

Cultural Values, Plagiarism, and Fairness: When Plagiarism Gets in the Way of Learning

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The dramatic increase in the number of overseas students studying in the United Kingdom and other Western countries has required academics to reevaluate many aspects of their own, and their institutions', practices. This article considers differing cultural values among overseas students toward plagiarism and the implications this may have for postgraduate education in a Western context. Based on focus-group interviews, questionnaires, and informal discussions, we report the views of plagiarism among students in 2 postgraduate management programs, both of which had a high constituency of overseas students. We show that plagiarist practices are often the outcome of many complex and culturally situated influences. We suggest that educators need to appreciate these differing cultural assumptions if they are to act in an ethical manner when responding to issues of plagiarism among international students.

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The issue of academic integrity within higher education has received considerable attention in the literature over recent years (Carroll & Appleton, 2001; Deckert, 1993; Dryden, 1999; Harris, 2001; Howard, 1993, 1995; Kolich, 1983; Lathrop, 2000; Martin, 1994; Myers, 1998; Pennycook, 1996; Scollon, 1995; Sherman, 1992). Academic integrity refers to honesty and transparency in the ways in which knowledge is acquired and transmitted (The Center for Academic Integrity, Duke University, 2004). Honesty is premised on high levels of trust between staff and students and on ensuring that all students are treated fairly. Further, academic in-

tegrity requires that all writers acknowledge the work of others and that action be taken if there is any wrongdoing (Drinan, 1999). Examples of compromising academic integrity include copying from others during exams, taking crib sheets into exams, taking part in unpermitted collaboration in course work, submitting the same piece of course work more than once, and including other people's words in a course work assessment without marking them as being such. This last example of academic dishonesty in course work is termed *plagiarism* and is the focus of this article. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (1995), *to plagiarise* is "to take and use another person's ideas, writing, or inventions as their own" (p. 1043). However, we suggest that plagiarism should not always be considered to be synonymous with cheating (Hunt, 2003).

Much of the literature on academic integrity, coupled with the considerable anecdotal evidence among colleagues in our own and other universities, suggests that plagiarism is on the increase. There have been many articles that seek to identify the extent of plagiarism and understand why students become plagiarists. In relation to the extent, O'Connor (2003) described one recent Australian study—conducted by Caval in 2002 on behalf of the Victoria Vice Chancellors Committee—that spanned 20 subjects and six universities. This saw 1,925 essays being submitted to Turnitin, an electronic detection service, and found that 14% of essays "contained unacceptable levels of unattributed materials." The report also highlighted that only a small amount are ever detected electronically, as Turnitin does not cover most books, journals, and paper mills (O'Connor, 2003). *Paper mills* are Web sites that provide completed essays for a charge or in exchange for another essay.

In relation to the literature that has considered why students plagiarize, Carroll (2002) suggested that as most students are unsure what plagiarism is, they do not plagiarize with the intention to deceive. Furthermore, Angelil-Carter (2000) claimed that there also is a lack of clarity across a university about what constitutes plagiarism and a discrepancy in the way plagiarism is detected and enforced (Biggs, 1994; Ryan, 2000; Scollon, 1995). Others have highlighted that due to the growing staff–student ratio, staff have less time to talk through issues regarding writing practices, which has contributed to the rise in the number of cases of plagiarism (Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999; O'Donoghue, 1996). Carroll (2002) also claimed that the move from examination to course work and project-based assessment has resulted not just in over-assessment but also in students being under constant pressure to attain high marks. Others have suggested that poor time management by students and the practice of staff setting the same submission dates for a number of different pieces of course work are major contributing factors (Bamford, Marr, Pheiffer, & Weber-Newth, 2002; Errey, 2002; Lim & See, 2001). Finally, and perhaps as a consequence of many of the previously described situations, when students are dissatisfied with a course, their interest and work rate decrease, which may contribute to plagiarism.

Although much of this literature has shed considerable light on why students plagiarize, it is rooted in Western contexts and thus does not specifically address the theme of this article: examining the differing cultural attitudes and understandings of plagiarism among overseas postgraduate students undertaking management-related programs. This is perhaps surprising because most Western countries, especially those whose national language is English, have witnessed a prolific increase in the number of overseas students. In relation to the United Kingdom, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of overseas students studying at British universities. Between 1996–1997 and 2002–2003, the number of overseas students attending higher education institutions in the United Kingdom rose by 39% (Churches Commission for International Students, 2002). Significantly for us, much of this increase is in the form of students from non-European Union countries.

To explain why students from different cultures plagiarize when studying abroad, several authors have said that for many students from the East, the approach to learning in the West is contrary to their experiences in their own country. For example, in China and other Asian countries, learning and assessment typically focus on the content of a textbook. A consequence of this is that when Chinese and Asian students enter Western higher education, it is especially difficult for them to be critical about an author and to state their own opinions. As Pennycook (1996) showed, for Chinese students, using another author's words is a form of respect, and it is hard for these students to change this cultural practice. Other commentators have highlighted how when English is a student's second language, he or she is placed under pressure by the increased amount of time it takes for him or her to write. Fear of failure, especially when students are funded by their family (often extended), their government, or a particular company, also places considerable pressure on students to do well (O'Donoghue, 1996; also see Bond, 1986). Furthermore, some commentators have found that overseas students may feel that they cannot improve on what is already written and prefer to use the original text rather than their own (Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999; Biggs, 1994; Fox, 1994). Furthermore, some overseas students are said to plagiarize, both intentionally and unintentionally, due to their lack of experience in essay writing, as many Eastern countries still rely exclusively on examinations (Ashworth et al., 1997; Carroll & Appleton, 2001).

Our research extends this literature by examining the different cultural understandings that students of different nationalities, studying in two UK management-related postgraduate programs, have of plagiarism. Based on this, we consider the implications this raises for postgraduate management education. The following section outlines the methodology that underpinned this study. Section three reviews the students' past practices and judgments pertaining to academic integrity. Following this we discuss some of the key analytical themes arising from our empirical work. The final section presents some brief conclusions. Before con-

tinuing, a word or two about terminology might be appropriate. In the United Kingdom the term *assessment* is used for all parts of work that contribute to the final grade awarded to the student for a course. Assessment normally consists of course work and examinations. The term *course work* is used for work that is normally done at home, such as essays (or term papers), reports, literature reviews, and so forth; the term *examinations* normally refers to examination papers completed under supervised examination conditions. Plagiarism is an issue in course work rather than in examinations.

METHOD

Our research was conducted primarily with a cohort of master of science (MSc) students studying two different postgraduate programs at Lancaster University Management School, one a specialist master's degree program pertaining to the interrelation between technology and organizations and the other a general management program. Although this research was conducted after the students had been in the United Kingdom for about 5 months, our questions focused exclusively on the students' past practices and judgments on various manifestations of academic malpractice as encountered at their universities in their home countries. The first, a master of science (MSc) in information technology, management, and organizational change (ITMOC), involved 46 students of a diverse range of nationalities, including students from India, Pakistan, China, Indonesia, Thailand, Greece, France, Ukraine, Germany, Brazil, Iceland, Columbia, and the United Kingdom. The general management program, the MSc management program, involved approximately 80 students with the same diversity of backgrounds.

As Table 1 indicates, we conducted focus-group interviews and distributed questionnaires to the MSc ITMOC students, whereas with the MSc management students we primarily distributed questionnaires. Supplementing this was considerable informal discussion with ITMOC students, as explained later.

Our questionnaire was based on a well known survey (McCabe & Trevino, 1993) developed by Donald McCabe, professor of organization and management

TABLE 1
Number of Responses to Questionnaires and Interviews

<i>Program</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Number in Program</i>	<i>Number of Responses/ Focus Group Interviews</i>
Information technology, management, and organizational change	Questionnaires	46	46
	Focus groups		22
Management	Questionnaires	80	57
	Focus groups		1

at Rutgers University and former president of the Center for Academic Integrity at Duke University. We included an extra section and modified some of the terminology to make it more comprehensible for those not from the United States. For both programs, as Table 1 highlights, we had an extremely high response rate to the questionnaire. This was primarily due to our handing the questionnaires out during a scheduled core lecture session. We also explained the importance of their completing the questionnaire honestly. One of us made himself available for questions, and the other stood beside the exit to collect the surveys, making it difficult for students to leave the room without handing in a questionnaire. We also left a copy in their mailboxes for those ITMOC students who were not at the lecture and provided a box in their program base-room for deposit. The questionnaires were anonymous (unless there was only one person from a particular country).

The questionnaire data were entered into a spreadsheet. We then analyzed the resulting tables and graphs, identifying differences and inconsistencies between the national groupings. However, although the sample was not large enough for it to form the basis of any predictive claims, it did provide us with indicative insights into the variations of academic malpractice within and between the different groups that we then pursued in detail in the focus-group discussions.

The focus-group discussions were highly successful in relation to the ITMOC program, partly because there was quite a small core of teaching staff associated with the program. Further, we make use of small tutorial groups, so we tend to know the students well. This communal ethos assisted in encouraging a significant number of students to attend the focus groups. The focus-group interviews lasted approximately 45 and 60 min each and were organized on the basis of national or regional origin. They were tape-recorded, and the notes were transcribed afterward. This resulted in five groupings: a UK group, a Chinese group, an Asian (other) group, a Greek group, and a group from the rest of the world (Table 2 indicates the distribution per nationality group for each of the programs). As with the questionnaires, our focus-group discussion sought to understand the students' experiences prior to coming to Lancaster, although the conversation inevitably became referential to their experiences of plagiarism since arriving in the United Kingdom. The interview transcripts were then coded and analyzed through Nudist, Sage's qualitative data-analysis software. With regard to the MSc management

TABLE 2
Numbers of Students From the Different National Groupings
in Each Postgraduate Program

<i>Program</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>Greek</i>	<i>British</i>
Information technology, management, and organizational change	5	9	17	10
Management	12	35	10	15

program, we organized the focus groups on similar lines. However, unfortunately, only one student, from China, attended any of the focus groups, and thus for this program our data has to rely on that obtained from the questionnaires. Unlike the ITMOC program, neither of us has any contact with this postgraduate program in either a teaching or an administrative capacity, which we believe could have been partly responsible for the negligible turnout for this optional session.

The questionnaires and the focus groups were supplemented by considerable discussion with students during a study-skills module we convened and taught together, as well as at the program director's weekly meeting. Although discussions in such circumstances were not recorded systematically, this did help us understand the differing cultural attitudes toward plagiarism in the program prior to, during, and after the data collection. As the study was primarily qualitative, we did not attempt to perform detailed statistical analysis of the quantitative data. The quantitative data served merely as a starting point for the qualitative work rather than as an attempt to demonstrate any particular hypothesis.

STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARD ISSUES OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

This section introduces the issues that emerged in the focus groups and questionnaires. Again, due to the small sample, the results of the questionnaire were indicative rather than predictive and formed the basis for the qualitative questions that we asked during the focus-group interviews. The first section focuses specifically on the issues that arose with regard to plagiarism and the students' experiences of course work assessment at their previous universities. The second section considers the experiences of malpractice during examinations at the students' previous universities. As most international students had limited or no experience of course work assessment in their own country, looking at their views and experiences of cheating during examinations provides valuable insight into the values surrounding academic malpractice in their country of origin. The final section examines the pressures to gain good marks that some students encountered.

Academic Integrity in Course Work

How much copying is plagiarism? All the UK students considered copying a limited amount of text without referencing the sources to be tolerable. They suggested that it was generally acceptable to copy word for word what they termed "very general and background information," such as company information or general facts and figures, without referencing it. Further, UK students suggested that if some text was written more eloquently than they felt they were able to do themselves, and they understood it, then it was acceptable for them to copy it. In this

sense it was about English proficiency, rather than content, even though English was these students' first language.

When asked what they considered substantial plagiarism in the context of a 3,000-word essay, the UK students' responses ranged from its being more than two sentences to its being a whole paragraph, whereas one student said he would not try to quantify it, but more generally it could be considered substantial "at the point when the text they were copying began controlling what they were writing." However, several of the other UK students responded vehemently to this by stating that if students were consciously copying extensive amounts of material, this was substantial plagiarism. Table 3 highlights the mixed response UK students provided in relation to whether they had copied material word for word from any source and turned it in as their own and whether or not they considered copying to be serious. It indicates that 19% of UK students admitted to doing this once or more, while 25% of UK students saw this as not being cheating or at least being trivial. When asked if copying material was done by combining one or two sentences (patching) from the work of different authors, the students said this was a typical approach they adopted when plagiarizing course work.

In relation to non-UK students, surprisingly, most students explained that they had little experience of course work in their undergraduate education and thus were not able to comment extensively on the issue of plagiarism in course work. Typically, the only form of course work non-UK students had completed was group project papers or business reports. In China and Greece, it was estimated

TABLE 3
Percentages of the Extent and Judgment of Copying Text Word
for Word Without Citing the Source

<i>Behavior/Opinion</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>Greek</i>	<i>British</i>
Copied a paragraph or more word for word once or more	20	40	21	19
Never copied a paragraph or more word for word	80	60	79	81
Judge such copying as not cheating or trivial cheating	40	30	7	25
Judge such copying as somewhat or very serious	60	70	93	75
Copied a few sentences word for word once or more	75	56	57	56
Never copied a few sentences word for word	25	44	43	44
Judge such copying as not cheating or trivial cheating	100	60	64	63
Judge such copying as somewhat or very serious	0	40	36	38

that students write only one essay and perhaps a couple of reports during their undergraduate education. Due to this lack of experience in undertaking course work, students naturally started to refer to their experiences since arriving in the United Kingdom. One Greek student suggested that copying a few words, as long as it did not entail copying a concept or an idea, was acceptable. Another Greek student claimed that it was important only when it became a significant amount—after some discussion, *significant* was considered to be a paragraph or more. Further, the students claimed that referencing was not as rigorous in their own countries as it is in the United Kingdom, partly because courses often require students to consult only one textbook.

Due to the non-UK students' limited exposure to course work, it is more revealing to look at how serious they judge cheating in course work to be than to look at how they judge their previous writing and assessment practices. As Table 3 indicates, all the different student groups judged copying a few sentences word for word without referencing them as being only a trivial form of cheating at best. In relation to previous practices, 56% of UK students admitted to having done this once or more, while 63% of UK students judged this as being trivial or not cheating at all. This supports the view that a small amount of plagiarism is considered by UK students to be acceptable. In relation to the judgment of non-UK students, 100% of Asian students viewed this as being only trivial cheating. In the other national groups, approximately two thirds of the students saw copying a few sentences of material without referencing them as not cheating or as a trivial form of cheating. This indicates not only that across all cultures is copying several sentences likely to be endemic in course work (or term paper) submissions but also that, regardless of background, students do not tend to judge it as an unacceptable practice.

Unintentional plagiarism in course work. Several UK students mentioned that plagiarism may be unintentional. They attributed this to the way they make notes while doing research for their essays, explaining that in the process of researching and drafting an essay, they collect many electronic and nonelectronic references, keep several windows open simultaneously, and copy-and-paste among them. They recognized that this could be dangerous, as it may result in their losing track of the different sources or make it extremely tempting to pass off others' work as their own. One UK student suggested that not fully referencing the resulting patchwork could come about due to one's own poor time management, saying that "most of the cases arise when students are short of time." In this sense, UK students viewed some form of plagiarism as being unintentional. Further, based on their experiences with course work since arriving in Lancaster, many non-UK students echoed these points.

Learning and plagiarism. One surprising view that emerged in both the UK and Greek focus groups was that plagiarism is perceived as being inextricably

interlinked with a student's development. For example, a UK student commented that when students plagiarize (well), it often still requires an understanding of the topic, and thus exhibits a degree of learning, saying, "If you take all the sentences/ paragraphs from other authors—then you have to do the work to put it together—you have learned and need a certain understanding of the topic, it is not just blatant copying." At a subsequent focus group, several Greek students supported this, claiming that being able to generate an argument in a course work assessment, even if some of it was plagiarized from different sources (patching), demonstrated a good level of learning.

English proficiency and plagiarism. Based on their insights gained since arriving in Lancaster, several Greek students said that when English is not one's first language, "taking a bit here and there helps with getting meaning across. Paraphrasing, if you are not a native speaker, is difficult." Others suggested that there are only so many ways that issues could be written. As one Greek student commented, "All the ways for saying something have already been said, and thus we have to use the same words. But this is about words and not concepts." The latter point reinforces the comment about how one could demonstrate a degree of learning even if some of the words were copied.

Collaboration and course work. In relation to the essay-writing practice of students (see Table 4), between 50% and 75% of the non-UK students judged re-

TABLE 4
Percentages of the Extent and Judgment of Student
Collaboration in Course Work

<i>Behavior/Opinion</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>Greek</i>	<i>British</i>
Received substantial, unpermitted help on an assignment once or more	25	40	50	31
Never received substantial, unpermitted help on an assignment	75	60	50	69
Judge such unpermitted help as not being cheating or only trivial cheating	75	50	50	38
Judge such unpermitted help as being somewhat or very serious cheating	25	50	50	63
Have written or provided a paper for another student once or more	60	40	36	6
Have never written or provided a paper for another student	40	60	64	94
Judge such collaboration as not being cheating or only trivial cheating	80	40	29	13
Judge such collaboration as being somewhat or very serious cheating	20	60	71	88

ceiving unpermitted help from fellow students to be trivial, whereas only 38% of UK students viewed this as trivial.

Table 4 highlights how 6% of UK students admitted to providing a course work paper for another student. Interestingly, the UK students judged writing a paper for another student as being more trivial than their practice suggested. However, this was still much lower (13%) than any of the other national groups. Further, Table 4 shows that 80% of Asian students consider writing a paper for another student to be trivial or not cheating, whereas 60% admitted to having written or provided a paper for another student. For the Chinese and Greek groups, 40% and 36%, respectively, admitted to having written a paper for another student, whereas 40% and 29%, respectively, viewed this to be only minor cheating.

Academic Integrity in Examinations

This section considers the issues raised by students with regard to academic integrity during exams. Due to the limited course work experience that non-UK students have in their own countries, examining the extent of examination-based malpractice committed by students in their previous university, and their judgment as to its seriousness, can provide further useful insight into how academic integrity is viewed by different national groups.

Exams as memory tests. In all the countries represented other than the United Kingdom, most students viewed exams as being purely memory tests. For example, an Indian student mentioned that in his undergraduate examinations, more marks were awarded when students simply reproduced lecture notes or the course textbook verbatim than when they paraphrased them. Indeed, he said that the exam questions “will ask us to repeat definitions word-for-word from the textbook.” He added that they are not required to reference quotes or definitions in exams, as it is assumed that they are derived directly from the lecture notes or the textbook. Similarly, the Chinese students explained that there was one book for each course and exams were designed to allow students to demonstrate how well they had memorized the book. Further, Chinese students complained that the book they were required to memorize was often outdated. This alienation from the examination system in China was evident in the fact that 30% of students admitted to using unpermitted crib sheets (unpermitted notes) during exams.

The Greek students were particularly animated regarding the futility of the examination processes. They explained that often during their undergraduate education they were required to memorize many pages of text word for word or to memorize a multitude of different mathematical formulas. They all agreed that this was ridiculous, as one Greek student explained: “The point is that it is about knowing how to use them not memorize them.” Indeed, he claimed that due to the emphasis on memorizing material, all Greek students were forced into a position in which

they “had to cheat.” This lack of faith in examinations was evident in the fact that 43% of Greek students admitted to using unpermitted crib notes during an exam, whereas none of the UK or Asian students admitted to using them.

Reciprocity and exams. Unpermitted collaboration during examinations was seen by all national groupings except the UK to have taken place in their previous institutions and also was judged by many as not being serious. The survey indicated that 80% of Asian students and 20% of Chinese students admitted to this form of copying, and significantly, 80% of Asian students and 30% of Chinese students judged this to be trivial or not cheating. Greek students mentioned that they would frequently provide unpermitted help to each other during exams, as was graphically explained by one Greek student: “I have submitted exam papers for others, swapped exam papers while writing it. It is perfectly logical as we do not care if the people are learning anything or not, they don’t care they just want to pass.” Table 5 also highlights that 36% of Greek students admitted they had copied during an exam, even though 79% of them thought it was somewhat or very serious.

Table 5 casts a different light on the issue of assisting others to cheat during an exam. It shows that 80% of the Asian group admitted to having helped someone else cheat once or more, which although high, is consistent with their responses concerning copying from another student during a test. However, it is important to note that twice as many Chinese and Greek students admitted to helping someone

TABLE 5
Percentages of the Extent of Reciprocity and the Judgment of Reciprocity
in Relation to Cheating on Exams

<i>Behavior/Opinion</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>Greek</i>	<i>British</i>
Copied from another student during a test with his or her knowledge once or more	80	20	36	0
Never copied from another student during a test with his or her knowledge	20	80	64	100
Judge such copying as being not cheating or only trivial cheating	80	30	21	6
Judge such copying as being somewhat or very serious cheating	20	70	79	94
Helped someone else cheat on a test or exam once or more	80	40	79	0
Never helped someone else cheat on a test or exam	20	60	21	100
Judge such help as being not or only trivial cheating	60	50	50	6
Judge such help as being somewhat or very serious cheating	40	50	50	94

else cheat once, even though 50% of them judged it to be a serious form of cheating. In addition to attributing this collaboration to exams' merely requiring regurgitation, non-UK students attributed it to cultural norms of reciprocity, as a Greek student explained: "In general, if you help, you will get help when you need it." Indeed, the main concern and fear among Greek and Asian students was not getting caught but that those who copied did not get as high a mark as the person they copied from. For example, one Thai student mentioned, "There is nothing wrong with helping friends, as long as they do not get as high a mark." A Greek student also admitted to making one or two deliberate mistakes to ensure that the copying student did not get a higher mark. Both the questionnaire and focus-group data indicated that UK students viewed collaboration of any form during exams as taboo.

Trust and exams. One of the most shocking insights that emerged from the empirical research arose in the Greek focus group. One Greek student suggested that a further condition that forced them to cheat derived from their lack of trust in Greek academics to treat all students equally, saying, "Sometimes I cheat because you know other people do so, other people do so with the professor's knowledge, sometimes the professor gives the exam paper to students before the exam. Students have certain connections with professors. Everybody knows that this happens." All 12 Greek students who attended the focus groups agreed with this. Another Greek student continued this theme and provided further insight, saying:

When you see that people are taking degrees without doing anything—the youths of political parties have a say in the promotion of professors. They tell professors who they should pass. It leaves people thinking, why should I bother to study and memorize things that I do not need afterwards when these things are going on around you? Why should I try not to cheat when even the professors are cheating behind my back? The competition was unfair from the start; in my institution there were 600 and about 50 of them took a degree without even opening a book.

When asked about this, other national groups they said this did not occur, except perhaps in the case of a professor's favorite student or a family connection. In general they trusted the equity of their professors' marking.

Motivations for cheating. Marks and fear of failure were seen by all respondents, but especially Asian and Chinese students, to be the main pressure behind cheating. In Asia, China, and Greece, high marks were seen as important in terms of finding a good job, but especially important for students planning to undertake an overseas postgraduate program, which may lead to cheating. One Greek student explained that they are allowed to repeat a year and resit an exam as many times as they wish, leading Greek students to write on an exam paper "Don't mark it if it

does not get 8 or higher,” indicating the importance for some of gaining a high mark. Those who would not cheat felt it unfair that they had to work even harder to get higher legitimate marks than those students who cheated. In their view, not cheating came at a substantial cost for them.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Many overseas students have a significantly different understanding of higher education than that of UK students. This section examines some key themes pertaining to cultural differences among overseas students as a basis for developing a more sensitive and morally responsive understanding of plagiarism. The issues raised are likely to be of significance for other Western higher education contexts.

Memorization and the Borrowing of Words

Our study and the literature highlighted that many overseas students, on arriving at UK universities, are more familiar with a “textbook based” teaching approach than one that requires them to consult a number of sources. In Asian, Chinese, and Greek universities, lectures often systematically cover the material in the textbook, and the exam requires students to demonstrate that they can recall all relevant material from one textbook and their lecture notes—often verbatim. Often there is minimal or no interpretation or commentary expected from the student. Through his research in China, Pennycook (1996) argued that this form of learning should not be frowned on but should be viewed as different and deeply embedded in cultural and linguistic practices, most notably with regard to paraphrasing. He suggested that the Chinese view of language is quite different from ours:

In this [view of language] primacy is accorded to language and not to the “real” world, notions such as metaphor, which suggests that some word “stands for” something else, become quite different because reality is in the language and not in the world. (p. 221)

Thus, altering the exact expression of something through paraphrasing, for example, *is*, in this view of language, the same as altering the reality of the world itself. Though our data did not represent this point as eloquently as Pennycook, several Chinese students mentioned that memorizing texts has been the focus of their learning experience throughout all levels of education. Indeed, although we cannot apply this culturally embedded analysis to the students from across the world, students from the rest of Asia and Greece reinforced this emphasis on memorization and on the assumed authority of the author of the prescribed text. The underlying explanation for this is that they consider the teacher to be the authority and there-

fore the only one properly authorized to have an interpretation. We suggest that an appreciation of the importance of memorization and the use of exact expressions for some overseas students is crucial if Western academics are to be effective in facilitating these students' adjustment to higher education in Western countries.

Postgraduates in the United Kingdom are expected to be able to read material from many sources, distill and reference the important arguments, and formulate and justify their own position in relation to the literature. Consequently, many foreign students often will find themselves in a context in which they have a huge deficit of skills, which is likely to deepen as the expectations and workload increase through the duration of the course. Further, many students lack the confidence to express and defend their own views. Thus, they would tend to fall back on the supposed authority of the text and string together arguments from a diversity of texts on the reading list without critical evaluation of the issue or reference to appropriate sources. Though this is an intentional act, it is often fueled by the mismatch of skills required in different educational contexts. It is vital to address these culturally laden points, for example by showing overseas students how to evaluate material and formulate arguments prior to their first assessment.

Language, Writing Practices, and Academic Malpractice

The transition from an institution that has a textbook-based teaching model and assessments based on a recall-type examination to one in which assessments typically take the form of a critical review of a topic must be quite daunting. If one adds to this the issue of language, not just ordinary linguistic competence but also the ability to master disciplinary academic language, then one can see that such a task would tend to overwhelm the foreign student. Add to this other issues such as family and financial pressures and a history of success with a different teaching approach, and it is easy to imagine the sort of pressure that many students feel.

To deal with this anxiety, they often turn to a number of writing practices that may be more or less acceptable to us (Howard, 1993). One typical form draws on their experiences of the past, namely repeating the words of others, though not in exactly the same form. Instead of merely submitting to the authority of one author, they engage in subsuming the words of multiple authors in the process of weaving them together to express themselves. This is referred to as *patchwriting*. Patchwriting differs from paraphrasing in that the author is not trying to express the original source in his or her own words; this is exactly what he or she finds difficult to do. Thus, the author uses the words—phrases or sentences—of others to express the ideas in an original source or his or her own ideas, mostly without using quotation marks or providing references for these individual fragments that have been appropriated. Howard (1993) defined *patchwriting* as “copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym-substitutes” (p. 233). She argued that writers often turn to

patchwriting when they are unsure of their understanding of the material or lack confidence in the use of a particular language (such as academic language and phraseology).

This is true not only for nonnative speakers but also for native-speaking academics paraphrasing a difficult-to-understand text—even material within their own discipline. Roig (2001), in a fascinating study, provided college professors in psychology (all members of the American Psychological Society) with two different texts to paraphrase: The first was a difficult text from a peer-reviewed psychology journal article, and the second was an easy-to-read text from an introduction-level psychology textbook. Twenty-six percent of the professors appropriated text—strings of five words or more in length without quotation marks—from the original text, but only 3% appropriated text from the piece that was easier to read. If psychology professors—and most probably native-speaking students—feel the need to “stay close” to the text when confronted with difficult material, one can see why students who understand the importance of “speaking” like the teachers and the authors whose work they read do the same to be accepted into the community. Likewise, nonnative academics also feel they need to “borrow words,” as a Chinese chemist said (Myers, 1998):

Many scientists are not good at English. In order to publish their articles in foreign journals they have to translate their journals [work] from Chinese to English. So they usually borrow some words from foreign articles. I don't know if this is a kind of plagiarism. (¶ 39)

Is this type of writing plagiarism—a deliberate intention to deceive on the part of the professor or the nonnative speaking student? Hull and Rose (1989) claimed that this form of writing is not cheating but a legitimate attempt to “interact with the text, relate it to your own experiences, derive your own meaning from it” (p. 150). This is something most writers do in unfamiliar contexts or with difficult-to-understand texts. It is, indeed, how humans learn: by mimicking or copying others whom we consider exemplary in an academic discipline or in terms of their linguistic competence. However, in the case of many authors, instead of merely reproducing one exemplary figure as they have done successfully in their own country, they patch together the work of several authors to express themselves adequately.

One could also say that in a “cut-and-paste” style of writing a “beautiful patchwork” (Dryden, 1999, p. 80) may indeed be valued. It seems correct to assume that such patchwriting implies a serious attempt to make sense of, and engage with, the material, as was claimed by several Greek and UK students. One UK student commented: “If you take all the sentences/paragraphs from other authors – then you have to do the work to put it together—you have learned and need a certain understanding of the topic, it is not just blatant copying.” Should patchwriting not be considered a legitimate pedagogical step toward becoming a competent “speaker”

of academic English in the academic community? Should we simply conclude, as Roig (2001) suggested, that “a small but significant proportion of writing by college professors may be classified as plagiarism” (p. 320). This seems an inappropriate conclusion, both in the case of the professors and in the case of these students. Nevertheless, this issue of language proficiency was often claimed to be one of the fundamental reasons students may plagiarize, as one Greek student said: “Taking a bit here and there helps with getting meaning across. Paraphrasing if you are not a native speaker is difficult.” Pennycook (1996) commented on this tension:

While [students are] constantly being told to be original and critical, and to write things in their “own words,” [they] are nevertheless only too aware that they are at the same time required to acquire a fixed canon of knowledge and a fixed canon of terminology to go with it. (p. 213)

Indeed, one could ask what other means are available for progress to competency in the use of the language of the subject but a sort of patchwriting? Thus, perhaps a more pertinent question may be at what point in a student’s apprenticeship should patchwriting be considered unacceptable. Patchwriting may be a crucial starting point in a student’s development. Unfortunately, the punitive approach to plagiarism does not always have the subtlety to make these very important distinctions, which often leads to devastating consequences for students who are already vulnerable.

Equality, Alienation, and Academic Malpractice

Our case study also highlighted that many students feel alienated from their country’s education systems. This was attributed to the emphasis on memorization, outdated material, and the lack of trust in the fairness of the assessment process. The extent of alienation also helps us see why there can be such a paradoxical situation: Although many international students believe cheating is wrong, they still engage in it in quite an extensive way. In the extreme case, this alienation from the academic system could imply a situation in which the assessment is so “pre-configured”—due to politics, untrustworthy academics, and so forth—that the outcome becomes completely meaningless and any cheating behavior becomes potentially morally justifiable. One can see such a moral justification in the comment of a Greek student:

When you see that people are taking degrees without doing anything—the youths of political parties have a say in the promotion of professors. They tell professors who they should pass. It leaves people thinking, why should I bother to study and memorize things that I do not need afterward when these things are going on around you?

Equally, those who do not engage in these practices, even though they are aware of the inequality, still note they often have to work harder to compensate for the cheating of their fellow students. Interestingly, this shared sense of alienation from the academic system in many contexts resulted in a strong degree of collegiality among students. For example, collaboration in tests and exams was said to be common in all of the non-UK countries represented. It seems that as the sense of alienation increases, the students feel increasingly justified to cheat—often collaboratively. This was perhaps most graphically depicted in the Greek context, where 90% of students said that they had cheated and helped others to cheat. Thus, if the issue of plagiarism (and academic malpractice) is to be addressed, the systemic conditions of alienation need to be attended to. Though we hope to discount lack of trust in professors in Western institutions, overseas students find themselves in an educational system that expects of them things they are not prepared for, and in a language they are not competent in. Addressing the resulting feeling of powerlessness is as much the responsibility of academics as of the students.

TOWARD INCREASED FAIRNESS IN ASSESSMENT PRACTICE

In this article, we have tried to show that the issue of plagiarism is not always simply a matter of cheating or not cheating. We believe we have shown that practices that might be termed *plagiarism* are often the outcome of many diverse and complex influences, especially for students who find themselves in unfamiliar and difficult terrain. On one hand, the ideological basis of the notion of plagiarism and the alienation from the assessment task (due to learning skills, language, perceived unfairness, and so forth) may lead students to feel justified when they plagiarize. On the other hand, when students sincerely try to cope with the situation by patchwriting and “borrowing of words,” they may be further alienated by attempts to impose rigid categories of judgment, which may lead to an increased sense of powerlessness and of being justified in the first place.

One central implication arising from our research pertains to the need for Western academics not only to develop a broader understanding of how overseas students were taught and assessed but also to communicate their expectations and explain how they differ from those in the students’ own country, and to provide resources for students to meet these expectations. Further, it is important to ensure that students view their assessments as an opportunity to learn rather than as merely an externally imposed logic of judgment.

A further important implication is for staff to recognize that for those students who are unfamiliar with paraphrasing and writing arguments based on multiple sources in their second language, patchwriting should be viewed as an inherent part of the teaching and learning process. It should be made explicit that patch-

writing and borrowing of words, when sources are cited, is a legitimate step toward independence of thought. The conditions should be created for students to freely discuss their patchwriting practices with academic staff as a means to move beyond these practices. More broadly, institutional frameworks should be developed that are sensitive to the issues of culture and alienation. It would be unfortunate if our judgments about students within an institutional framework become an additional and final humiliation of a student already in an asymmetrical power relationship. This means that we should insist on what we value in the West—that is, academic integrity—yet be mindful that in insisting on this we do not compromise other things we equally value, such as fairness.

Clearly, due to its limited scope, our research is provisional and merely indicative of the issues at stake. There is a need for more detailed ethnographic studies that explore the transition involved in students becoming independent writers. This may include research that charts how their recognition and understanding of plagiarism is formed and put into practice, how they draw on the words and ideas of others, and how they utilize technology in composing their essays. A detailed understanding of such issues is necessary if institutions with diverse student populations are to develop effective preventative plagiarism policies and procedures.

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