

ACADEMIC PLAGIARISM RULES AND ESL LEARNING — MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE CONCEPTS?¹

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I. Introduction.

My interest in the relationship between anti-plagiarism rules and ESL learning arises out of my own lack of training regarding plagiarism. As someone who has been out of the academic community for more than 30 years, I came to a course in English Language Teaching with only the vaguest notion of the meaning of plagiarism. Although I have practiced commercial law for three decades and am presumed to have a good command of the English language, I found myself struggling to comply with complicated citation conventions and to understand the meaning of such terms as "a distinctive name" and "a phrase", found in American University's Academic Integrity Code (Section II A). How much more difficult is this struggle for someone whose native language is not English, I wondered.

Academic ESL learners' ability to master the anti-plagiarism rules of the American academic community is critical to their ability to compete in American universities and in their chosen disciplines. The question as to whether or not such learners have the knowledge and background necessary to comply with these rules is a vital one, as is the question as to whether or not the rules should be modified to accommodate such learners' particular needs.

II. Methodology.

The research methodology used for this paper was primarily a review of the literature in the area. The literature review was supplemented by a written questionnaire on plagiarism that was completed by four ESL and academic writing professors at Georgetown University in Washington DC. Their responses, modified to remove name references and non-substantive remarks, are included in Appendix A.

III. Review of Literature and Survey

A. Plagiarism is a Western concept, which is not uniformly defined or accepted even in the United States.

What is plagiarism? According to one author (Myers, 1998), the underpinnings of this Western concept can be traced to: (1) the preservation of "Cherished notions of Individual Rights and Truth" (p. 3) and (2) the economic interests of publishers (p. 4).

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While the reasons for the existence of the concept may be straightforward, its exact meaning is not. The literature in this area is consistent on this point: there is no uniform definition of plagiarism (Howard, 2000, p. 1). Two authors cite the definition given by the American National Academy of Sciences: "using the ideas or words of another person without giving appropriate credit" (Hu, 2001, p. 52; Myers, 1998, p. 2). Another writer (Dillon, 1988, in Evans and Youmans, 2000, p. 52), contends that the essence of plagiarism "is grounded in having selected, ordered and uttered words... in some written document that can be checked and cited by others " (p. 52). Howard prefers to discard the term altogether and refer to its various sub-meanings, such as *fraud*, *insufficient citation*, and *excessive repetition* (2000, pp.3, 10).

It has been noted that there is a "lack of consensus among members of the university communities on issues of plagiarism and authorship" (Howard and Jamieson, 1995, in Myers, 1998, p. 8). University definitions of plagiarism often do not take into account the plagiarist's intentions, i.e. do not distinguish plagiarism from oversight or negligence (Howard, 2000, p. 2). A sampling of the policies of two universities in Washington DC supports these observations. American University's Academic Integrity Code (Section II A) states:

to plagiarize is to use the work, ideas, or words of someone else without attribution. Plagiarism may involve using someone else's wording without using quotation marks -- a distinctive name, a phrase, a sentence, or an entire passage or essay. It may also involve misrepresenting the sources that were used...

While the foregoing language does not address the issue of intent, other portions of the Code (Section .03 B1) give the faculty discretion in the event of student errors of judgment. The issue of intent is, however, specifically mentioned in Georgetown University's Honor Council Pamphlet, which reads in part (at p 3):

Plagiarism is the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another... Note that plagiarism can be said to have occurred without any affirmative showing that a student's use of another's work was intentional.

The concept of plagiarism, being grounded in the culture and regulations of the academic community, is not always coextensive with the legal regulations which govern the copying of intellectual property. One may plagiarize from documents which are in the public domain and, thus, not copyrightable (Myers, 1998, p. 2). Additionally, while under the above-definitions one can plagiarize ideas, ideas themselves are not copyrightable -- although they may be protected under other legal schemes, such as patent laws.

The concept of plagiarism is sometimes defined not by what it is, but by how to avoid it. Myers (1998, p. 6) makes reference to English writing textbooks and research manuals which use this technique and advise their readers how to choose between paraphrasing and quoting -- the advice being grounded in whether or not the cited author's words are deemed worthy of exact reproduction.

B. The various definitions of plagiarism have been criticized in the West as being unclear, non-uniform, not consistently applied, unrealistic and having little relevance in some disciplines.

Besides the obvious problems of enforcing a concept which is not consistently defined, Western writers have criticized the various plagiarism definitions on other grounds. If one is to be held to an enforceable standard, with the risk of severe consequences for violation of that standard, fairness demands that the standard be comprehensible. According to some commentators, many definitions of plagiarism do not meet this standard.

Hu (2001, p. 52), for example, queries: "How many words count as the phrasing of a source or a quotation?" and "How [are] private words, which require citation, ... to be differentiated from public words, which do not?" Another writer asks: "what may be considered general knowledge and written about as such?" and what are questions of intent? (Myers, 1998, p. 3). One commentator points to an acknowledged gray-area question as to whether legitimate paraphrasing can take place where the order of ideas in the original is maintained (Booth, Colomb and Williams, 1995 in Stanley, 2002, pp. 6-7). While Howard (2000, p.2) believes that oftentimes the definition of plagiarism does distinguish violations on the basis of intent, she criticizes the method of discerning that intent, which she contends is derived from examining only the text itself and not an actual inquiry into the circumstances of the author's intent.

Additional criticism includes failure to acknowledge the reality of collaboration in a great deal of professional and technical writing in America, particularly those involving a research group using computers (Myers, 1998, pp. 7, 9). Finally, at least one commentator believes that, given the differences in focus between writing literary text (the end of which is to create unique written words) and scientific texts, (the intent of which is to advance science), traditional notions of plagiarism do not make sense in the latter case (Hu, 2001, p. 58).

C. As a concept plagiarism is not well understood, and/or consistently practiced by ESL students and other ESL speakers.

While there is some indication that the Western concept of plagiarism is generally understood throughout the world (Evans and Youmans, 2000, pp. 51- 52), the majority of commentators point to cultural differences and varying national environments as support for their belief that many ESL students come to the study of English with little understanding of and/or respect for the academic rules of the game.

For example, Hu observes that "In many Asian, Middle Eastern, African, and First Nation cultures, ... knowledge is believed to belong to society as a whole, rather than an individual..." (Hu, 2001, p. 54). The same author goes on to describe the educational environment of students in China and Italy, where students studying certain disciplines (particularly science and history) are only required by their teachers to find the source answers and copy them (Hu, 2001, p. 54). Another author also mentions that Italian

students view copying "as both legitimate and showing respect for the original author" (Sherman, 1992, in Hyland, 2001, p. 375). Commentators on the situation in China point to a culture where plagiarism is acceptable (Xueqin, 2002, p. 2), and to one of its likely causes, i.e. that talent may not be seen as "private property", but rather that there is a "duty to give it to others" (Ross, 1993, in Myers, 1998, p. 8). To many Asian students "copy[ing] well-respected authors and leaders in their societies ...show[s] intelligence and good judgment" (Thompson, and Williams, 1995, pp. 27-28) and "Having their own perspective and being graded on how well they express it is an entirely, foreign concept..." (Stanley, 2002, p. 9).

The cultural values and practices taught in the classrooms of some countries may undermine students' acceptance of the cultural underpinnings of the Western anti-plagiarism rules. According to Hazlitt (1998, Chapter 8), students in Korea are encouraged to imitate rather than create; Japanese students are taught group solidarity and collaboration, while Mexican students are motivated to share homework and/or answers. It is not hard to see how being raised in such an educational system may impede an easy transition to acceptance of Western anti-plagiarism values and practices.

Unfortunately, many students of English as a Second Language come from countries where the problems go well beyond plagiarism. Their cultural background may involve not only copying in the classroom, but corruption throughout the educational system and in the country as a whole. A study of students from 15 countries by Evans and Youmans (2000, pp. 58-59) documents reports of some students who believe that in order to pass their examinations (which in some cases involved receiving the answers ahead of time), they had to have "good relationships" with their instructors. In order to attain such relationships, they claimed they were pressured to purchase private tutorial sessions with their instructors, give gifts and, in some cases, pay out right bribes. Xueqin reports that in China "almost anything can be copied or counterfeited if the price is right." He goes on to mention the blatant presence of diploma-sellers and test-takers on the streets outside of the University of Peking (Xueqin, 2002, p. 2).

Given the cultural baggage with which many students enter the ESL classroom, it should not come as a surprise that they will be puzzled, and in many cases frustrated, by the academic conventions of the West and may turn to imitation as a coping mechanism.

The Georgetown survey results verify the existence of plagiarism in the U.S. academic environment (all of the survey respondents reported incidences of plagiarism) and provide support for the idea that the U.S. view of plagiarism is confusing to students new to the academic environment. Professor A suggests that some students believe "copying is... a compliment" and do not understand its stigma within the U.S. academic culture (Appendix A, p.2). Professor C contends that in some cultures "memorizing and copying exactly [is] an important skill [and that] it is difficult for students to come to the U.S. and suddenly find that one of their well-developed writing skills is no longer valued, and is in fact off limits" (Appendix A, p. 4). This bewilderment is vividly described by one commentator's report of a student's reaction to learning about paraphrasing: "you want

me to take this piece of writing, written in perfect English and rewrite it full of grammatical and vocabulary errors?" (Stanley, 2002, p. 10).

D. Some aspects of plagiarism may be an inherent part of the ESL learning process.

Is plagiarism inevitable in an ESL learning environment or does working in a second language serve as a convenient excuse for the lazy, non-competitive, incompetent and those lacking self-confidence? Do ESL students deserve the apparent widespread mistrust that is frequently attached to their academic integrity? (Evans and Youmans, 2000, p.50).

Certainly, there is no shortage of reasons put forth to explain and/or rationalize plagiarism by Non-Native English speakers (NNS) or to justify arguments for modifications of the plagiarism rules. One notion is that students find plagiarism difficult to identify and they find it difficult to transform text so as to avoid plagiarism (Hyland, 2001, p. 376). It has been suggested that plagiarism is an academic coping strategy used by NNSs to meet academic expectations (Hyland, 2001, p. 380). Some argue that students are rewarded by graders of their work for using the right terminology and discourse style for the disciplines they are studying (Currie, 1998, in Hu, 2001, p. 58). Often, some say, it is hard for students to distinguish plagiarism from legitimate collaboration and typical U.S. instructional methods (Evans and Youmans, 2000, p. 55). Plagiarism is sometimes seen as a necessary competitive strategy for NNS scientists to get published in the West (Myers, 1998, pp. 5, 11, regarding language-based prejudice, particularly in Taiwan's scientific community). Plagiarism has also been justified as necessary to bring new ideas to a country where a particular discipline is undeveloped (Xueqin, 2002, pp. 3-4, regarding copying by a Chinese scholar of large sections of a book on anthropology written by a U.S. scholar).

If, as has been suggested, there is indeed rampant plagiarism among ESL students and other NNS speakers and writers, can this phenomenon be explained or justified by these types of excuses?

Of the literature considered for this paper, Hu (2001) provides the most extensive discourse on an alternate rationale for the apparent linkage between NNSs and plagiarism. The heart of his position is that there is an inherent conflict between traditional Western notions of plagiarism and the process of learning and writing in a non-native language:

In writing academic papers, especially source-based papers, English as a Second Language (ESL) students must use the words they have learned from texts or other sources. While such a practice appears to be natural for all students, and particularly for students who write in English as a second, additional, or foreign language, the traditional notion of plagiarism may forbid it. (Hu, 2001, p. 52).

Relying on his own studies and the writings of other commentators in the field, most importantly on Pennycook, Hu argues that the process of learning to write in English in a particular academic discipline, of necessity, inherently requires students

who think in L1... to use the others' words to express their ideas, or use the others' ideas, or both ideas and words, to display the knowledge they have just learned... (Hu, 2001, p. 53).

Hu describes the experience of NNS participants in his own study who continually searched for written materials to find language adequate to express their ideas (Hu, 2001, 54). He argues that "the issue is not whether one should use the others' words or ideas, but how " (p. 55). He ends his discussion of the nature of disciplinary writing by ESL students by concluding that it is not possible for ESL students studying a discipline to provide sources for all their written English words, as is expected of Native English Speakers (NES) students (Hu, 2001, p. 55). Howard goes further, suggesting that strict compliance with anti-plagiarism rules (i.e. even for NESs) is virtually impossible: "Contemporary theory rejects the possibility of original, uninfluenced writing and even the possibility of fully acknowledging one's sources" (Howard, 2000, p. 2).

Additionally, Hu contends that the nature of learning to write is a developmental process and goes on to discuss the concept of *patchwriting* -- which many consider a form of plagiarism -- as a useful learning strategy for ESL students as they move from developing second-language writing skills to mature writing (Hu, 2001, p. 57). He cites a definition by Howard (1993) of patchwriting as "copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym - substitutes" and argues that it "is a crucial technique in academic writing" for both NNSs and NESs, particularly when dealing with unfamiliar discourse, words and/or ideas (Hu, 2001, p. 57). Howard, herself, finds patchwriting valuable as a composing strategy. (Howard, 1993).

Myers also believes that patchwriting is often practiced in the context of unfamiliar discourse where the L2 writer does not have the large vocabulary of his native language to call on. She gives examples of Spanish scientists using the technique routinely when writing in English. For example, when writing introductions for their papers, they often began by gathering English articles on the topic and then combining expressions from the various English papers, while adding some words of their own (St. John, 1997 in Myers, 1998, pp. 8-9). She also reports the view of one of her Taiwanese ESL computer scientist students who justifies the use of a technique which involved imitating sentence structures from well-written English-language papers, based on competitive pressure to publish in the West (Myers, 1998, p. 11).

The results of the Georgetown teacher survey provide some support for the idea that patchwriting is a learning style or technique. Professor B believes it is "part of the process of learning to paraphrase and summarize" (Appendix A, p. 3). Professor C concedes, "patchwriting might be a learning style that would work for a small number of students ... " (Appendix A, p. 4). The survey also supports a link between benign (non-

fraud) forms of plagiarism and inexperience with academic writing (Appendix A, p. 3), as well as with lower level ESL learning (Appendix A, p. 5). The survey does not, however, agree with Hu's conclusion that reliance on plagiarism is either inevitable or acceptable for ESL students. On the contrary, while all the survey respondents believe the process of learning techniques to avoid plagiarism for NNSs (and one commentator includes NESs, as well) is a difficult one, all appear to believe that it is possible and necessary (Appendix A, pp. 2-6).

E. Writers on this topic are recommending changes in anti-plagiarism rules, particularly for ESL students, as well as better training in and clear communication of such rules.

A number of scholars working on the issue of plagiarism have suggested that the entire discourse surrounding the issues needs to be rethought. Do the current definitions of plagiarism make sense in the ESL classroom? Should different academic rules apply to NNSs? (Hu, 2001, p. 57). Does it make sense to apply the same rules of plagiarism to the writing of a novel versus a scientific research paper? (Hu, 2001, pp. 55, 58; Myers, 1998, p. 9). Is it meaningful to apply the same word to such disparate concepts as wholesale intentional theft versus inadvertent failure to use quotation marks? (Howard, 2000, p. 10).

Writers who see an inherent conflict between the anti-plagiarism rules and the learning of English as a Second Language conclude that what must change are the rules. Hu, for example, suggests making "a distinction... between a literature-review ... and 'original' writing" and allowing liberal language-reuse and copying in the former, but not in the latter. He gives the writing of the background section of a research paper as an example where copying would be permitted and the discussions/conclusion sections of a lab-based research, where it would not (Hu, 2001, p. 55).

He further suggests that ESL students, who are: "newcomers to the academic community... should not be strictly judged by the same standards that are routinely applied to full participants..." but that expectations as to their work would increase as they grow in maturity as academic writers in the English language (Hu, 2001, p. 57). Hu also advocates having text-specific standards of plagiarism. He sees a fundamental difference between literary texts, the whole point of which is unique writing, and disciplinary texts, particularly in the area of science, where the goal is development of the particular discipline (Hu, 2001, p. 58). Myers supports this distinction: "science is not organized to produce original works of literature... there is a difference between stealing science and 'stealing' syntax" (Myers, 1998, p. 9). She doubts that any harm is done in the re-use of words between scientists in various countries whose aim is to transmit factual information regarding their specialty, and she questions the practicability of full citations in the Internet age of scientific collaboration where hundreds of contributors may be working on a project (p. 9). Her recommendation for scientific texts is a relaxation of expectations for original writing and an acknowledgement of "intentions" of such writers (Myers, 1998, p. 9).

Howard, while agreeing that patchwriting "should be adjudicated differently than other forms of plagiarism" (Howard, 2000, p. 2), also advocates addressing the subcategories of plagiarism separately in terms of their consequences. With respect to fraud, she strongly believes that it should continue to be a major offense. However, with respect to the remaining offenses that are now treated as plagiarism, she states: "let's deal with everything else as issues of pedagogy, not as issues of morality. . . ". The penalty for an insufficiently cited paper, she suggests, should be a failing grade, while excessive repetition would merit a reduced grade and patchwriting would call for a required revision of the work (Howard 2000, p. 10).

Others recommend less drastic approaches to the perceived problem of plagiarism in the ESL classroom. All the faculty participants in the survey use preventative measures, which include avoidance practice (e.g. summarizing and paraphrasing, quoting and citation practice), careful selection of writing topics, discussion of consequences, and discussion of cultural differences in understanding the concept. Hyland (2001) suggests that plagiarism is too sensitive to be dealt with in written feedback and is best discussed orally, with a clear message and sensitivity to cultural differences (pp. 380-381). Silva (1993) believes that sensitivity to the special needs of L2 learners is a requisite characteristic of writing instructors (in Myers, 1998, p. 6). Evans and Youmans recommend education and mutual understanding reached through "interaction and discourse" between teachers and students (2000, p. 61). An example of the latter approach is exemplified in the questionnaire response from Professor C, whose practice is to show to her students an empathetic understanding of their bewilderment that skills highly prized in their native country, e. g. memorization and copying, are not valued in U.S. academia (Appendix A, p. 4). Other commentators' suggestions for dealing with plagiarism ranged from practice with the various plagiarism issues to giving unique assignments that are not "plagiarism friendly" and setting up special writing centers and tutors (Stanley, 2002, pp. 8, 10, 12, 15).

IV. Conclusions.

Reflection on the above-discussed literature review and survey results and my own experience working in a legal environment and the competitive world of business, along with my recent paper-writing experience as a relative new-comer to the world of academic writing, lead me to the following conclusions:

- (a) Plagiarism-avoidance techniques, such as summarizing and paraphrasing, appropriate quoting and citation, can be taught. However, learning such techniques is difficult for both NESs and NNSs and likely more difficult for NNSs--particularly those below the advanced level of second language learning.
- (b) The value of current all-encompassing anti-plagiarism rules seems questionable, particularly when applied to literature-review projects, as opposed to projects requiring original writing. Serious thought should be given by the academic community to re-defining and separating the various offenses currently covered by the term.

- (c) NNSs should be required to perform under the same rules as NESs. If the former are going to compete with the latter, the competitive rules need to be the same. However, academic communities should take into account the special needs of NNSs and specifically design anti-plagiarism training modules to meet such needs.
- (d) Actual intent should be taken into consideration in enforcing all anti-plagiarism rules. No one's career or reputation, regardless of their NNS or NES status, should be ruined by an inadvertent mistake.

More research needs to be done into the relationship between plagiarism and NNSs to determine if there are disproportionate or widespread violations of the anti-plagiarism rules by this group, and if so, the causes and potential solutions.

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Plagiarism Questionnaire

1. In your teaching experience, have you had problems with plagiarism? If so, please describe the nature of the problem, the level and type of class in which it was encountered, the cultural background of the student[s] involved and how you addressed the issue.

2. Have you dealt with plagiarism on a preventative basis in any of your classes? If yes, again please give details on the method you used and if it was successful.

3. In your view, is it realistic to expect ESL students to avoid plagiarism, at least in the more benign (non-fraud) forms, such as patchwriting or insufficient citations? Is it possible, in your view, that patchwriting is an innate part of the process of learning a second language?

4. Please add any other comments or thoughts that you have on this issue.

Note: A slight variation of the above questions were piloted with Professor A. After receiving her response the questions were refined and the modified version shown above were distributed to the other professors. The changes were clarifying ones.

Response of Professor A

Plagiarism

1. Yes, I have had problems with plagiarism. The class that comes to mind was an intermediate reading and writing class (post secondary academic setting). I assigned an essay on alternative medicine (something we had been reading about) and students set about doing research on the Internet. One student handed in a paper that was “too good.” I checked some web-sites related to the topic and found her source. The material had been copied almost word for word. I was a fairly new writing teacher at the time and my first instinct was to give the student a failing grade. Luckily, I decided to seek the counsel of a more experienced writing teacher. She explained that in some cultures copying is quite common and even considered a compliment! The teacher advised that I discuss plagiarism with the class---- especially the acceptable norms (quotations, paraphrasing, citations, etc.). I also spoke individually with the student and had her do the assignment again (I returned the paper without a grade---no penalty).
2. Since that time, I have learned to deal with the issue “up front.” I now review what is acceptable and in some classes (depending on the level), we practice how to quote, paraphrase, cite, etc. as part of the course. I do not take for granted that students are familiar with the concept of plagiarism and its stigma in our culture.
3. I believe that students can learn to use citations and paraphrase, but it must be taught and practiced. They often do not have confidence in their own writing, so plagiarism is tempting. However, in the process writing model we make them aware that content and organization are more important than “perfect writing.”

Note: Professor A orally informed me that the student involved in the above description was from Thailand.

Response of Professor B

2. Yes, in both native speaker research writing and non-native speaker research writing I have warned of the seriousness of plagiarism (using the university's stated position), alerted students to the different attitudes of different cultures on the topic, and shown examples of benign plagiarism, acknowledging that in my experience student plagiarism was not intended to be fraudulent---but that the consequences could, nevertheless, be severe.

1. Yes, I have often encountered problems with plagiarism. In spite of my efforts to prevent it, most students (both native and non-native) who are inexperienced in writing academic research papers succumb to some form of benign plagiarism early in the semester, but most catch on after extensive feedback (does that mean success????). However, a few students have not. The most dramatic two in my memory are a Southeast Asian female and an Arabic male in the required university freshman comp course; one case occurred at a public university in Colorado in freshman comp where native and non-native students attend the same class; the other occurred at a private university in DC where the freshman comp course consisted of non-natives only. In both cases, in spite of repeated warnings (verbal and written), and in spite of my refusal to accept the papers for a grade, the plagiarism persisted so that in both cases I turned them over to the academic heads for discipline. Of course, news of that sort travels fast, and the result was renewed efforts on the part of the other students.

In my view, it is not only realistic, but necessary (albeit very difficult) to expect that ESL students will avoid benign plagiarism---just as we must expect it of native speakers. Is it an innate part of the process of learning a second language? I doubt that it is any more a part of learning a second language than it is a part of learning a new form of rhetoric in a first language. Native speaker students depend on models for their writing just as NNSs do; the weaker the NS writer, the greater the dependency. Learning to paraphrase and summarize fairly and accurately is not easy for most native speakers. I think you might find that patchwriting is prevalent in classes other than ESL. So ...if the question were: is patchwriting an innate part of the process of learning to paraphrase and summarize.....well then my answer would be yes, it's a natural crutch, and is to be expected in the first attempts, but not to be accepted in the final product.

PS What you didn't ask but I will say is "yes, I think that the ethics of various cultures (almost all relative) and the extent to which they "buy into" Western ethics, determine, to a large extent, how students respond to the Western notion of plagiarism."

Response of Professor C

1. I've had more problems with classes below the advanced level - intermediate and high intermediate. I think there are several reasons for this: 1. Those lower-level students feel less able to write in their own words, but also 2. With advanced-level students, my assignments are more likely to involve using outside sources. For this reason, I anticipate the possibility of plagiarism and talk about it before sending them off to do the assignment.

The cases of plagiarism that I remember involved Arabic speakers copying directly off the Internet (in a reading/writing class). I searched for the material and found the exact passage online.

2. With those cases and in all my classes, I try to stress to students, especially students from the Middle East and Asia, that I know that, in their past education, memorizing and copying exactly was an important skill. It is difficult for students to come to the U.S. and suddenly find that one of their well-developed writing skills is no longer valued, and is in fact off limits. But, they need to learn new writing skills for writing in English.

Another tack I take is to share with them some famous/published examples of plagiarism and talk about how severe the consequences were. This usually impresses them greatly.

In terms of citations, I think it is important in students' understanding of U.S. culture to learn about our cultural value of ideas (and not just words) "belonging" to a person. Seeing it as a cultural difference helps students a) see the need for citations and b) see more about how Americans think.

3. Yes, I think it is realistic to expect ESL students to avoid plagiarism. Patchwriting might be a learning style that would work for a small number of students, but the majority would never go beyond the patchwriting if they are not pushed to paraphrase.

Response of Professor D

First of all, the students I have worked with include high school and middle school students learning English as a Foreign Language in Eastern Europe, and university -level students here in the U.S. studying English in order to enter an American University, to improve their professional skills, or to live or work in the U.S. Since the bulk of my experience has been with those who have an academic focus, I'll base my comments on students working to begin full-time university studies.

1. + 2. Yes, I have encountered problems with various forms of plagiarism -- copying ideas directly from sources without citation, inadequately paraphrasing information from sources, having someone else write a paper, having someone else correct mistakes in an assignment, etc. I can say that this hasn't been a large problem, but I would say that it is more of an issue when students are at a lower level and have less language to work with, or at a transitory stage when they are just learning skills like summarizing and paraphrasing.

Students at higher levels usually have enough vocabulary and grammar structure choices at their disposal to make a stronger attempt at producing work in their own way, using their "own words." I think plagiarism issues can come up at these levels if students don't understand what is expected of them by the academic system, or if they are at a loss in handling the content itself. I think it is very important to carefully choose the content that the students will be working with, particularly on assignments that will require them to utilize skills like synthesizing information, comparing/contrasting, etc. and to reward their efforts to express ideas in their own ways, even if they are awkward at first.

In terms of preventing plagiarism, particularly at the higher levels, I think it is important to discuss what the American educational system is like and address the responsibilities of students. I often start with discussions about what my students' university systems are like and ask them to give examples of typical tasks that they have to complete. We talk about academic honesty codes and go over the university policies, and we discuss the differences between graduate and undergraduate work (especially when I have a mix of both in my class). We look at very specific examples of what is considered plagiarism, which is key. We also practice skills like note taking in reading texts and articles and paraphrasing. It's more difficult to help students to become self-editors, but by having them routinely check for focus grammar points or word choice can help increase their ability to check their work on their own.

3. I think it is natural for low-level or inexperienced learners to rely on the more benign forms of plagiarism, mostly in the beginning of their learning experiences. Again, it is critical that the task is appropriate. I typically ask my low-level students to write or talk about topics that are more familiar to them for certain assignments (e.g. writing an essay, doing a short presentation in front of the class), and introduce new topics or themes when the task is less demanding.

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Helping them build confidence in their own language skills over time is a big part of guiding them in understanding what they must do in order to succeed in the university system. If we don't raise the awareness of the students who will be going on to study in an academic program and give them (particularly higher-level students) the tools to produce their own work, then I think we are not adequately preparing them for what they will be required to do.