Academic honesty in the IB
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IB Position Paper

Introduction to IB position papers

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Abstract

Across all programmes, IB learners' work needs to exemplify the values of honesty and integrity, both of which underpin the IB curriculum. Almost all learners behave honestly but a few do not. In the 21st century, opportunities for misuse of resources and misunderstanding of expectations are significantly greater than in the past. This paper outlines the challenges that learners face in demonstrating honesty and how teachers, schools and learners themselves can share responsibility for ensuring that all actions in support of academic honesty are integrated and consistent. The paper suggests actions for the Primary Years Programme (PYP), Middle Years Programme (MYP) and Diploma Programme (DP), and recommends that IB World Schools create policies for academic honesty that support learners and safeguard the integrity of IB awards. Policies and procedures need to be especially clear on managing collusion and plagiarism as, in these two areas in particular, learners need to develop specific skills in order to be able to apply the rules and to understand why doing so is important. In cases where formal citation is expected, schools should provide detailed guidance to learners. There is much good practice already in use on pedagogical approaches to managing academic honesty and on deterring learners from plagiarism. By creating a local academic honesty policy, drawing upon and using such guidance and good practice, schools will help ensure they can manage these complex issues.

Introduction

The IB *Programme standards and practices* (2010) requires schools to show that "[t]eaching and learning promotes (sic) the understanding and practice of academic honesty" (p. 4). The learner profile, explained in the *IB learner profile booklet* (2008), "define[s] the type of learner the IB hopes to develop" (p. 1) and lists learner attributes that underpin honesty, including "independent critical and creative thought" (p. 1). Principled IB learners should "act with integrity and honesty, with a strong sense of fairness, justice and respect" (p. 5) and as inquirers, they should "acquire the skills necessary to conduct inquiry and research and show independence in learning" (p. 5) This paper focuses on how learners can be guided and supported in meeting these requirements, in demonstrating academic honesty and extends the requirement for showing respect for others to ensuring learners show respect for others' work. It suggests how each school can develop, embed and communicate their own policy on academic honesty and how schools, teachers, parents and learners themselves can share responsibility for meeting programme standards.

IB learners are constructivist learners

The number of cases involving dishonesty is tiny compared to the number of authentic assessments completed by IB learners around the world (the IB does not make public the number and nature of academic dishonesty cases). However, each contravention of IB principles requires effective management as dishonesty threatens the value of IB accreditation and failure to deal with dishonesty, however rare, would threaten IB standards.

Developments in technology, communication and information management have provided myriad opportunities and advantages for learners as well as posing particular threats to their engagement and hard work. It is the latter which are the focus here as IB learners now have more opportunities than ever to avoid the engagement that inquiry-based learning requires (McCabe 2005; Ma et al 2008).

Some attempts to gain unfair advantages involve deliberate breaches of the rules. Learners who take devices into examinations, gain unauthorized access to assessment questions, or who hire an impersonator are clearly being dishonest. Because of developments in communication technology, smaller devices can be smuggled in to examination rooms, impersonators are easier to recruit, and hacked questions are more easily available. However, deliberate breaches form a relatively small proportion of dishonesty cases whereas up to 80% in most years involve misuse of others' work through plagiarism or collusion. In these cases, determining whether a learner has acted dishonestly is much more problematic and the role of technology and networked communications in encouraging misuse is also more complex.

A growing literature on plagiarism and collusion in educational settings does not, as yet, include studies specific to IB learners but it is likely that reasons for plagiarism and collusion in IB World Schools are similar to those identified elsewhere. A small proportion of plagiarism cases are deliberate attempts to gain unfair advantage (Marsden et al 2005). For example, purchasing a document is deliberate dishonesty, as is creating a paper that consists of a single block of text constituting 80% of the overall submission, with no acknowledgment. An IB learner is highly likely to know these acts are not acceptable, regardless of protests about copying songs off the internet or comments on how copyright is widely disregarded in the national context, or that their friends in other

schools copy and paste without triggering complaints. They probably know that to hand in an 80% copied text or one done by their best friend is contrary to IB values.

However, most cases of plagiarism and collusion are not deliberate (Anyanwu 2004; MacGregor, Williamson 2005; Devlin, Gray 2007). Learners frequently misunderstand what rules mean and how they should act to comply with them (Lathrop, Foss 2005; Pittam et al 2009). Learners often assume it is acceptable to copy others' work without acknowledgment, perhaps stitching together chunks of others' (unacknowledged) texts into a more or less coherent whole. Many see no problem with relying on the help of parents or fellow learners. As they develop their own writing skills, IB writers often think that changing a few words transforms someone else's text into "my own work". All of these are examples of plagiarism but most are not deliberately dishonest. It takes time to grasp that an acceptable paraphrase, for example, must restate the ideas and show that the writer has understood what the original author has written. Learning to master this complex task requires practice and a study of examples. In the sections below, there are suggestions for supporting and developing these skills across IB programmes.

The key point is that changes in information and communication technology mean that finding and reproducing others' knowledge cannot evidence learning as defined within a constructivist-learning paradigm (Carroll 2010). The link between using others' work and demonstrating individual achievement, and the ease, speed and mind-boggling reach of technology mean that IB World Schools need to take care that learners do not use plagiarism and/or collusion with fellow learners in order to bypass the hard work of learning. They also need to prevent learners from doing so to gain unfair advantage.

Defining academic integrity and plagiarism

The American-based Centre of Academic Integrity defines plagiarism as occurring when someone:

- uses words, ideas, or work products

- attributable to another identifiable person or source

- without attributing the work to the source from which it was obtained

- in a situation in which there is a legitimate expectation of original authorship

- in order to obtain some benefit, credit, or gain. (Fishman 2010)

Collusion is usually defined as occurring when the unattributed source is one or more fellow learners.

Misunderstanding of each aspect of the definition can lead to overall confusion (Carroll 2007). For example, the first point about what needs acknowledgment can be assumed to apply only to others' words whereas IB learners must also acknowledge ideas, images, data plus more apparently ephemeral "work products" such as choreography. However, acknowledgment is only for an identifiable source, leaving unexplored the issue of common knowledge. IB learners will need help in distinguishing what "everyone" knows and does not know, and the answers will change, depending on the level of study and on whether or not original authorship is expected. For example, the MYP personal project certainly requires original authorship as does the DP extended essay whereas a homework assignment that asks the learner to replicate the textbook does not (though arguably, setting such a reproductive task does nothing to encourage constructivist learning). It would not be plagiarism to fail to cite the text in the homework. Less clear-cut instances will require discussion of the underlying ideas rather than offering a seemingly explicit rule to "do your own work". Did the learner do some research to find something out? If so acknowledging the source not only values the work that the learner did (as well as the work of the source author), but increases the authority of the learner's use of the source. This approach focuses on teaching students to learn, and is not focused on avoiding plagiarism. The same can be said about involving learners in actively considering how others' ideas contribute to their own understanding. It is plagiarism if writers do not show where they have used identified sources of ideas and words; it is not plagiarism if the learner has his or her own ideas about something and did not realise that others have had similar ideas in the past. That is a learning issue.

Finally, the definition stresses the importance of transparency in using others' work. Requirements for acknowledgment will vary. For example, a learner in the DP must master the basics of in-text citation, showing at the site of use how others' work was included. DP learners must show that others' words came from a named source and decide they are of sufficient originality to warrant acknowledgment. Where neither happens, this would

be plagiarism and if it is on a large enough scale to undermine the integrity of the work, then action needs to be taken. It would not be plagiarism if the learner formulated a citation incorrectly or attempted but did not fully succeed in creating an accurate paraphrase of the original text (with indication of the original source). An MYP learner, on the other hand, might be expected to use more informal ways to transparently indicate use of sources, perhaps creating a list of them as part of the piece of work. It would be plagiarism at MYP level if copied extracts were presented as if they were written by the MYP learner and it would be deliberate dishonesty if the text was altered to mislead the reader by, for example, finding a text about one topic and using the "find and replace" function to make it seem as if it referred to the topic designated in the assignment. This paper returns to these issues in more detail below.

Using others' work in the PYP

In the PYP classroom, teachers verify a "constructivist, inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning that promotes inquiry and the development of critical-thinking skills" (*Programme standards and practices*, p. 6) through observation and conversations with learners. On the other hand, when PYP work is completed out of the classroom, others share responsibility for ensuring a piece of work is the student's own.

The school encourages academic honesty in PYP programmes by:

• discussing appropriate help regularly with parents

• ensuring parents and learners understand what the learner profile value of academic honesty means

• making clear what will happen if submitted work is not the learner's own.

Teachers encourage honest, creative, critical PYP work by:

• creating inquiry-based assessment tasks: a request to "Write about Mars" can seem to be an invitation to copy from sites like Wikipedia but creativity is encouraged by tasks that use information to solve a problem such as "Suppose you were organizing tourism to Mars, what would you need to find out and how would you market etc…"

• designing assessment criteria that value and reward the work required, rather than only the result

• teaching ways to acknowledge others: PYP learners can learn to use quotation marks to mark others' words or describe what help was useful and why

• teaching reflection on the learning process: reflective writing about sources as in "When I read about xxx, I thought…." values learners' hard work rather than stressing formal citation or demonizing copying.

The PYP learners' work will be creative and honest if learners are encouraged to:

• show how they have used others' work: although to avoid plagiarism attention is necessary only in situations where the work being used is that of a named or identified person, in situations where original work is expected and where work is assessed, PYP learners will find requirements to acknowledge others' work less confusing if they apply this way of thinking to everything they do. (Note that "original" here does not mean novel or never done before; rather it is closer to the ideas underpinning constructivist learning where the learner constructs and makes sense of something independently and individually.)

Encouraging academic honesty in the MYP

All of the activities and approaches suggested in the PYP apply here, plus the school will support academic honesty in MYP programmes by:

• ensuring the school community understands the academic honesty policy (programme standard B1:5:d); special care might be needed for learners joining the MYP from other educational settings where expectations might differ.

- making explicit any changes in expectations for autonomy and independence, ideally through examples and opportunities for interactive discussion

- strengthening the use of vertical planning (programme standard C2:1c) to ensure consistent guidance on using others' work.

MYP teachers reinforce academic honesty by:

- stressing the scholarly role of the approaches to learning skills of information literacy, problem-solving and self-management

- offering task-specific clarification of assessment requirements (*Programme standards and practices*, p. 18) including using the work of others

- making sure that assessment tasks, especially but not only in the personal project, require inquiry and creativity.

MYP students encourage academic honesty by:

- tracking use of resources and others' work and by applying their developing approaches to learning skills

- using appropriate ways to signal use of sources: acknowledgment is likely to be informal and general, for example, "I agree with what it says in [names book] about …". Use of bibliographies, quotation marks and reflective commentaries on others' work are likely to develop in complexity during the course of the programme.

Academic honesty and avoiding plagiarism in DP work

At the DP level, many aspects are more formal and codified versions of the actions carried out in the PYP and MYP. MYP teachers, in particular, will find overlaps. To support academic honesty at this level, schools can:

- "develop and implement an academic honesty policy that is consistent with IB expectations" (*Programme standards and practices*, p. 20) and that is tailored to the context and priorities of a particular IB World School.

- nominate a referencing system for formal citation: generic IB guidance refers to a large number of acceptable systems as options, designed to cover the cultural and academic diversity in the schools worldwide; if schools do not select and focus students' attention on one system by selecting whichever seems most appropriate then confusion about use is common and false fears develop as to the consequences of selecting the "wrong" one

- provide each student with detailed guidance on academic writing and referencing systems; many guides exist but schools may prefer to write their own to improve engagement and stress local priorities

- provide staff development and guidance on plagiarism and citation: where software is used to identify copied text in summative assessments, teachers' inconsistent understanding of what software can and cannot do is common and widespread (Badge, Scott 2008); one misunderstanding is to assume software detects plagiarism whereas in fact it identifies some, though far from all, examples of where text in the learner's submitted work matches text held in the tool's databases. Software cannot judge the significance or otherwise of matching text—only informed reviewers such as IB teachers can do that. Another misconception is to assume that a low matching "score" is ideal but here again, significance is for teachers, not technology, to decide

- create procedures for managing cases of deliberate cheating, especially where it involves plagiarism and collusion, including what penalties will apply and how a penalty will be selected.

DP teachers help ensure students' academic honesty by:

- agreeing topics and titles for students' extended essays that are harder to find, copy or fake (see http://www.plagiarismadvice.org/designing-out-plagiarism for more guidance): For example, recent, local, specific and individual topics encourage synthesis and evaluative authorship and specifying use of a particular theory, of a set of primary data, or of a particular resource can limit use of ready-made texts.

- monitoring the writing process: There is a growing and worldwide problem of commissioning texts similar to those expected in the extended essay (Hongyang et al 2007; Clarke, Lancaster 2008); schools can deter students from using these fraudulent services (sic) by publicizing severe penalties and, more positively, by authenticating the writing process through use of drafts, peer review and interactive supervision.

- teaching academic writing skills: As IB writers create their own understanding of a topic, they use others' work as supporting evidence; The focus is on scholarship, not plagiarism—citations can show the authority of the information; they can show its credibility or its accuracy through being able to trace it back to the source. Citations show correct use of terminology; they can show how widely the learner has researched the topic and/or indicate what the writer chose to include or exclude (given that the reader has expertise in the topic).

- stressing research skills, focusing particularly on resource evaluation and search strategies among sources, some of dubious reliability (Boden, Stubbings 2006; Channock 2008)

- dealing with inappropriate use: Schools should not have rules on what percentage of unoriginal work is or is not acceptable, perhaps based on use of text-matching software, nor should they defer to generic IB requirements for honesty; Local judgments are needed on a learner's submission as to whether any or all aspects of the definition of plagiarism are relevant to any example of unattributed use.

- misuse need not be shown to be deliberate before taking action though it is useful to remember that the assessor's purpose is to judge the student's critical, creative thought, not to safeguard others' copyright; Penalties should match the degree of severity of any breach. (Note that while safeguarding copyright is important, the point here is to recognize the learning needs and responsibilities of DP students.)

For DP students, academic honesty is strengthened when they:

- make the effort to learn academic writing, research and citation skills

- seek clarification when unsure, including in situations where they may be using the work of other IB students inappropriately, leading to collusion

- use guidance on referencing techniques: Consistency and traceability are important in assessing how students use the agreed citation system, whereas conformity with the minutiae of rules on formatting citations and bibliographies is not, especially at DP level; however, it is often helpful to inform writers that inconsistency in citation practices might lead readers to wonder if the work is the result of cut-and-paste construction—software to keep track of and record sources often helps.

- use time-management and self-management strategies to avoid procrastination which is often referred to by learners as explanation for their plagiarism.

Conclusion

Academic honesty is a fundamental and important value for IB programmes and it is central to a constructivist-learning approach. Across all IB programmes, at all levels, students must be creative, independent and principled learners and they must show they are working in this manner in explicit and transparent ways. However, responsibility for the integrity of their conduct, and especially for avoiding collusion and plagiarism, cannot rest with individual learners. Since misunderstanding of plagiarism is widespread and opportunities for finding and using others' work in ways that breach IB values are now greater than in the past, there is a need for explicit attention to requiring and supporting honest academic work in the PYP, MYP and DP. Interventions and activities in this position paper stress awareness, being explicit about expectations, developing students' skills, providing opportunities for discussion, and providing detailed guidance to learners where formal citation is expected. Overall, learners, teachers and schools as a whole share responsibility for ensuring actions are integrated and consistent. There is much good practice already in use on pedagogical approaches to managing academic honesty and

plagiarism. Drawing upon and using such guidance and good practice could help IB programmes better manage these complex issues.

Recommendations or suggested courses of action

1. Have a clear institutional policy and procedure. The academic honesty policy can be written in a way that knits together the cultural/educational background of the students, addresses the research and citation skills the school values and understands, and guides students on how the school expects them to meet the academic honesty expectations of the IB. For students, it is important to see that their teachers, coordinators and the administration value academic honesty, and having an academic honesty policy that all students and staff clearly understand and can communicate is vital towards this goal.

2. Focus on simplicity and clarity in guiding students.

3. Focus primarily on teaching the skills, not on policing the application of the rules.

4. Treat all breaches as serious. Deliberate cheating must, of course, be managed but so too should breaches caused by misunderstanding as they undermine the accreditation of learning. Schools should apply penalties that reflect the learner's developing understanding of how to use others' work.

5. Find ways within the school of discussing and sharing good practice through staff development and programme planning.

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