Plagiarism Education: Strategies for Instructors

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Abstract. Plagiarism among college and university students is a growing concern. Some researchers feel that plagiarism is an issue that is here to stay. Several research studies focus on self-reported plagiarism rates. In these studies, students report on the frequencies of their engagement in plagiarism behaviours. Although these studies are helpful in determining plagiarism rates, they are only an initial step. Other research on plagiarism examines reasons why students plagiarize, and one of the recurring reasons is that students are unclear regarding what plagiarism entails and how to avoid it. Research on plagiarism needs to examine plagiarism education strategies for instructors and their effectiveness. Students who are educated on plagiarism may plagiarize less. This paper will share a number of strategies centering on plagiarism education that educators can use in their classrooms with their students. The activities suggested can be modified by instructors to fit the needs of their classes.

Keywords: higher education; online learning; plagiarism education

Introduction

Plagiarism is a topic of growing concern in higher education institutions, and ". . . is a considerable challenge for universities" (Elander, Pittman, Lusher, Fox, & Payne, 2010, p. 157). According to Chapman and Lupton (2004), "academic dishonesty in post-secondary education . . . is a global problem" (p. 425). Despite the abundance of research that is being done on plagiarism, Marcus and Beck (2011) report that "plagiarism is a persistent problem" (p. 6 3). This is a bit ironic. Researchers are investigating plagiarism in their studies, and although they are studying this topic, it seems to be an issue that is here to stay.

The global interpretation of what is considered plagiarism differs. The differences in the concept of plagiarism lend to confusion on plagiarism behaviours among students (Bamford & Sergiou, 2005). For example, international students studying in North America may plagiarize more often than domestic students for a number of reasons, including learning the new language (Chen & Van Ullen, 2011). Instructors should be encouraged to educate students on plagiarism, which will provide clarity regarding what is and what is not acceptable.

Literature Review

Although there are different types of studies conducted on plagiarism, a large number focus on plagiarism rates. For instance, several researchers ask students to read a list of items that consist of plagiarism behaviours and then report how often they have engaged in that type of behaviour. This section will outline engagement in plagiarism rates, and all of the participants are post-secondary education students. Risquez, O'Dwyer, and Ledwith (2013) found that 84% of first and second year business, engineering, education, and health service students reported "low levels of engagement in plagiarism" (p. 38). Trushell, Byrne, and Simpson's (2012) participants were enrolled in an education-related program (Early Childhood Education, Education Studies, and Youth and Community Work). The results demonstrate that "17% [of participants] invented a study/research paper to include in the essay, 13% presented a false bibliography, and 11% changed dates of old research to make it appear to be up-to-date research" (p. 139). Christensen Hughes and McCabe's (2006) participants were from eleven Canadian post-secondary institutions. The results from this study revealed that "37% of participants copied a few sentences of material from a written source without footnoting, and 35% copied a few sentences from an Internet source without footnoting" (p. 10). Dawkins (2004) found that 19% of participants self-reported to copying from another source and submitting it as their own within the previous year. Selwyn (2008) compared online and offline plagiarism. Overall, 61.9% of participants engaged in online plagiarism within the previous year, and 61.9% engaged in offline plagiarism within the previous year. Walker (2010) found that 31.4% of students submitted an assignment that contained plagiarism. As demonstrated above, the self-engagement rate of plagiarism varies in the literature, with the highest rate found being 84%.

Although plagiarism engagement rates have been studied, these numbers might be lower than the true plagiarism engagement rate, since "determining the true prevalence of deviant behaviours is a challenge" (Youmans, 2011, p. 749). One reason for this is because students may under-report this behaviour, despite it being an anonymous study. Students might be fearful that their responses may be tied back to them, so out of caution, they under-report these types of behaviours (Colella, 2012).

According to the literature, the incident rate of plagiarism is increasing among post-secondary students, with plagiarism becoming a serious issue in universities. The massive amount of information available on the Internet benefits students by giving them access to information that significantly increases their bodies of knowledge; however, this easy access to information may make students more prone to committing plagiarism (Evering & Moormen, 2012). The Internet makes it easy to copy text from sources directly into a paper. The amount of information available also makes it easy to be excessive when it comes to including citations. Due to technology's reinforcement of plagiarism, the "[t]raditional definitions of plagiarism are further challenged by the digital revolution" (Evering & Moormen, 2012, p. 36).

In colleges and universities, reputations are based on creating new knowledge, discovering new facts, and thinking critically from different perspectives. Lupton and Chapman (2002) argued that plagiarism can impact a university's reputation, especially at the graduate level (as cited in Flint, Clegg, and

Macdonald, 2006). Moreover, universities compete with each other for enrollment; therefore, they may be hesitant to advertise that their school has a high level of plagiarism (Devlin, 2006; East, 2010). Indeed, some universities are very circumspect when it comes to announcing the existence of academic integrity on their campus (Devlin, 2006). It is difficult, however, to expect to resolve a problem if its existence is not acknowledged.

Although higher education institutions may have plagiarism policies and regulations, many students continue to submit papers that contain plagiarism or improper citations. In fact, plagiarism among university students has proven to be a full-blown epidemic (Devlin, 2006). Many studies indicate that misunderstandings of plagiarism, which often has serious consequences, is a common excuse offered by students who are accused of it (Devlin & Gray, 2007; East, 2010; Flint et al., 2006; Power, 2009). If students are not properly educated on the correct documentation styles, it becomes questionable as to whether or not they should be held accountable if they have errors of this type in their submitted work. At the graduate level, it is expected that students understand what plagiarism is and how to avoid it (Colella, 2012).

Educating students about plagiarism is likely the most effective way to reduce it (Evering & Moormen, 2012). Born (2003) emphasizes that educators should concentrate more on reducing plagiarism rather than on how or why students commit it. Educators should intervene by teaching students how to avoid plagiarism. This is supported by Born (2003) through the following suggestion: "a proactive approach needs to be used more than a reactive approach" (p. 223).

Flint et al. (2006) cited two research studies (Ashworth et al., 1997; Macdonald & Freewood, 2002) "on students' understanding of plagiarism" p. (153). Flint et al. (2006) emphasized the different perspectives of students and professors due to a lack of knowledge among students regarding plagiarism. Most of the students in these studies blamed instructors for not explaining specifically what constitutes plagiarism in class (Flint et al., 2006). This result depicts the importance of providing plagiarism education for students.

Strategies for Instructors to Educate Students on Plagiarism
Many studies have successfully highlighted the need for plagiarism education (Aasheim, Rutner, & Williams, 2012; Born, 2003; Evering & Moormen, 2012; Power, 2009). This paper's main focus is on educating students about plagiarism and what educators can do to prevent or reduce plagiarism among post-secondary students. Therefore, the authors of this paper offer the following strategies to help instructors reduce plagiarism:
Provide In-Class Activities:
Educators can start their courses with some activities relating to plagiarism. Class activities can be a fun way to introduce plagiarism to students. Educators can arrange questions to ask students using games and presentations. Students can then answer the questions individually or in groups. For example, true/false games could be very useful for demonstrating some scenarios involving plagiarism (see Appendix A). In this game, the educators provide students with a true/false card shaped like a hand. After a scenario is introduced, the students decide whether or not plagiarism was present in the scenario through the use of their true/false hand. A class discussion can follow each scenario.

Provide Online Activities:
Online activities can be very helpful in demonstrating students' knowledge of plagiarism. Prior to the writing assignment due date, instructors can assign online activities that focus on the proper citation (e.g., APA or MLA format). Throughout the activity, students are required to avoid common citation mistakes by using, for instance, Student Initiated Editing, in which students write two short essays, one which is in correct APA or MLA format and the other which contains errors. Instructors then can upload the essays on the class Web site or distribute them via e-mail for students to review and find mistakes. Instructors should keep the names anonymous and request the essay's author to check his/her classmates' work.

Provide Drafts/Provide Feedback:
Throughout the semester, educators should keep track of their students' work progress (Born, 2003). This will help them to detect any plagiarism in earlier phases and to reduce the possibilities of receiving plagiarized papers (Evering & Moormen, 2012). Educators can have checkpoints throughout the semester in which they can monitor their students' papers gradually, in different phases. In the first phase, for example, they could check students' outlines, which include their original ideas. In the second phase, students should submit a first draft, and educators could give them feedback. In the meantime, throughout these meetings, students can ask questions and find out if they have inadvertently committed plagiarism.

Use Clear Instruction to Explain Expectations:
Educators should provide clear and reasonable expectations for the course (Evering & Moormen, 2012). At the beginning of the semester, educators should clearly explain the assignment requirements. It may also be beneficial for educators to show examples of satisfactory assignments to students, so they will not have any difficulties in meeting assignment expectations.

Include Plagiarism Information on the Course Outline:
Educators should include a section about plagiarism and its consequences in the course outline. It is not enough to simply mention that students must not plagiarize and then refer them to the university academic integrity Web site for further information. The course outline should define the concepts of plagiarism and explain in what ways plagiarism is illegal.

Assign a Plagiarism Assignment:
A useful strategy for educators might be to require students to complete a plagiarism assignment at the beginning of the semester. By doing this assignment, the students will have to research in-depth about plagiarism. In addition, during the writing process for the assignment, they will acquire rich knowledge about plagiarism. As a result, this will help them to understand plagiarism and how to avoid it. An example of this type of assignment could be to have the students write a brief paragraph on what plagiarism is and what steps students can take to ensure they do not plagiarize in any of their assignments.

Provide Self-Reflections:
Having students complete self-reflections, whether they are asked to complete them before an assignment, as they work on an assignment, or after they have submitted an assignment can encourage them to think about the assignment, particularly about academic integrity if these questions are incorporated in the

self-reflection. For example, priming students to consider plagiarism and its possible consequences prior to submitting an assignment may defer students from plagiarizing. When completing an assignment, asking students to self-reflect on what they have done so far and what they need to do may make them more conscious of plagiarism and less likely to plagiarize. Think of a student who is in the editing stage of an essay. If the student is asked to reflect on the sources used in the essay, the student may be more inclined to fix any plagiarized sources compared to a student who is not asked to reflect on their sources. A sample of a self-reflection can be found in Appendix B.

Provide Students with Resources Regarding Plagiarism:

Explaining to students what plagiarism is and completing activities or assignments on this issue may not be enough. Providing students with a list of additional resources at the start of the semester will send the message that support is available. Since plagiarism is a sensitive topic, the student might be more comfortable discussing it with someone outside of the classroom. Here is a list of possible resources on campus that provide students support on plagiarism:

 a) The Library
 b) The Academic Integrity Centre
 c) Peer Writers
 d) Student Development Centers
 e) Teaching Assistants (TA) or Graduate Assistants (GA)

Openly Discuss Plagiarism:

If plagiarism is openly discussed, students will feel more comfortable with the topic. If students feel they cannot openly discuss plagiarism with their instructors and that they cannot ask their instructors questions about plagiarism, they might develop a sense of uneasiness with the topic; as a result, they may plagiarize even though they are aware that it is wrong. When a written assignment is due, instructors might want to dedicate five to ten minutes each week up until the assignment due date to discuss plagiarism and address anyone's concerns. Although time may be sensitive for classes, putting aside this small amount demonstrates that the instructor cares about this issue and takes it seriously. A way to do this might be to have an open email policy, where students can send in any plagiarism questions, and the instructor discusses the questions the following week without revealing which student sent it in. Oftentimes, students have similar questions.

Change Assignment Topics Regularly:

Taking some time to change assignments or assignment topics before the class starts can cut down on plagiarism, especially the recycling of assignments. For instance, if students are required to submit a research essay on globalization each semester, students from previous semesters can share their essays with others who take that class after they do. A simple way to help avoid sharing of assignments is to create new ones. In some cases, simply changing the assignment topic can help reduce plagiarism. For example, if students are asked to create a business proposal, give them a few choices for the topic of the proposal. The following semester, provide different choices.

Conclusion

Overall, plagiarism is a consistent issue in higher education institutions. Through education, students can develop their referencing skills, which may help to reduce the number of plagiarism cases reported in universities and colleges. Further, educating students on plagiarism may save instructors hours, since "plagiarism can take hours of work to locate the original sources and cross-reference with the student assignment" (Gullifer & Tyson, 2010, p. 446)

This paper provided several strategies that instructors can use with students. The several strategies shared may provide a more holistic approach to combating the plagiarism engagement rate. Similarly, Owens and White (2013) shared that plagiarism is complex, and providing a single strategy to help students understand plagiarism is not likely to be successful. As stated above, plagiarism is an issue on campuses, and from an instructor's perspective, "Of all of the negative student behaviours that instructors in higher education find challenging to manage, student plagiarism ranks highly" (Youmans, 2011, p. 749).

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Appendix A

True/False Sample Questions

Situation: Mila has an argument essay due next week. In addition to her essay, she has two assignments due in Biology. Frustrated, Mila takes a paragraph of an essay she found online and used that as a part of her own essay. She does not cite the paragraph of the essay she took online.
Question: Is Mila plagiarizing?

Situation: Dr. Zhang asked his class to submit a final tech project. One group submits a PowerPoint on how to use computer games in the classroom. One of the games they used in their final tech project asks students geography questions. The group takes these questions word-for-word, and they do not state where these questions were taken from.
Question: Did this group plagiarize? If so, who should be held responsible for this plagiarism?

Situation: Last semester, Richard took an economics course. Samantha, his sister, is taking the same economics course this semester. Richard gave one of his economic labs to his sister. She submitted it as her own.
Question: Is Samantha plagiarizing? If so, who should be held responsible for this plagiarism?

Situation: In her qualitative research course, Leslie presented a seminar on focus groups. In her research methodology course, she took parts of her previous focus group presentation and used it in her research methodology course presentation. The work belongs to Leslie, and she does not state in her second presentation that the material was previously used as part of a different class project.
Question: Is Leslie plagiarizing?

Situation: Carla is taking an online course this semester. A component of the course has students participate in online discussions. Carla is the last to host an online discussion, and her friend, Amy, was the first to do so. Carla takes a few sentences from Amy's discussion because she really likes how Amy worded it. Amy gave her permission to do so, and Amy suggests she does not want to be cited as the original source. The instructor notices the similarity between the two discussions, and when he types these sentences in Google, it is evident that Amy took her work from an online source and did not cite it.
Question: Who should be blamed for plagiarism? Amy? Carla? Neither?

Appendix B

Sample Self-Reflection Questions

What do you know about plagiarism?

What would you like to know in order to avoid plagiarism in your assignments?

How confident are you that your assignments will not contain plagiarism?

If you were the instructor, what would you do to ensure the class avoids plagiarism in their assignment?

Why do you think plagiarizing has penalties?

List as many resources as you can think of that students can use if they need help with plagiarism.

If you are unsure if you are correctly citing/referencing something in your paper, what will you do?

Since time management is one reason why students plagiarize, what can you do to avoid waiting until the last minute to complete your work?