

Reducing plagiarism by teaching students how to develop their own critical voice and place in the academy

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Concerns about plagiarism and students' abilities to cite have resulted in many institutions teaching students directly about the need for academic integrity. But are problems with citation due to a lack of academic integrity or due to a lack of knowledge and confidence in expressing one's own critical voice in relation to the literature? This session reports on the success of a method used in a large first year unit aimed at helping students find their own informed critical voice. The unit both taught and expected critical thinking in reading, discussion and writing throughout. Prior to their first written assignment, students were taught how to use citation to express their own 'critical voice'. The unit did not address matters of academic integrity and students were directed to library resources on the mechanics of referencing. On completion of their first assignment, students were given feedback to help them improve in the next written assignment. This developmental approach to critical voice and its expression through citation was evaluated using data gained from (i) criterion-based judgements of the students' written assignments, and (ii) plagiarism reporting data. Evaluation revealed (i) improvement in the development of critical voice through citation from one written assignment to the next and (ii) very low levels of plagiarism. The findings show that when students are placed as valued members of the academic community, given permission to develop their own voice and taught how to use citation to do so, critical thinking and citation skills develop and plagiarism is low.