Problems of Policing Plagiarism and Cheating in University Institutions

Due to Incomplete or Inconsistent Definitions

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Abstract

The purpose of this article was to gain an understanding of the definitions of plagiarism, and cheating that are used in the literature, in institutions, and by students. The information was gathered from a literature review, from university and college websites, and from an informal sampling of students from five different first-year classes. The results indicate that there is no one clear definition for each term, and in fact, there is a wide variety of definitions that are used by researchers, institutions, and students. Due to the wide range of definitions, it is the author's contention that the literature on plagiarism and cheating, which indicates how wide-spread the problem is, cannot be trusted due to incomplete or inconsistent definitions. In addition, some measures that institutions can adopt to help students understand academic integrity policies is offered.

Introduction

When I studied for my degrees, at two large public universities in Canada, one of the courses was not on law enforcement. I did not become a university instructor to spend time searching for information, I suspected, students did not generate on their own. And, yet that is what is happening in not only my institution, but in institutions around the world. There are numerous articles available that discuss the so-called crisis in universities regarding wide-spread cheating (Owunwanne, Rustagi, & Dada, 2010; Walker, 2010; Wilkinson, 2009), and others which maintain that the incidents of plagiarism are now so common, due to the internet, that the only course of action is to obtain plagiarism detection software, that will allow individual instructors to find, and punish plagiarizers (Braumoeller & Gaines, 2001; Jones, 2011; MacDonald & Carroll, 2006). The use of plagiarism detection programs, and the punitive measures enacted at various institutions seems, in my opinion, to detract from the purpose of universities. It appears that universities have changed their focus from teaching students how to think, to becoming punishers of those who do not follow the rules. If this is the case, this changes the dynamics between instructors and students. Students may rebel against instructors, who appear to be trying to catch them in academic dishonesty, and some instructors may resent having to resort to plagiarism detection software when correcting assignments.

The literature on plagiarism, and cheating, is confusing. The more articles I read, the more confusing it became for me, as each author seemed to be working with a different definition. It also lead to speculation, as to how widespread plagiarism really is, and how widespread cheating is, since each author appears to be working from a different definition. When I began my search for information, I thought that it would be fairly easy to come up with a working definition of each term, and proceed from there, but that was not my experience. And,

within each institution some departments also have their own definitions of plagiarism.

Confused yet, I was. If we are to believe that plagiarism and cheating are now at epidemic levels

in institutions of higher education it makes sense to find out what definitions authors are using

when arriving at their conclusions. It is my contention that the ambiguity of the terms used to

define plagiarism and cheating leave them open to individual interpretation. Also, most studies

on plagiarism rely on self-reported data which can be affected by how students view and

understand the practices that they identify as plagiarism/cheating.

Definitions from Literature

It is interesting that most published studies about plagiarism do not define the term,

seemingly expecting that everyone already knows what plagiarism means. This is one of the

problems with accepting the conclusion that plagiarism is on the rise in higher education

institutions. Without an operational definition, it is difficult to understand exactly what was

measured, and how it was measured. For the purposes of this article, I only looked at those

studies that defined the terms, plagiarism and cheating, since I was interested in discovering

exactly how authors define the terms and how the definitions impact the way that they are

understood.

Hayes and Introna (2005) do not discuss plagiarism and cheating separately, in their

article, instead they discuss the two together under academic integrity. They, also, do not define

the term academic integrity, but instead they provide examples of what behaviours would be

considered a violation of the academic integrity policies. Things such as:

copying from others during exams, taking crib sheets into exams, taking part in

unpermitted collaboration in course work, submitting the same piece of course work

more than once, and including other people's words in a course work assessment without marking them as being such. (p. 214)

In my estimation, these are two separate issues, the first four would be considered examples of cheating, and the last one is an example of plagiarism. In this definition, plagiarism is confined to the use of other people's words. The authors further specify that "plagiarism is an issue in course work rather than in examinations" (p. 216) and inappropriate behaviour in examinations would be considered cheating. By putting the two together, under academic integrity, it is difficult to understand if the authors are discussing cheating, or plagiarism, or both.

Park (2003) defined plagiarism according to the *Collins Dictionary of English Language,* as:

the act of plagiarising, which means to appropriate (ideas, passages, etc.) from (another work or author). Plagiarism involves literary theft, stealing (by copying) the words or ideas of someone else and passing them off as one's own without crediting the source. (p. 472)

In Park's definition, plagiarism is considered stealing, which implies intent, of not only the words but the ideas of another. This differs from Hayes and Itrona (2005) who referenced the use of another's words without crediting the original source but did not mention using someone else's ideas.

McCabe (2001), who has done extensive research on cheating, includes plagiarism under the term cheating. When reporting on a study conducted with high school students, he listed the common forms of cheating among high school juniors. These included cheating on tests or examinations, and forms of plagiarism such as copying assignments word for word, copying from another student, copying a few sentences without citation, copying from a web site without

citation, or turning in a paper that was purchased on the internet. McCabe's use of the two terms synonymously, could explain his findings that the rate of cheating has risen over the years. In his definition of plagiarism he confines the infraction to copying words which is more similar to Park (2003) than Hayes and Itrona (2005). In 2005, McCabe published an article that revealed that 70% of the 50,000 undergraduate students surveyed from 2002 to 2005, on 60 campuses nationwide, reported cheating. However, there is no mention of how the students, or the author, defined cheating. Without those definitions the results cannot be accepted as stated.

In her article on academic dishonesty, Jones (2011), stated that 92% of online business communication students (n=48) indicated that they had, or they knew someone who had cheated. When asked if they engaged in Internet plagiarism (undefined by Jones), 50% of the students said they had or knew someone who had engaged in Internet plagiarism. While the actual numbers would be a cause for concern, the results are questionable without a working definition of how the term was understood by the students. Jones also concluded that 67% of students would intentionally plagiarize an assignment, because 33%, of those surveyed, indicated that they would not plagiarise an assignment because of their ethics. Again, with no working definition of the term *ethics* it is difficult to accept the findings. Each person has their own definition of what constitutes ethical behaviour. She also used the two terms, plagiarism and cheating, synonymously which can skew the results. In her study, she provided nine scenarios and asked students to select those that they considered examples of academic dishonesty. The students did not have to indicate which ones they considered plagiarism and which ones they considered cheating. The top three scenarios identified by the students included: (1) turning in another person's assignment as their own (100%); cutting and pasting a paper using online materials without proper citing (92%); and, buying a paper from the internet (75%). Of the top

three scenarios, identified by the students, only the second one that discusses cutting and pasting

a paper without proper credit is the same as the definition favoured by Hayes and Itrona (2005),

McCabe (2005) and Park (2003). None of the examples used by Jones (2011) provide a

definition of plagiarism or cheating so it is difficult to determine if the students saw these as

instances of plagiarism or of cheating. Since Jones (2011) did not provide any definitions of the

two terms, her interpretation of the results leads the reader to question the validity of her

findings.

In their article on plagiarism, MacDonald and Carroll (2006) define "academic

misconduct in respect of assessment, such as plagiarism, collusion, cheating, impersonation, and

the use of inadmissible material (including material downloaded from electronic sources such as

the internet)" (p. 234). They further state that plagiarism, by students, should be seen as a

"breach of academic integrity" (p. 235). In each of these instances, there is no definition of what

the authors consider cheating, and what they consider plagiarism, since the behaviours are

included in the term academic integrity. They also found that, in their university, "staff had no

consistent understanding and/or definition of plagiarism both in relation to student behaviour and

to cheating as a practice" (p. 241). The fact that the staff were unsure about their own

understanding of plagiarism and cheating means it is an unreasonable expectation, on the part of

the university, that students will somehow understand how to avoid cheating and plagiarism

without any guidelines.

Carroll (2002, as cited in Savin-Baden, 2005) defined plagiarism by saying "plagiarism is

considered to be the passing off of work done by someone else, intentionally or unintentionally,

as your own for your own benefits" (p. 11). Savin-Baden (2005) goes on to argue that the

"difficulty with plagiarism is that there are degrees of plagiarism and this, to some extent,

overlaps with collusion and cheating" (p. 11). She also argues that "there is often the assumption that plagiarism is about the use or borrowing of words when in fact it is about 'work' done rather than just borrowing words" (p. 11). When reading the definition of plagiarism by Carroll (2002) the wording used is notable as he makes the point that plagiarism can be intentional or unintentional. This sets up a dilemma for instructors whose job it should be to teach students how to avoid plagiarizing their assignments. If students do not understand how to cite properly, then I would argue that they have not plagiarized but have unintentionally used words, phrases, or ideas without naming their sources. If we include all students who do not understand how to format an essay as plagiarizers then the incidence of plagiarism will definitely rise in our classrooms. But, the argument can be made that those students are not guilty of academic misconduct but instead are guilty of not understanding how to format an essay while conducting research. I agree with Savin-Baden (2005) that there are degrees of plagiarism. If students intentionally plagiarize an essay then they should be treated differently from those who unintentionally plagiarize an essay. Of course, this scenario can only work if instructors make the effort to discover in which category their students fit.

Ercegovac and Richardson Jr. (2004) reviewed the literature on plagiarism and defined academic dishonesty from a variety of researchers. They cited Kibler (1993) who defined academic dishonesty as "forms of cheating and plagiarism that involve students giving or receiving unauthorized assistance in an academic exercise or receiving credit for work that is not their own" (p. 304). Burke (1997) and Stearns (1998) (as cited in Ercegovac & Richardson Jr., 2004) express the belief that plagiarism is the intentional taking of literary property. Howard (1999) characterized student plagiarism as "patchwriting which she defined as 'copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one

synonym for another'" (p. 304). In Kibler's definition what does the term *unauthorized*

assistance mean? Who gives the authorization? Is it the person who is assisting another student

or is it the instructor? It is difficult to determine the degree of academic dishonesty when the

terms used are ambiguous. As well, Burke (1997) and Stearns (1998) make mention of literary

property which is also vague and confusing. What exactly is literary property? And, they use

the term *intentional*. So, following their reasoning, students who do not form intent would not

be guilty of plagiarizing. Howard's definition of plagiarism involves a term that she coined

called *patchwriting,* which means that students copy and paste and then change a few words to

make it their own. In order for this to be considered plagiarizing, students would have to

understand how to properly paraphrase and summarize material, both of which are concepts not

often taught in classes that require writing, but do not teach writing.

Fish and Hura (2013) designed a study that looked at students' perceptions of plagiarism.

They developed an online survey which asked students questions about their views and

experiences with plagiarism. In an effort to ensure that all students had the same definition of

plagiarism they wrote their own, which stated:

> Plagiarism is representing another author's ideas or words as your own in course
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> documents or electronic postings. This would include submitting an entire document by
>
> another author as well as using a portion of text or ideas from another's work and not
>
> citing the source. This would include information obtained from the internet, from other
>
> students, and from published and unpublished documents. (p. 35)

This is a very comprehensive definition that was cobbled together based on the existing literature

on plagiarism. However, what does a portion mean? Is it one or two words, a sentence, a

paragraph? The problem with this type of definition is that it is too subjective and requires the

reader to set the parameters.   Fish and Hura also state that plagiarism includes information obtained from the internet, from other students, and from published and unpublished documents. Again, how much information would be considered plagiarism? This is undefined. The authors reported that 62.6% of the students surveyed said they never used another author's ideas, and 83% said they did not use another author's sentences or paragraphs. But, they did not ask the students if they used other author's words which is part of their definition. Another problem with this data is that the authors relied on self-reported surveys. It is difficult to be able to trust self-reported data which asks students how often they engage in academic misconduct, as that would entail students being truthful about their incidences of plagiarism/cheating. This study was not consistent in their questions, or their reporting, making the results suspect.

Martin (2004), in his article, takes a different approach to the plagiarism issue. He defines plagiarism as "claiming credit for ideas or creations without proper acknowledgment" (p. 15). He further elaborates on what is meant by acknowledgment, which means in an academic context, that citations are used to show awareness of sources. He maintains that to "speak of proper acknowledgment is to focus on the positive side of scholarly practice; to speak of plagiarism is to focus on the negative" (p. 15). He defines plagiarism as one part of cheating. I appreciate Martin's take on plagiarism as claiming credit without properly acknowledging the material used, rather than the more punitive definition of plagiarism as stealing. When instructors focus on punishing students rather than teaching them, they run the risk of alienating their students who rightly feel that they have done nothing wrong since they were not aware that what they were doing was wrong in the first place.

It was interesting to read the article by Owunwanne, Rustagi, and Dada (2010) who maintained that "plagiarism and cheating are not clear-cut issues, despite the fact that most

universities have written guidelines and codes of practice. In many instances, most students do not read the policies" (p. 59). The authors found that it is difficult to define cheating because it is "associated with ethics, values and an individual's subjective perception of what is considered right or wrong" (p. 62). They go on to say that "failure to identify a clear definition of cheating can distort what the student considers as academic dishonesty" (p. 62). Similarly, Wilkinson (2009) said that "personal ethics and belief systems of students become a significant consideration in any discussion of academic misconduct" (p. 99). Flint, Clegg and Macdonald (2006, as cited in Wilkinson, 2009) said "the very terms used (plagiarism and cheating) have no clear definition with some seeing them as synonymous, while others see plagiarism as a subset of cheating, or as separate issues" (p. 100). If experts in their field, cannot come to a consensus of what exactly plagiarism is and what cheating is, then how can students be expected to understand the differences? The mixed messages are confusing, and as a result the conclusions reached by various researchers that plagiarism and cheating are on the rise are premature.

Definitions by Institutions of Higher Learning

There appears to be some confusion as to what constitutes plagiarism, and, what constitutes cheating in higher education institutions, just as there was in the literature. Each institution has policies in place that were drafted by committees of educators. Some institutions use the terms plagiarism and cheating synonymously (Harvard, MIT, University of Saskatchewan, & Stanford); while others make a concerted effort to define both terms separately (Universities of Alberta, Brandon, British Columbia, Regina, Manitoba, Toronto, UCLA, & Winnipeg). It is my contention that the two terms are not synonymous, and should be defined, and dealt with separately.

Every university, or college, website has a stated policy on academic misconduct. The

policies are for the most part uniform in defining plagiarism as the taking of someone else's

words, or ideas, and using them in an essay, or assignment for grades, without crediting the

original source (Universities of Alberta, Brandon, British Columbia, Harvard, Manitoba, MIT,

Regina, Saskatchewan, Stanford, Toronto, UCLA, & Winnipeg). In other words, plagiarism is a

form of intellectual theft. But while the overall concepts are the same, the specifics are different.

The University of Saskatchewan notes that students are expected to do their own work. Any

deviation from this policy would be considered academic dishonesty and includes plagiarism and

cheating. The University of Manitoba defines academic integrity as a commitment to six

fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. An interesting

choice of words, especially courage. What does courage mean in terms of academic integrity? It

is not defined, nor are any of the other terms defined. Without the definitions, the terms are open

to a student's individual interpretation constructed from their own values, culture, and

assumptions. It would be difficult to punish students for academic integrity infractions, based on

this policy, for behaviour that is so personally defined. These are only two examples of how the

specifics differ among the universities. Most of the university sites inform students as to what

plagiarism is, that it is not acceptable, and then they list the consequences of how students will

be disciplined, if they resort to plagiarism.

Cheating is defined several ways, but most institutions, in their definitions, make

reference to inappropriate conduct during examinations, course work, or tests

(Universities/Colleges of Alberta, Brandon, British Columbia, Harvard, MIT, Regina,

Saskatchewan, Stanford, UCLA, & Winnipeg); using one assignment in multiple courses without

the permission of the instructors involved (Universities of Alberta, Manitoba, MIT, Toronto, &

Saskatchewan); changing the answers on an assignment and then submitting it for regrading without the knowledge of the instructor (Universities of MIT, Regina, Stanford, & UCLA); or, inappropriate collaboration (Harvard, Manitoba, MIT, Saskatchewan, Stanford, & UCLA). At the University of Winnipeg, cheating is also seen as a student's attempt to gain "an improper advantage in an academic evaluation (e.g. examinations, tests, or assignments)." Again, as can be seen, the definitions are as varied as the institutions they represent. As well, the words are ambiguous. What does inappropriate conduct mean, or inappropriate collaboration? These are words that have several different meanings based on who is interpreting the phrases. And, this is where the problem arises in many cases as individual instructors construct their own definitions. As a result, the punishment for violations is different across instructors, and within departments. The diverse messages students receive make it difficult for them to navigate the mine fields that characterize cheating and plagiarism.

Honor Code

Universities and Colleges in the United States, such as Harvard, do not have specific policies on plagiarism, cheating, or academic misconduct. Instead, they have what are known as Honor Codes. The Honor Codes stipulate what is acceptable behaviour, from unacceptable behaviour, with regards to academic honesty. Harvard defines breaking the honor code as:

> cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one's own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.

Harvard also defines plagiarism, within the honor code, by beginning with a statement that says:

The College recognizes that the open exchange of ideas plays a vital role in the academic

endeavor, as often it is only through discussion with others that one is fully able to

process information or to crystallize an elusive concept. Therefore, students generally are

encouraged to engage in conversations with their teachers and classmates about their

courses, their research, and *even their assignments* (my emphasis). These kinds of

discussions and debates in some ways represent the essence of life in an academic

community. And yet, it is important for all scholars to acknowledge clearly when they

have relied upon or incorporated the work of others.

The Harvard Honor Code gives students permission to engage in conversations about their

courses, their research, and their assignments but then they say that it is important for all scholars

to properly acknowledge the work of others. How is it possible for students to acknowledge a

conversation which might have triggered an idea that they then take and develop as their own?

At Harvard, they rely on the definition of plagiarism that was adopted by their Faculty of

Arts and Sciences which states:

it is expected that all homework assignments, projects, lab reports, papers, theses, and

examinations and any other work submitted for academic credit will be the student's

own. Students should always take great care to distinguish their own ideas and

knowledge from information derived from other sources. The term "sources" includes

not only primary and secondary material published in print or online, but also information

and opinions gained directly from other people. Quotations must be placed properly

within quotation marks and must be fully cited. In addition, all paraphrased material

must be acknowledged completely. Whenever ideas or facts are derived from a student's

reading and research or from a student's own writings, the sources must be indicated.

If we look closely at the wording, it is obvious that the student must submit their own work for credit, but what does *take great care*, mean? The words used indicate that there is a loop hole for students who are caught plagiarizing. If they can argue that they did take great care with their assignments and that they just made an honest mistake, it would be difficult for Harvard to penalize that student. Also, they mention that students have to acknowledge when they get information and opinions directly from other people. This is a murky definition because if in the course of a conversation, what someone says causes another person to think of an idea, does this mean they have to cite that person? According to the Harvard Honor Code the answer is yes, but how many students and faculty engage in conversations with their peers every day. At the end of the day, who can remember where they heard what information.

Stanford University also uses an honor code to deal with academic integrity. It is based on a code of conduct that was written by students in 1921. It articulates university expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work. It states that:

> students, individually and collectively will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading. They further provide examples of what is considered to be a violation of the honor code which includes: (1) copying from another's examination paper or allowing another to copy from one's own paper; (2) unpermitted collaboration; (3) plagiarism; (4) revising and resubmitting a quiz or exam for regrading, without the instructor's knowledge and consent; (5) giving or receiving unpermitted aid on a take-home examination; (6) presenting as one's own work the work of another; (7) giving or receiving aid on an

academic assignment under circumstances in which a reasonable person should have

known that such aid was not permitted.

They also provide a definition of plagiarism which states that:

For purposes of [the] Stanford University Honor Code, plagiarism is defined as the use,

without giving reasonable and appropriate credit to or acknowledging the author or

source, of another person's original work, whether such work is made up of code,

formulas, ideas, language, research, strategies, writing or other forms.

One of the differences between Stanford's honor code and other institutions' honor code is that

this one specifically mentions that faculty are also responsible for maintaining high standards in

academic work. In the definition of plagiarism they speak of providing *reasonable and*

appropriate credit but what does reasonable mean in this context? In one of the examples of

what they consider a violation of the honor code they state that a *reasonable* person should know

that aid is not permitted when completing an assignment. Again, what does reasonable mean

here? Does reasonable mean the same thing in both instances?

MIT has a policy on academic integrity which is provided in their handbook for students.

It states that "honesty is the foundation of good academic work. Whether you are working on a

problem set, lab report, project or paper, avoid engaging in plagiarism, unauthorized

collaboration, cheating, or facilitating academic dishonesty". Then they have a list of do's and

don'ts that characterize what they consider plagiarism such as "don't purchase papers or have

someone write a paper for you; and don't copy ideas, data, or exact wording without citing your

source". The definition used is:

plagiarism occurs when you use another's words, ideas, assertions, data, or figures and do

not acknowledge that you have done so. If you use the words, ideas, or phrasing of

another person or from published material, you must use quotation marks around the

words and cite the source, or paraphrase or summarize acceptably and cite the source.

Cheating guidelines include:

Don't copy answers from another student; don't ask another student to do your work for

you. Don't fabricate results. Don't use electronic or other devices during exams; don't

alter graded exams and submit them for re-grading; and don't submit projects or papers

that have been done for a previous class. Copying is cheating.

They further state that "plagiarism is sometimes unintentional. It can occur when you try to put

information from a source into your own words, but fail to do so completely. Often plagiarism

occurs not because a student is trying to cheat, but because he or she has not been taught how to

incorporate the words and ideas of others in the proper way". Stanford University is the only

university that actually acknowledges that some students might inadvertently plagiarize. This

explanation is one that I subscribe to as it has been my experience that first-year students often

do not know how to paraphrase or summarize material they have read. The policy also states

what can happen if a student violates the academic integrity as set forth by the university "the

consequences for cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and other forms of academic

dishonesty can be very serious, possibly including suspension, or expulsion from the institute."

As can be seen from the policy, the punishment is not consistent. It can take many forms such as

suspension or in extreme cases expulsion. They also leave room for individual instructors to

determine what action is appropriate to take and provide three suggestions: "(1) requiring the

student to redo the assignment for a reduced grade; (2) assigning the student a failing grade for

the assignment; or (3) assigning the student a failing grade for the class". When the punishment

is left up to the individual instructors this can lead to an uneven policy being implemented by

each instructor which, for all intents and purposes, means that the policy is subjective and not objective. The problem with a subjective policy is that students will become confused by the different expectations of each instructor.

UCLA has a Student Conduct Code that discusses the different types of misconduct and one of the sections is on academic dishonesty which deals with "cheating, fabrication or falsification, plagiarism, multiple submissions or facilitating academic misconduct which occurs in academic exercises or submissions". Plagiarism is defined as:

including, but not limited to, the use of another person's work (including words, ideas, designs, or data) without giving appropriate attribution or citation. This includes, but is not limited to, representing, with or without the intent to deceive, part or all of an entire work obtained by purchase or otherwise, as the Student's original work; the omission of or failure to acknowledge the true source of the work; or representing an altered but identifiable work of another person or the Student's own previous work as if it were the Student's original or new work . . . all submissions must be the Student's own work, or must clearly acknowledge the source.

Cheating is defined as:

including, but not limited to, the use of unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise; the alteration of any answers on a graded document before submitting it for re-grading; or the failure to observe the expressed procedures or instructions of an academic exercise (e.g. examination instructions regarding alternate seating or conversation during an examination).

UCLA's policy includes all instances of plagiarism whether they are intentional or not. This policy clearly states that the work must be the student's own original or new work. This puts the

onus on the students, to know and understand the policies on the different types of academic misconduct, which serves to remove the obligation of the instructors to teach their students about plagiarism.

Definition by Students

Since students are the ones most impacted by the academic integrity policies of the various institutions they attend, it made sense to see how students define plagiarism and cheating. In an informal survey of 128 of my students, I discovered that for 96% of the students (123/128), plagiarism followed the same basic definitions that are provided in the literature. They defined plagiarism as the taking, or stealing, of someone else's words or ideas without giving credit through proper citations. They referenced copying word for word (verbatim) from another source, or changing some words in a sentence and passing them off as their own work. One of the students said that plagiarism was "the purposeful or accidental attributing of written or depicted material as your own." This is the same as the definition used by UCLA which does not distinguish between purposeful or accidental plagiarism. Another student defined it as "the submission of a previously published text by someone other than the true author." An interesting definition was "using information or any content, that is not originally yours, and claim[ing] it to be your own," which is a much more straight forward definition than some that are offered in the literature and by the institutions. Another student used a clear, concise definition by stating that plagiarism was "taking credit for someone else's work by citing it as your own."

The definitions, by students, for cheating were more varied than the definitions for plagiarism. There wasn't a clear definition for cheating as there was for plagiarism. The majority of the students (41%) defined cheating the same way that they defined plagiarism. For them, cheating was a form of copying someone else's work and using it as their own. This is an

interesting finding, because in the literature, plagiarism is often referenced as a form of cheating (Hayes & Introna, 2005; Macdonald & Carroll, 2006; McCabe, 2001).

The next five most common definitions of cheating included: (1) copying from someone either in an assignment or on a test (53/128 or 41%); (2) gaining an unfair advantage by finding a way around the system (21/128 or 16%); (3) a form of breaking rules set by the institution (15/128 or 12%); (4) using shortcuts to benefit themselves (21/128 or 16%); and (5) cheating as a form of dishonesty (19/128 or 15%). Some of the definitions provided by individual students included: "cheating is the act of intentionally doing something that gives you an unfair advantage over other people"; "choosing to be dishonest in finding success for personal gain" ; "copying someone else's work to use it as your own, usually for personal gain"; "breaking set rules to gain the upper hand in a situation"; "taking unethical measures to somehow have an advantage"; "operating outside of permissible actions associated with an endeavour"; "finding ways around the proper regulations and abusing the ways you can manipulate your result for the better"; and "having work done that is not your own and passing it off as your own for gain". It is significant that many of the students identified cheating as something done for personal gain. The same distinction was not made in their definition of plagiarism.

I, also, asked how many students had read the university academic integrity policy that discusses plagiarism and cheating. Eighty-two out of 128 (64%) had not read the policy. There were only thirty-eight students out of 128 (30%) that had read the policy. This result supports the findings from Owunwanne, Rustagi, and Dada (2010) who found that most students do not read the academic integrity policies of their institutions.   If universities want to ensure that their students know what is stated in the policies, then they should do more than just post their academic integrity policies and hope that students will read them. The vast majority of students,

that were surveyed, indicated that they did not read the policy, nor did they intend to. Therefore, instructors have to do a better job of making sure that students, in their classes, know what the academic integrity policy is, and not just refer them to the appropriate document posted by their institutions.

What does it all mean?

Plagiarism is a word used mainly in academic institutions. You don't often hear people accused of plagiarism when they tell a joke that they heard from another person, or when someone repeats gossip, or restates an opinion they obtained from someone else. If these scenarios happened in an institution of higher learning, the people would all be considered plagiarists. If plagiarism and cheating are indeed on the rise, as we have been led to believe, it makes sense that the members of the individual institutions should be the ones who define and police what they consider plagiarism and what they consider cheating.

The problem with definitions arises due to the wording of the policies. Students are instructed to read the academic integrity policies of their institutions but often the policies are written in language that students do not understand. This is compounded by institutions that provide examples of plagiarism and cheating. If students do not do any of the things listed, but instead do something else that is also dishonest, it will prove difficult for the institutions to take action against the students. The problem with listing behaviours that are against the policies is that invariably there will be some behaviours not listed that are still not acceptable but students could argue that since it wasn't listed they thought they could do it.

Let's look at some of the definitions, used by universities and colleges, in greater detail and see if it is possible to understand what is meant by the definition used.   Every institution defines plagiarism in connection with student assessment, and they use almost exactly the same

words to define plagiarism. The institutions see plagiarism as the taking of someone else's

words, or ideas, and using them in an essay, or assignment for their own benefit, without

crediting the original source. This seems fairly straight forward. Even the students agree with

this definition. However, in reality, there are only so many ways that one can discuss a topic,

and therefore the same words are going to be used by different authors. Similarly, establishing

ownership of ideas can be problematic. Many scientists, such as Alexander Graham Bell,

Einstein, and Thomas Edison, owe their discoveries to ideas they acquired from others who were

also working in the same field. If we were to follow the strict definitions put forth by the various

institutions, they would have all been sanctioned, and considered plagiarists and/or cheaters.

Collaborative efforts and discussions are condoned by Harvard University as a way for

people to share ideas. If students are allowed to share ideas it makes it difficult for them to

figure out what they can and can't do when writing their own papers. People can, also, have the

same ideas but execute the discussion or essay differently. And, determining who the original

author was, of the words or ideas, can also be difficult since many authors make use of someone

else's words and ideas when they are writing their own papers. So, if students are accused of

plagiarizing an author's words or ideas, and that author plagiarized someone else's words and

ideas, then how can the writer determine who the original author was so they can cite the source?

The cycle perpetuates over time until the original author is forgotten. If it is alright for some

people to share ideas and words, why is it the only ones who face penalties are the students, and

not the authors of the articles that students read and use in their assignments?

The institutions that have policies that define cheating, as a separate entity, also use

language that is not clear. In most cases, the committees that write policy for institutions of

higher education define cheating as inappropriate conduct during examinations, and this can

include, but is not limited to, taking unauthorized materials into an examination, the use of

electronic devices during an exam or test, or the copying of another student's answers. It can

also extend to handing in one assignment in separate courses for credit, inappropriate

collaboration, and gaining an unfair advantage in an academic evaluation. Let's look at the

wording used in the first definition. This one seems fairly obvious. The definition centres on

examinations and inappropriate conduct but who determines what inappropriate conduct is. If a

question asks students to discuss, perhaps someone could take that literally, and attempt to

discuss the answer with a fellow student. Would that be considered inappropriate conduct even

though the student could argue that the question asked him/her to discuss it? Would getting up

and walking around the classroom, without looking at any other papers, be considered

inappropriate conduct and therefore cheating? And, what constitutes unauthorized materials?

The definition would have to be set on a course by course basis. Instructors would have to be

very clear about what appropriate behaviour in an examination is and what is not appropriate. If

the members of the institution have a blanket policy on this, then each course would have to

adhere to the same specific guidelines which is not sustainable.

 If policies are to be consistently applied across faculties, this can prove difficult, due to

the fact that individual instructors are not sure of the policies themselves (MacDonald & Carroll,

2006). There is also the issue of how staff treats plagiarism and cheating, as Wilkinson (2009)

observed that "some staff may not be as visible or as vigilant about checking for plagiarism as

others; this has the potential to seriously undermine institutional messages about academic

misconduct" (p. 103). Her study with 217 nursing students found that some of the issues with

plagiarism that the students reported were that different staff had different approaches to dealing

with plagiarism which made it confusing for the students; and that they did not receive adequate

guidance from staff about what was acceptable and what wasn't acceptable when it came to referencing sources in their assignments.

Another issue that must be addressed, is the fact that many institutions, in an effort to make their academic integrity policies as comprehensive as possible, try to include every conceivable example of plagiarism and cheating known to occur. It's an impossible task, made harder by the length of the policies needed to include everything. The policies have become so unwieldy that both instructors and students do not read and understand the guidelines. It is important that the people who write the policies acknowledge that it is not possible to formulate a definition that will take into consideration every single instance of cheating and plagiarism. In an effort to be all things to all people, institutions are doing a disservice to their instructors by expecting them to follow generic guidelines that are not specific to their own courses. It is better to go back to a more simple definition. What that definition will be depends on each individual instructor, and not the institutions where the instructor works, because the instructors are the ones on the front line of policing the policies.

What Can Be Done by Members of the Institutions to Assist Students?

There seems to be wide-spread fear-mongering, in the literature, about the increasing incidences of students plagiarizing, and cheating, in institutions of higher learning. As can be seen from the above discussion, one of the main problems with this conclusion is in determining what exactly is meant by plagiarism and what is meant by cheating? It appears that the members who contribute to the academic integrity policies of their university institutions think that by posting a plagiarism and/or cheating policy, on their website, or in a student handbook, somehow absolves instructors of having to teach their students exactly what the policy means. Most students do not read the academic integrity policy (82/128), many do not know that one exists,

and in many cases the wording used is too confusing for the students to understand exactly what they need to do to avoid plagiarism or cheating. In many cases the policies are prohibitively long, making reading them onerous and tedious. The University of Toronto academic integrity policy is twenty-one pages long and deals mostly with the punishment of students who are caught knowingly breaking the rules of conduct. The University of Alberta's code of student behaviour is fifty-two pages long. How many students are going to take the time to read such a large document? Most of the institutions looked at, for this article, had pages of what happens when students break the academic integrity, or honor code policy, but very little on how students can avoid plagiarizing an assignment.

Another problem with the definitions is that there are degrees of plagiarism and cheating. Often the instructors, themselves, do not have a good idea of what exactly constitutes plagiarism, and what would be considered cheating in their own departments (Macdonald & Carroll, 2006). Due to the ambiguous nature of the terms, and the fact that instructors are not conversant in the policy, or the repercussions for academic dishonesty, many undergraduate students face minor, or in some cases no discipline for infractions. And, if discipline is meted out, the kinds of discipline varies from department to department. Some students receive a grade of F, others get the chance to re-do the assignment, while others face academic suspension. It is no wonder students are confused.

What can members of institutions do to help students navigate the plagiarism and cheating policies that they are obliged to follow? One of the ways to ensure that students, are not only directed to the policy, but that they understand the policy, is to get instructors to discuss the policies in class (Jones, 2011). Jones (2011) suggests that "each instructor should include a copy of the written integrity policy, or honor code, as part of the course syllabus, with links to the

student handbook highlighting detailed steps for how the university will address academic dishonesty" (p. 147).

I would, also, suggest that the wording of the policy reflect the audience it is intended for. Too often universities use language that is ambiguous to their audience leaving the policy open to interpretation. It doesn't make sense to write an elaborate policy that only the writers of the policy are able to understand. And, the policies have to be shorter; no student is going to read a 21 or 52 page document. As Savin-Baden (2005) stated "few students understand what counts as plagiarism, so activities should be undertaken to help students to understand what it is" (p. 15). Savin-Baden (2005) further discusses another way to prevent plagiarism by "ensuring that students understand what is required of them in an assignment" (p. 15). Instructors should develop assessment guidelines that articulate, for the students, exactly what is expected of them in an assignment. They should make sure that the language used is one that is easily understood by the students by avoiding ambiguous terms.

Academic Integrity polices, and Honor Codes, make the assumption that all students are potential plagiarizers, and are supposedly academically dishonest. This does a great disservice to the number of students who do not plagiarize, and yet are perceived to be the same as students who do plagiarize their assignments. This feeling of mistrust goes against what I consider the purpose of higher education. Universities are teaching institutions, composed of instructors, whose responsibility should be to teach their students how to avoid plagiarizing and cheating on their assignments. The instructors should also not resort to using plagiarism detection programs that are designed to catch students who are dishonest, because that absolves them of the responsibility to instruct their students in what is acceptable behaviour in their courses. If

universities, and colleges, are in the business of punitive measures rather than teaching, then

something needs to be changed.

I don't subscribe to the use of plagiarism detection software as the way to curb

plagiarism. The programs can detect word for word plagiarism but often miss words that are

synonymous, or words that have their order changed. It is also ultimately up to the instructors,

who use plagiarism detection software, to determine how much overlap between sources is

acceptable. Is there a zero tolerance policy, is it 10% of the paper, 20%, 50%, 75%. What

percentage will be punished? An experiment, carried out by Youmans (2011) found that even if

students were aware that their papers were going to be checked using a plagiarism detection

program that it made no difference in the amount of plagiarism that was detected. This indicates

that just knowing about the programs does not deter those students who are going to plagiarize

because they have other factors that determine if they will submit work written by someone else,

or will resort to cutting and pasting their assignment. The instructors who think that investing in

a good plagiarism detection program will help them stop plagiarizers in their classrooms are

going to be sadly disappointed with the results.

Conclusion

Plagiarism and cheating are not new to education. There have, without a doubt, been

instances of them since formal education began and maybe even before. How institutional

policies, and individual instructors, react to the instances of academic dishonesty depends on

what they see as their purpose. If their purpose is to instruct students, then they will spend less

time trying to figure out how to punish those students who do not follow the rules, and more time

teaching them how to avoid academic dishonesty such as plagiarism. Cheating is a different

story. Students who cheat, on exams, or essays, do so with the intent to circumvent the rules of

the institution. They know, in many cases, that what they are doing is wrong but they do it

anyway. It is important to take into account, the intent of the students. Most students, who

plagiarize, are not forming a conscious intent to gain an unfair advantage over other students,

whereas those who cheat do have the conscious intent to be dishonest, because cheating is

deliberate.

       As I was reading the articles for the literature review, I realized that most authors when

providing the results for their studies, do not define exactly what students considered plagiarism

and what they considered cheating. In addition, the terminology used in articles is often vague

and confusing. This issue alone causes problems for the members of the institutions and for the

students. Until there is a more universal definition for cheating and for plagiarism, we have to be

careful about using studies and statistics to draw attention to the incidence of plagiarism.

       As long as the main purpose of universities and colleges remains one of competition for

the highest grades, there are going to be those students who will do anything to gain an unfair

advantage over their peers. This desire to be better than anyone else stems from the belief that

those with higher marks are somehow better than those students who do not get the top marks.

As long as professional colleges accept only those students with high GPA's there are going to

be students who will do anything, including cheating and plagiarizing, to further their chances of

getting accepted into those colleges.

       The level of compliance to the academic integrity policies of higher education

institutions concerning plagiarism and cheating needs further study. There are very few

workplaces that punish people for taking others ideas, and words, and using them as their own

but that is what happens in higher education institutions all over the world. I am not advocating

getting rid of academic integrity policies. We need them. What I am proposing are formulating

definitions that make sense to students, that don't only list wrong behaviours, but instead use language that students can understand. And, I suggest that individual instructors take on more of the responsibility for explaining to their students what acceptable behaviour is in their particular course, because if everyone has a different definition of plagiarism and cheating than how are students supposed to navigate the system.

Those students who deliberately plagiarize by copying and pasting, getting someone else to write their paper for them, or who pay for an online essay are the ones who deserve to be punished. But, those students who take a word here or there, who change some words, and continue writing their *own* essay should not be grouped with the deliberate plagiarizers and cheaters. The deliberate plagiarizers are the students we need to be aware of and those are the students who deserve the harshest penalties, not the ones who honestly have no idea what they did was wrong. I agree with Savin- Baden (2005) that there are degrees of plagiarism and as such we have to be more prudent in our policy of taking the same stance with every student. My informal survey shows that students do not read the academic integrity policies posted on institutional websites so, as instructors, we have to do more to make them aware of the policies. There is no use in insisting that it is up to students to read the stated policies, and follow them when the results show that they don't read them. Even when they have to sign a document to indicate that they are going to uphold the Honor Code of their institution, as they do in many universities and colleges in the United States, how many of them just sign without knowing what they are agreeing to? How many people read the terms of usage, on anything such as Facebook, before they click agree? Do any of them even know what they are agreeing to? Most people just click agree because the terms of usage are too long to read, the font is too small, and the language is too confusing. It is the same for our students who are expected to read the complex

academic integrity policies and agree to uphold them. I would argue, that the burden of proof

that plagiarism was intentional has to be met, so that we are not tarring and feathering all for the

sake of a few.

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