An Organizational Approach to Reducing Cheating

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Position Paper

Submitted to Kohelet Foundation

(Initially submitted to USC, Rossier School of Education)

Accountability Problem

The working definition of educational accountability for the purpose of this paper will focus on Stecher and Kirby's (2004) understanding that it is "the practice of holding educational systems responsible for the quality of their products - students' knowledge, skills, and behavior" (p. 1). As an independent school, which does not rely on external agencies of accountability to determine benchmarks and standards, Shalhevet is beholden to different types of accountability, most specifically community and market accountability as well as professional (or internal) accountability. Community accountability demands the community to be "fully informed of its accomplishments, its challenges, and the strategies it is undertaking to overcome these challenges"(Goldberg & Morisson, 2003, p. 68). Professional accountability values the autonomous professional community and relies on the strengthening of links between the individual faculty member and the community (Goldberg & Morisson, 2003). Market accountability demands that our school is held responsible to ensure that religious, philosophical and academic standards are maintained at the school, and if they are not, we face the consequence of lost students and therefore reduced revenue, if we fail in our mission (Stecher & Kirby, 2003). That is why it is particularly necessary and critical for Shalhevet to combat the issues of cheating and plagiarism, which have permeated the school. In a recent (non-scientific) survey conducted by the schools newspaper at the school, we discovered that roughly 40% of Shalhevet students admitted to cheating in class. This caused pause and introspection for the faculty and administration. Although this percentage is below the national average of 80 to 90% (Lang, 2013; Murdock & Anderman, 2006), our school was created as a “Just Community,” which teaches students to cherish personal ethics and justice and to pursue equality for all (Shalhevet High School, 2014). The founders of Shalhevet believed that the educational

experience ought to serve as a vehicle for moral growth and development and, when required, students are expected to set aside personal needs for the good of the community (Shalhevet High School, 2014). Therefore, if Shalhevet does not implement a productive action plan to address this problem, it may lead to decreased student enrollment and philanthropic donations, as well as negative internal faculty and student morale.

Action Plan

Based on Hentschke and Wohlstetter's theory (2004), we currently seem to neglect one of the four key elements of accountability, namely delivering the service we promised to deliver. Another one of the four key elements of accountability is that the provider's performance is assessed on whether the goals are achieved (Hentschke & Wohlstetter, 2014). If Shalhevet is predicated on moral integrity and guiding the students to live ethical lives and make moral decisions, the school's administration and teachers must be held professionally accountable for a culture in which cheating and plagiarism occur in multiple classrooms. Recognizing this deficit, in order to address this performance problem, we will follow the gap analysis problem-solving method (Clark & Estes, 2008; Rueda, 2011). Clark and Estes (2008) identify three types of causes for performance gaps: knowledge, motivation, and organizational causes. Knowledge causes include stakeholders' lack of information and motivation causes include stakeholders' failure to act, to persist, or to apply necessary mental effort. Organizational causes generally refer to the alignment of an organization's goals and its culture. In this particular case, we will work to solve the performance problem of cheating at Shalhevet by focusing more on the organizational and motivation aspects than the knowledge gap.

Action Steps

Knowledge-Step 1 As mentioned above, the specific action plan to respond to cheating at Shalhevet will not spend significant mental capital on knowledge. However, after the principal informally spoke with students from each grade at Shalhevet, it is clear that many students are unaware they are cheating or plagiarizing. Many of them simply do not know what constitutes cheating and specifically, plagiarism. Clark and Estes (2008) note that providing information is particularly valuable when people require the knowledge, but not necessarily practice in order to apply the information appropriately and accurately. Taking that into consideration and implementing a specific practice based on this, it is important the principal provides all of our students with information at the outset of their Shalhevet experience, particularly at freshman orientation and then remind each grade at orientation every year, so that they have the necessary factual knowledge and awareness.

Organization-Step 2 Though knowledge and motivation gaps (discussed below) are necessary to address, Rueda (2011) concludes that the "big picture lesson is that many times organizational issues are at the root of performance problems and can lead to additional motivational and learning gaps" (p. 66). Organizationally at Shalhevet, we have not done enough and our policies may not serve as a sufficient deterrent. Currently, our student handbook (2014) states that "Students caught plagiarizing or cheating will receive no credit on the assignment in question...A second incident may lead to suspension, or, in some cases, dismissal from the school" (p. 19). Though our institutional policies are typically not administered in a draconian fashion (our discipline is typically meted out in a democratic fashion), perhaps responding to cheating and plagiarism should be the exception to the rule because fear of being caught and the perceived

severity of consequences are two of the most important deterrents to cheating (Murdock & Anderman, 2006). Murdock and Anderman (2006) note that, "When students assess the potential costs incurred from cheating are minimal, they are more apt to engage in dishonest behaviors" (p. 130). It might also serve us to implement an honor code or code of ethics regarding honest academic work because honor codes which specify no tolerance decrease the pervasiveness of cheating (Murdock & Anderman, 2006).

There are three other specific action items we can change organizationally in order to mitigate cheating. For instance, in many academic classes, the focus is still on performance and high stakes assessments, which Lang (2013) concludes, are "features of a learning or competitive environment that may pressure individuals into cheating" (p. 35). We can therefore decrease cheating by implementing administrative policies which require teachers to remove trivial assignments, shifting the focus to learning in the classroom as opposed to grading and not grading on a curve (Murdock & Anderman, 2006). Moreover, cheating occurs more often when teachers are disorganized and unprepared (Murdock & Anderman, 2006). The administration should provide the teachers with this knowledge and strategize with teachers how to structure their courses in a clear and organized way through a series of professional development opportunities. Lastly, it is critical that administrators respond to every cheating incident in a consistent matter. According to Murdock and Anderman (2006), "Students appear to normalize cheating when they see others getting away with it" (p. 137). Therefore, administrative consistency to apply the handbook policies remains organizationally crucial.

Motivation-Step 3 Notwithstanding the importance of the organization in response to cheating, motivation remains the prominent reason why cheating occurs (Lang, 2013; Murdock &

Anderman, 2006). Murdock and Anderman (2006) argue that "academic cheating is by nature a motivational issue" (p. 139). As such, the action plan will also revolve around solving the motivational issue of cheating. Research indicates that cheating occurs less frequently when students find class interesting (Murdock & Anderman, 2006). On no account does lack of interest excuse cheating, but it tells us about the importance of teachers inspiring and intriguing their students. Another reason cited for why students cheat is low self-efficacy regarding a specific task (Murdock & Anderman, 2006). The concept of self-efficacy was first introduced by Albert Bandura and can be defined as the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura, 1977). To improve the self-efficacy of students, teachers should focus on short term attainable goals, frequent formative assessments, and checks for understanding so that students can build their self-efficacy beliefs towards a given task (Murdock & Anderman, 2006). Some might suggest that demanding teachers provide more formative assessments will merely frustrate some teachers who are mired in their own methods. Taking this potential uneasiness seriously, the senior administration will make sure to provide faculty members with specific examples of formative assessments in order to scaffold it for the uncomfortable teachers. Moreover, the senior administration will provide the educational reasoning for formative assessments, thereby bringing the faculty into the thinking and logic for these assessments.

The method of grading also has an impact on student cheating. Students who desire to understand the material are less likely to cheat than students who are more interested in achieving performance goals (Murdock & Anderman, 2006). Murdock and Anderman (2006) cite the research of Dweck (1988) who distinguishes between the entity theory of intelligence, which sees intellect as capped and the incremental theory of intelligence, which believes

"intelligence is a reflection of what one currently knows and can thus be improved through additional effort" (p.131). As a college preparatory school, Shalhevet will invariably have grades to serve as an external benchmark. However, if teachers at Shalhevet grade based on acknowledgement of active student learning and engagement as well as allow students to revise their work, this can both increase student learning and reduce cheating (Murdock & Anderman, 2006).

Concluding Thoughts

Cheating has historically been part of the human experience to the extent that the ancient traveler and author Pausanias recorded famous instances of Olympic cheating in the second century (Lang, 2013). At Shalhevet, we are not overly ambitious nor are we Pollyannaish to the point that we think we can thoroughly annihilate cheating. Rather, our goal is to recognize the problem, address it from the various vantage points cited above and reduce it. We need to demonstrate to our students that cheating matters to us and we need to demonstrate to ourselves that cheating is not exclusively about the students, but about the teachers, the teaching, and the organization. After three months having implemented this action plan, I will invite the student newspaper to send out another survey. This will be instructive for us to determine if our action plan was effective or not. When thinking about how to affect all of these changes, I am reminded of Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) who distinguish between two types of change: first order and second order. First order change is incremental and can be described as "the next most obvious step to take in a school" (Marzano, et al., 2005, p. 66). Second order change, however, does not have a set formula to follow, nor does it have a precedent to neatly implement. Rather, it requires new language of improvement to solve the problem (Marzano, et al., 2005). For Shalhevet to marry its institutional and organizational ideology and framework with its practice,

we must embrace the challenge of cheating and plagiarism as a second order change. Incremental change will not suffice.

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