

An Institutional Code of Ethics—A Response to Attitude of Israeli Teachers' Education College Students Towards Academic Plagiarism

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Academic plagiarism becomes very easy due to new opportunities provided by the Internet era (Scribner, 2003; Underwood & Sazabo, 2003; Ross, 2005). We believe that academic dishonesty is a major issue, because it strikes at the heart of the academic and social values: honesty, trust and integrity. When dealing with education students, the future educators of children, academic dishonesty takes on added significance with much graver consequences for our society. This paper is aimed to reveal the opinions of 200 Israeli teacher education students towards different aspects of plagiarism. These responses, which were collected using likert scale questionnaire, led us to define some principles for a plan to reduce academic dishonesty, especially internet based plagiarism (Mc Murtry, 2001; Foster, 2002; Landau, Druen, & Arcuri, 2002; Murray, 2002). We suggest focusing on a plan for an institutional ethic code to reduce plagiarism and unconscious academic dishonesty.

Keywords: teacher education, academic dishonesty, plagiarism, ethical code

Introduction

University and college lecturers are compelled frequently to deal with an increasing number of fraudulent papers students downloaded either word for word or partly from the Internet, or copied from books or colleagues. It is easy for a student to download papers from the Internet, which has made academic material highly accessible. This has turned the problem of plagiarizing, which occurred even before the internet era, into what Harker (2005) called “an epidemic”. This article presented a plan of action designed to deal with academic dishonesty, and specifically with plagiarism. The article is based on two sources of information: a survey of the professional literature on plagiarism, its causes and ways of combating it and a study carried out by the authors of this article at an Israeli academic college of education regarding those students' attitudes towards acts of plagiarism.

This paper contributes to reveal other aspects of academic dishonesty in the following four aspects:

- (1) The first contribution is to the inner Israeli field of research. There were very few researches about plagiarism in Israel previous to ours. As a result, since our report was finished, it had a very strong echo all around the mass media in Israel.
- (2) The current article about Israeli students can contribute to the international discourse about academic

dishonesty by describing a research in a non-western society. Israeli society is composed of a highly diverse amalgamation of different national, ethnic and religious groups that live side by side. The values of the Arab national minority and large part of the ethnical and religious groups of the Jewish majority are non-western and traditionally collective-oriented (Reingold, 2007).

(3) Research through out the world has been done on business or medical students. Our research focused on students who intended to become teachers. We assumed that their behavior was guided by an inner ethical code. Teachers are expected to provide their students with moral education. This assumption is common in most of the main pedagogical paradigms and theories. Traditional or conservative pedagogies expected teachers to function as agents of socialization that led their students to follow the social conventions (Lamm, 2001). Progressive (Dewey, 1966) and some of the humanistic pedagogies (Aloni, 1998), expected teachers to function as agents of acculturation and convinced the students to adopt the moral codes and values of the democratic school or other ideologies. Constructionist pedagogies, such as, critical pedagogy, multicultural education or radical education expected the teachers to become agents of individualization (Lamm, 2001; Shremer, 1999), meaning to help their students develop skills of autonomous moral judgment. No followers of either one of the above-mentioned paradigms would welcome teacher students who do not see academic dishonesty and plagiarism as an unmoral act. Kohlberg (1976) emphasized the importance of adults as a model to moral and honest behavior. Future teachers should function accordingly.

(4) While most programs for reducing plagiarism focus on either the appropriate sanctions and penalties for acts of plagiarism or in ways of prevention by explanation (of the concept of plagiarism and of the rules of academic writing), we suggest to focus on a plan for an institutional ethic code to reduce plagiarism and unconscious academic dishonesty.

Theoretical Background—The Dimensions and the Causes of the Problem

Cheat is one form of academic dishonesty defined by Oxford dictionary as “act in a dishonest way to win an advantage or profit” (1969, p. 158).

Plagiarize is another form of academic dishonesty defined by Oxford dictionary as “take and use somebody else’s ideas, words, etc., as if they were one’s own of the thoughts, writings or inventions of another” (1969, p. 737). The dictionary definition of plagiarism comprises of two meanings: (1) As an intransitive verb, it means taking ideas from an existing source and presenting them as new and original; and (2) As a transitive verb, it means using work done by others without acknowledging the source of the work. In other words, plagiarism is an act of fraud. It involves both stealing someone else’s work and lying about it afterward (Merriam-Webster’s online, 2002).

Lathrop and Foss (2000) enlarged the basic dictionary definition and said that, if you did not think of it and did not write everything by yourself, or you did not quote or write down the idea or sentence pointing out the source from which it was taken, that was certainly plagiarism. Plagiarism derives from the Latin word “plagiaries” that means “abductor of a person” (kidnapper). Nowadays, it has the meaning of a literary theft by a person who takes and prints some work, or parts of it, created by others as if it was his own. In the Hebrew language both “plagiarism” and “cheating” are defined as “copying”, while the English language distinguishes between “plagiarism” (presenting material written by others as one’s own) and “cheating” (a more general term that also encompasses other kinds of moral, legal and ethical offenses). The Hebrew dictionary defines “copying” as “writing down word for word from the source”. This definition which has the meaning of a

technical process, is objective and avoids any negative connotations.

Each university had its own definition of plagiarism and its own procedures for dealing with it (Ross, 2003); however, he pointed out that most definitions of plagiarism included the following elements: a deliberate intention to cheat, copying or paraphrasing a text without acknowledgment and adopting someone else's ideas without acknowledgment.

The Web era has complicated the problem by making plagiarism very easy. The Web offers an enormous amount of information that can be downloaded easily.

"The new epidemic" (Harker, 2005, p. 193), was not a one-time occurrence. Using material that is not produced by one's own effort and presenting it as one's own harms the whole system of values of an academic institute where free, original and intellectual thinking should take place. Moreover, it has a harmful influence on the whole society values. Harker (2005) claimed that if a student entered business school as a liar, then that student would also graduate and enter the marketplace as a liar. The issue is by no means limited to business schools, but has spilled over into the whole academic world (Kennedy, 2004). Some researchers emphasized the linkage between dishonesty, plagiarism and criminal activity (Ross, 2003). Ilani (2006) claimed that if a student plagiarizes material protected by copyright, then that student would continue to behave in a criminal manner, later in adult life.

The research of this matter is relatively new. Stressing the misuse of the Internet, discussions on the issue began in the US in 1995, but became more urgent and intensive in 2000 (Gallant & Bertram, 2006). While in Israel, very little research was being carried out on the subject (Heshin, 2006), in America and in other countries, the subject has attracted a lot of attention and is being seriously investigated by a relatively large number of researchers. Combating cheating and plagiarism at school and in the universities is an educational as well as a moral challenge. Educators, parents and students involved in the issue should take up the challenge to fight against academic dishonesty and especially plagiarism before it spreads and erodes the moral fabric of our whole society. Although there is evidence that plagiarism at universities is widespread, and in spite of the fact that lecturers are aware of the problem, they do next to nothing to stop it. Even when some of them attempt to do something, the results are far from satisfactory because they may not have been briefed on how to take care of the problem. Students must be warned unequivocally about the consequences of plagiarism before punishment is meted out (Zobel & Hamilton, 2000). In many cases, students may not be aware of the meaning of plagiarism. They plagiarize without being aware they are doing it. Besides, many universities did not have a clear definition of what was considered plagiarism (Carroll, 2002). Oliphant (2002) attributed most plagiarism to ignorance. The students lack the knowledge of the rules for quoting from texts. Kennedy (2004), who discussed methods of detection of plagiarism, also believed that in many cases, plagiarism occurred unwittingly.

Advantages of technology are enormous and everyone is familiar with the convenience of searching for information, conducting dialogues and obtaining quick feed-back by using computer related technologies. However, the Web has also exposed the user community to unprecedented temptations. Plagiarism is not new, but now it is extremely easy to plagiarize material from the Internet, because it is so highly accessible to all (Zobel & Hamilton, 2000; Mc Murtry, 2001; Underwood & Szabo, 2003; Ross, 2005; Thompson, 2006).

The great demand for instant academic papers has spawned new kinds of sources of dishonesty like "sweatshops" in which Philippine, Pakistani and Indian students are willing to write papers on Shakespeare and Byron, for a reasonable price, for lazy British and American students. In Israel, it was also possible for a student to buy "Bialik for five shekels" (Ilani, 2006). The New Israeli Shekel is Israel's currency and Bialik is the national poet.

Oliphant (2002) claimed that plagiarizing also occurred as a result of the prevailing attitude that the Internet and the information it made available were public property and free for all. Freedman (1998), on the other hand, believed that it was none other than the lecturers that were to be blamed for this embarrassment because they did next to nothing about cheating even when they came across it. The quality of the lecturers is one of the points raised by Kennedy (2004) too. She questioned the qualifications and the quality of many lecturers. She also claimed that students misunderstood the learning culture of the university, lacked suitable learning skills, prepared assignments inadequately, had inadequate writing skills and did not meet deadlines for submitting papers.

Carrol (2002) mentioned additional factors responsible for this problem: (1) the ever increasing disproportion in the ratio of number of students per lecturer resulting in overcrowding of classes and an absence of personal contact between lecturers and students; (2) relinquishing examinations in favor of written assignments; (3) the pressure to attain high grades; (4) students' failure to manage their time properly; and (5) students' feelings of dissatisfaction with courses—All these contribute to the worsening of the problem. In addition, mismanagement and failure to organize time properly, and the need to attain high grades are also the reasons.

There are other reasons that drive students to plagiarize, and the mainly cultural reasons: Foreign students studying in Western countries suffer from social isolation. They were unable to adjust or adjust too slowly to a Western life style and suffered from anxiety of fear to fail (Lathrop & Foss, 2000; Magnus, Polterovich, Danilov, & Savvateev, 2002; Rothstein-Fisch, 2003).

Following the theoretical review, we decided to check the Israeli students' attitude towards plagiarism in an academic college for education.

Methodology

The Aim of the Research

This research aims to exam students' attitudes towards cheating in its various manifestations at a teacher training college: plagiarizing material from the Web, copying work from a colleague and copying from textbooks. It also examines whether student attitudes were affected by the extent (level) of the copying or by the plagiarized source. We divided the term "plagiarism" into three subcategories: word-for-word copying, cutting and pasting, and paraphrasing of plagiarized texts.

Research Method

In order to check the students' perceptions of their attitudes about cheating, we carried out a quantitative study based on two hypotheses:

(1) The level of plagiarism (word-for-word, paraphrasing or cutting and pasting) would affect the attitude of the education students about the severity of plagiarism; they would perceive word-for-word copying as a much more severe violation of ethics than partial copying;

(2) The plagiarized source (a colleague, a book and the web) would affect the attitude of the students about the severity of the cheating. Copying from a colleague would be perceived as more severe than copying from a book, and the latter as more severe than copying from the Web.

The independent variable regarding the first hypothesis is the level of copying. The definition of this variable is "the extent of copyright violation", and the values of the definition are "word-for-word copying, paraphrasing and partial cutting and pasting".

The independent variable regarding the second hypothesis is the plagiarized source. The definition of this

variable depends on the following data: a colleague, a book and the Web.

The dependent variable concerning both hypotheses is the attitude of the education students about the severity of the plagiarism. The definition of this variable is the extent to which plagiarism is perceived as an improper behavior, a forbidden behavior, a violation of copyright, a criminal offense or a moral offense. The functional definition of the dependent variable is the score the students gave the variable in the questionnaire surveying their attitude on the subject.

A questionnaire surveying the attitudes of the respondents was distributed among the students at the teacher training college. The students were presented with three different situations involving plagiarizing: word-for-word copying, paraphrasing, and cutting and pasting. For every situation the students were presented with three potential sources of plagiarism: the Web, books or a colleague. In every one of the nine cases, the students were asked to respond to three questions: "Did the case involve a copyright violation, did the case constitute a criminal offense or did the case constitute a moral offense".

The term "plagiarism" relates to three types of copyright violations: (1) unaccredited downloading of entire files from the Web; (2) unaccredited downloading of files and paraphrasing; and (3) unaccredited cutting and pasting of files from the Web.

Three questions were asked concerning each type of plagiarism; the student was asked to respond to them using a scale ranging from 1 to 6, with 1 indicating "disagreement" with the utterance, and 6 indicating "agreement" with the utterance to a very large extent.

Data Analyze

Following the compilation of the data, we analyzed it using the Axcel program (averages and standard deviations).

An average score was calculated for each student's responses to every type of plagiarism (relating to both method used and the plagiarized source). This average is based on the three questions dealing with every type of plagiarism (copyright violations, criminal offense and moral offense). The lower the average is, the more negative the students' attitude about cheating is. Since the questionnaire checked students' points of view the analysis is based on the average and the standard deviation only.

Findings

Table 1

Students' Attitudes Regarding the Method and Source Used for Plagiarizing (Average and Standard Deviation)

	Copying from a book			Copying from a colleague			Copying from the web		
	Cutting and pasting	Paraphrase	Download /copying	Cutting and pasting	Paraphrase	Download /copying	Cutting and pasting	Paraphrase	Download /copying
Violation of copyright	3.68 (1.77)	3.86 (1.79)	4.21 (1.82)	3.62 (1.78)	3.47 (1.90)	3.84 (1.96)	3.65 (1.73)	4.07 (1.70)	4.57 (1.72)
Committed a criminal offense	3.19 (1.95)	3.28 (1.90)	3.55 (1.96)	3.06 (1.87)	2.94 (1.82)	3.21 (1.89)	2.91 (1.77)	3.18 (1.83)	3.64 (1.90)
Committed a moral offense	4.01 (1.87)	4.20 (1.79)	4.54 (1.70)	4.24 (1.71)	4.23 (1.79)	4.63 (1.71)	3.90 (1.78)	4.25 (1.68)	4.83 (1.56)

Table 1 shows the results regarding the method and source used for plagiarizing for each of the three questions asked in the questionnaire:

(1) Violation of copyright—For all the methods used in plagiarizing, the values regarding the question of the violation of copyright were median and higher. This means that the respondents considered most methods of plagiarizing as violations of copyright. They considered downloading papers from the Internet as the worst violation of copyright (4.57), whereas paraphrasing a colleague's work was considered the mildest violation (3.47). In all the sources used for plagiarizing, downloading and copying from these sources were considered worse violations than the other methods of plagiarizing;

(2) Criminal offense—In general, all the behaviors mentioned in the questionnaire were considered criminal—The values were median and lower. The highest values for this category were given to downloading/copying in all the sources used for plagiarizing. Downloading from the Internet and plagiarizing material from books received the highest values (3.64 and 3.55, respectively). Cutting and pasting from the web were considered criminal only to a minor degree (2.91);

(3) Moral offense—In contrast to the criminal offense, this category received median values and higher. This shows that plagiarizing was not considered a criminal behavior, but rather morally offensive. The most offensive method was downloading from the Internet (4.83). Copying from a colleague or from a book was also considered offensive to a very large extent (4.63 and 4.54, respectively). The method considered the least offensive was cutting and pasting from the Internet (3.90).

Discussion

Our research was carried out in a big college whose students are intending to be teachers. We assumed that student will deny any way of coping. But there was not a negative attitude to plagiarize during the process of learning as reflected in the findings. The students did not treat coping the way it should be: cut and paste, copy from a friend or copy from a book without giving the credits to the author is illegal. One should mention the name of the author otherwise he violates the copyrights and the rights on intellectual property.

Their way of thinking of the matter reflects a confused approach to the subject. From the results, we can learn that they do not understand the correct meaning of plagiarizing. They think it is immoral to copy, but it has nothing to do with breaking law. They do not understand that copying without permission is an offence. Taking into account the college students' attitudes about plagiarizing especially from the web, it is necessary to draft a plan in order to diminish the extent of the problem if it cannot be prevented at all. Educational actions that will bring students to understand the meaning of moral value may contribute to minimize the problem. As it is reflected in the research results, even when the students understand the severity of plagiarism, they still do not negate it categorically.

Principles of a Plan for Combating Academic Dishonesty

A program to combat cheating in general and especially plagiarism must start at the top level. Heads of colleges and universities should define clearly the meaning of "academic cheating and academic plagiarism" and their institution's policy to combat it. The policy should be consistent and made clear to all. New students should be solemnly assembled and given clear guidelines on the subject. Since cheating and plagiarism is partially a result of considerations of potential profits vs. potential losses, the policy must include severe penalties for cheaters so that its consequences and costs would be prohibitive. The heads and the administrations of academic institutions should support and encourage teaching staffs to actively oppose cheating, expose cheaters and report them. In order to achieve this goal, the educational culture of many institutions must change.

Most of the researches on the subject of academic dishonesty have focused on the roots of the problem, perhaps on the assumption that exposing the causes of the problem should help to find the cure. For example, many Australian universities are now developing and presenting policies which deal with standards of integrity and attempt to define plagiarism and specify its penalties. This focus directs faculty to be more mindful of the presence and potential of plagiarism (East, 2006). In order to deal with the problem, it is preferable to exert effort on prevention than sanctions and penalties. The problem should be dealt at two levels: at the national level and the local institutional level (Logue, 2004). Mc Murtry (2001) took up the challenge by suggesting ways to combat e-cheating. He recommended the following: (1) Devote time to explain and discuss with the students your policy on academic honesty; (2) Plan to write assignments with very precise aims and very specific instructions; (3) Do not give assignments formulated in general terms; (4) The more specific the instructions, the better chance you have of getting an honest paper; (5) It will also be easier to detect inconsistencies; (6) Familiarize yourself with the material on the web before giving assignments; (7) Give students enough time to complete the assignments; (8) Give them tips on how to do the assignments; (9) Help students organize their time, students that wait until the last minute to write their papers will usually take shortcuts by plagiarizing other people's work; and (10) Require students to send their papers by e-mail so you can create e-folders of all the papers you assigned. This will make detecting of cheaters much easier.

Mc Murtry (2001) stated that e-cheating was quick, easy and accessible. Therefore, educators should be alert if they want to instill academic values in their students. His recommendations were directed towards the educators, but did not answer the question about which channel of communication should be cultivated with the students so they would understand the moral message behind it. Requiring the students to write a position paper on their research question and on the method they will use to write the paper will help prevent plagiarizing. The Center for the Study of Higher Education (Devlin, 2002) mentioned 36 strategies to minimize plagiarism gathered from a range of sources. They drafted a three-point plan: (1) Make expectations clear to students; (2) Design assessment to minimize opportunities for plagiarism; and (3) Visibly monitor, detect and respond to incidences of plagiarism.

"Culture of enquiry" (McGowan, 2005) or "Character education" (Kolbergh, 1976) are other ways to improve the situation. Strengthening the students' morals would automatically reduce his tendency to act immorally (Lathrop & Foss, 2000). Zamsky (2004) offered an alternative solution: self-proctored examinations not supervised by invigilators or lecturers in coordination with the students. However, before administering such examinations, the teachers should prepare the students with relevant educational activities and explanations climaxed by signing an honor agreement or an honor code.

Other suggestions to prevent cheating were given by Mc Lafferty and Foust (2004). Creating a good learning atmosphere by making clear to the students what plagiarism is, teaching them writing skills (through exercises) and knowledge that will obviate the need to cheat. Teachers should define assignments in such a way that it will reduce the possibility of cheating. Most students must be taught how to use reference articles and books and how to write the rest of a paper by themselves (Yari, 2004). According to that there is a need to reestablish academic writing courses (Kendy, 2004; East, 2006). The purpose of this course is to teach the students the principles of academic writing. It is better to prevent but if not, if a teacher suspects a paper which has been plagiarized he should use sites specializing in searching for plagiarists. There are some web sites that help reveal copied materials. For example, <http://www.find-same.com>, <http://www.plagiarism.com> and <http://www.howoriginal.com>. That information banks that specializing in searching for plagiarists take payment, but facilitates the searching process.

In order to deal with the issue, a national program for combating cheating must be designed. Each academic institution must act decisively and intensively. For a start, penalties for cheating or plagiarism should be severe enough to make the issue unrewarding. These penalties should deter students from even thinking about using fraudulent methods to succeed in their studies. Educational institutions must not stand by helplessly in the face of this situation, for example, Oxford University, has warned that its new students' habit of downloading and plagiarizing materials from the Internet is a problem threatening the value and credibility of the academic degrees it grants. Consequently, combating cheating was a fight for academic honesty and integrity, which could be achieved, among other things, through a dialogue with students (Hutton, 2006).

In our opinion, the way to deal with the problem of copying or plagiarism is to outline a code of ethics.

A Code of Ethics

The aim of a code of ethics is to direct the personal and professional behavior of individuals in the organization. In our case, the aim is to guide students and instructors to the set of standards and norms during the educational process.

A code of ethics defines the values and norms to which an organization or professional community commits. It describes a system of basic principles likely to determine the do's and don'ts of the community standards. It must be a clearly stated and written document, as detailed as possible and containing many comprehensive examples. It is the basis for creating an organizational environment heightening members' self-awareness of proper behavior (Yizraeli, 2000).

Professional ethics was the term applied to the rules and standards governing the conduct of the members of a profession; professional ethics was an orderly concept of the practical ideal of behavior in a professional framework defined by special human endeavors (Kasher, 2003). Therefore, the code of ethics should include two different parts: one about the personal behavior of each individual dealing with integrity and preventing copyright offences and the other one will deal with the professional behavior.

Drafting a code of ethics will create confidence in our institutions. Strict observance of ethical behavior can make a significant contribution to lawful behavior and prevention of unlawful behavior. However, it is not sufficient to just draw up a code of ethics. It is very important to apply it and assimilate it in the organization. If a college is considered an organization, then it is important to draft a code of ethics binding the students as well as the staff. According to this theoretical point of view, students must be thought to be aware to all the aspects of plagiarism. Professional ethics do not deal with questions of morality or customs, but with professional ways of behavior. While the basic values of a code of ethics are usually permanent and do not change very easily, because they outline the general ideal values of a profession, the students flow in and out colleges and universities are at a relatively rapid pace. It is clear that changes occur as a result of changes in the way of life and in the culture.

An additional method of instilling ethical thinking in professionals is through meetings and study days. There is a large variety of topics and complex points of view to offer at these meetings. Just as in the professional field there are so many excellent lecturers that cover so many different aspects of the field, so should it be in the field of ethical thinking. We believe that more attention should be paid to adopting ethical thinking in professional practice. The moral basis for ethical thinking arises in the formative years of the individual. We cannot teach the moral foundations of moral thinking. We cannot train people in moral thinking or build moral foundations in people who lack these foundations in their psychological tool box. If a beginner in his/her profession makes severe professional mistakes (in contrast to mistakes deriving from ignorance or

insufficient professional ability) at the very beginning of his/her career, this bodes no good for his/her developing into a successful professional in the future.

In addition, there is a need to foster knowledge and education in ethics. Specifically, there is a need to be familiar with rules of professional ethics, with the laws relevant to one's professional work and the potential conflicts that might arise between them. This should be done so that they can be integrated into one's work. They can certainly be taught in seminars, in-service training and other courses (Scheffler, 2003).

The Israeli Standards Institute has recently published a code of ethics named Standard No. 10000, February, 2007 (Ziclinsky, 2007) which is directed to encourage organizations to commit to social responsibility as well as to establish a common framework of guidelines, definitions, principles and methods of evaluation of ethical behavior. The code requires the committing organization to observe a minimal number of standard rules and to be well acquainted with the legal limits of its activities. It also details the guidelines and the steps the organization must follow in order to carry out its social responsibility. The orderly and efficient functioning of the organization requires mainly the following: (1) setting the framework; (2) the principles governing its social responsibility; (3) detailed guidelines for carrying out its commitment; (4) evaluation of its performance; (5) a reporting and documentation procedure; and (6) ensuring the quality of the system.

To sum up, academic institute could not allow itself to do nothing in order to reduce the opportunities for plagiarism and the students' motivation to plagiaries. Plagiarism should be perceived simply as real threat to academic education and its principles as well as the moral basis of society. If taking an action is urgent in all academic institutes, it is especially important in teacher-training colleges. Are cheating education students fit for teaching? If an education student attains good grades through cheating, has he/she acquired the necessary skills to be a teacher? How much time and energy has he/she invested in acquiring the knowledge in the matter he/she will be teaching at school? How can new teachers that have experienced and used cheating be expected to educate their pupils (our future generations) against cheating?

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