Plagiarism:
Catalysts and Not So Simple Solutions

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Plagiarism has gained much public attention with media, corporations, and researchers leading the way. The general public's perception is that plagiarism is a "plague" spreading without control within our educational institutes. Furthermore, a social perception has been created that the Internet is the "catalyst" of modern-day plagiarism. This chapter explores the domain of plagiarism, taking into consideration some definitions of plagiarism, the recent history, the cultural context, the view of students and teachers, and the situation in Distance Education. The chapter goes on to discuss the actual catalysts of plagiarism and methods used to detect plagiarism. Finally, the chapter forwards some good practices that may help prevent and act as deterrents of plagiarism and addresses challenges faced in tackling the problem of plagiarism.

INTRODUCTION

Plagiarism is not a new phenomenon. Copying from other writers is probably as old as writing itself, but until the advent of mass-produced writing, it remained hidden from the public gaze (Park, 2003, pp. 473).

Integrity in general has come to become a highly prioritized issue in today's society. Scandals, unethical actions, incidents of dishonesty and cheating in world are being highly scrutinized by all sections of society as well as by the media. Institutes of Education that are considered the mould of the future leader of society are not immune from this and researchers (Hayes & Introna, 2005) as well as media (Maruca, 2004) have paid much attention to the issue of academic integrity in higher education.

With the growing focus on academic integrity, surveys have been carried out in an attempt to gauge the extent of the problem of plagiarism in academic institutions. Results have shown that academic dishonesty is abundant in our education systems. McCabe, Butterfield and Trevino (2006) report that 53 percent of Graduate Business students (GBS) and 43 percent of their Non-business peers admitted to at least one count of cheating over the past year. They further report that 23 and 33 percent of GBS admitted to test-cheating and "cut and paste" plagiarism respectively. Schab (1991) in his survey of college students in 1969, 1979 and 1989 reports that the respective percentages of students using crib sheets at a test grew from 34 to 60 to 68 percent and letting others copy their work grew from 59 to 93 to 98 percent. In this same survey the more moral questions of "sometimes it is necessary to be dishonest" increased from 34, 64 and 67 percent respectively for the years 1969, 1979 and 1989. One important observation from this study is that while there has been considerable increase in the number of students who cheat, there has also been a noticeable shift in their moral value system.

In this chapter we explore the domain of plagiarism with two main aims: 1) to create a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and 2) to put forward best practise guidelines that can be applied in an educational context.

Plagiarism and Digital Technology

The 'Internet Culture' has created a notion among many students that anything in the public domain is common or public knowledge (McCabe, 2001; Marshall & Garry, 2005). Increasing access to technology and the Internet has opened up an entire new sea of resources that students can use for learning. At the same time, there is much worry about how students (mis)use these resources. The main concern comes from the fact that technology and the Internet has made plagiarising as simple as "copy n

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