

The Case

A New Approach to Writing

Miss Tanya Walker, a relatively new Social Studies teacher at Northville High School, decided to have her students create a wiki about major figures during World War II. There were approximately 75 students in her three American History classes. She divided the students in each class into groups of four and assigned them a "person." She instructed the students to research their person as a group and write a brief biography with emphasis on their role during WWII. They were then to place this report, including a bibliography, on a page in the Wiki that Miss Walker had created on the Internet.

The students were mostly enthusiastic about this new assignment. They enjoyed being able to use the computer to complete an assignment. Each group researched their person in the library and on the Internet. Then they compiled their information into a report that was placed on a page in the wiki. Each student was encouraged to add information or edit their group's wiki as they saw fit.

Miss Walker was pleased, for the most part, with the students' performance, both in their preparation and their reports. They knew that they were going to be "published," so they wanted to do well. But, she noticed that several of the reports had used language and grammar that were at a level above what she had seen previously from her students. She began to suspect plagiarism had occurred. Upon checking the references that the students had listed, she did indeed find evidence of direct passages being used without a citation. She began to wonder if she had adequately taught the students how to properly summarize or paraphrase another person's work? She decided to review proper summarizing and paraphrasing techniques with ALL the students. They were then allowed to edit their work if necessary.

Questions for Discussion

- Could Miss Walker have handled the plagiarism situation any differently?
- If wikis are to be used in the classroom, at what grade level are the students ready?
- What can be done to assure that ALL students are involved in the writing and editing process?
- What, if anything, should be done about those students that plagiarized work? Should Miss Walker have allowed them to edit their work after she found evidence of plagiarism, or just given them a "0"?
- What, if any, other concerns do you envision with the use of wikis?