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CULTURAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS PLAGIARISM

Developing a better understanding of the needs of
students from diverse cultural backgrounds relating to
issues of plagiarism

August 2003

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1 INTRODUCTION

The increase in concern regarding plagiarism in Higher Education is highlighted in many recent articles (Ashworth P 1997, Carroll J & Appleton J 2001, Errey L 2002, King P 2002). The Plagiarism Advisory Service (PAS)¹ was established in September 2002 and is based in the Information Management Research Institute at Northumbria University. It is funded by Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) at Oxford Brookes University and it aims is to raise awareness of plagiarism in the academic community. It provides a service giving advice regarding prevention and detection of plagiarism and provides a forum for discussion of related issues.

There has also been an increase in the number of overseas students in UK Higher Education in recent years. In 1999 Tony Blair launched an initiative to encourage more international students to study at British Universities. The initiative promoted UK education overseas, streamlined visa applications, made it easier for students to work in UK and increased the number of scholarships available.² The number of full-time overseas students has risen from 202,000 in 1990 to 313,000 in 2000.³ This high level of international students is evident at Lancaster University with the Management School having currently more than 50% of full time students from overseas. Some courses, e.g. MA in Accountancy and Finance are 80% overseas students.

These two increases have given opportunity to study cultural attitudes towards plagiarism. From the experiences of Lancaster University staff in the Management School and the Computing Department it is clear that there are different levels of understanding of plagiarism between different cultures. These concerns are also supported by some recent literature.

“The copying we (in North America) call plagiarism is, however, not considered a problem in many other cultures. In some cultures it is acceptable, even flattering, to copy the work of ‘masters. In some cases it is considered more humble than boldly advocating your won opinions about something.” (Bell, 1999) and “students who

¹ http://online.northumbria.ac.uk/faculties/art/information_studies/Imri/Jiscpas/site/Jiscpas.asp

² Churches Commission for International Students Annual Report 2000-2002

³ Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) quoted in CCIS Annual Report 2000-2002

want to make a point particularly clearly see paraphrasing the source as a strange thing to do when the source itself makes the point better than they could ever reword it in an imperfectly mastered language.” (Watkins and Biggs, 1996)

This two month research project, funded by a small grant from Lancaster University’s Teaching and Quality Enhancement Fund, aimed to identify whether there are significant cultural differences in the student’s interpretations of plagiarism and to consider some of the implications of such differences for teaching practice. This report will outline some of the preliminary findings and potential implications of this research. The results will also be used as a basis to secure further funding for more detailed research.

2 THE RESEARCH CONTEXT, STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE

2.1 Structure of the research project

The research was conducted in three phases as depicted in Figure 1 below. Phase one involved several interviews with academic and administrative staff as well as an initial literature review to establish a context for the next phase. In phase two a survey was distributed to students in several postgraduate courses in the Computing Department and the Management School. Following the analysis of the survey qualitative data was collected from four focus group discussions with students grouped by nationality: UK, Asian, Chinese and Greek. During the final phase, all the data was analysed and reported at a university wide workshop.

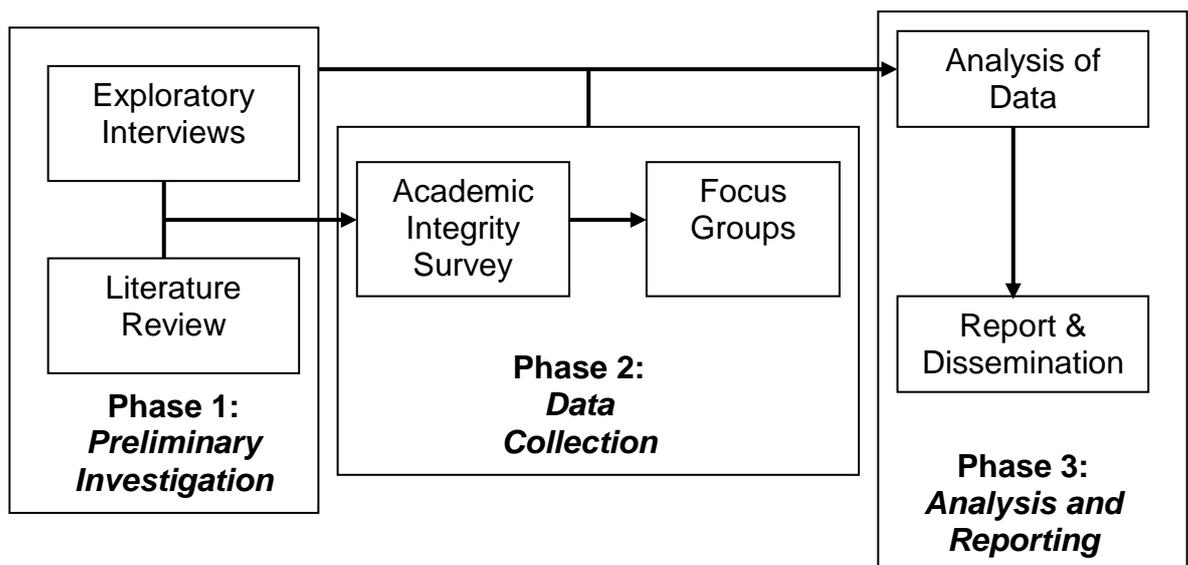


Figure 1: Structure of the research project

2.2 A Preliminary investigation

The preliminary investigation consisted of interviews with academic and administrative staff in order to establish a broad understanding of the issues as seen by those that most often deal with these issues.

2.2.1 Perceptions of those interviewed

There is a perception that over the last 5-10 years there has been a rise in the incidences of plagiarism at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels. This is often attributed to the increase in availability of material via the internet.

There is also a sensitive issue of whether overseas students are more likely to plagiarise than UK students. An alternative concern is whether they are effectively being discriminated against since detection of plagiarism is often easier in an overseas student's work than in a student's work whose first language is English. This may lead to a higher percentage being identified and hence the (possibly incorrect) conclusion that overseas students are more likely to plagiarise.

It was also clear from the interviews that there is a lack of clarity in defining what plagiarism is. These different levels of understanding vary between different departments on the campus and between staff and students. One of the aims of Lancaster University's Working Party on Plagiarism has been to clarify what is meant by plagiarism within the University.

A need for better provision of education for students on what is/isn't acceptable both in UK academia and specific subject disciplines was identified as a concern. Most staff suggested that there is also a need for greater understanding by staff of the cultural dimensions to plagiarism.

2.2.2 Some Case Examples

The following are examples provided to us by the interviewees of recent incidences of plagiarism from students of different cultural backgrounds. They indicate the

ambiguity of understanding of plagiarism. The key points from these cases and from the interviews in general will be discussed in Section 4 and 5 below.

Chinese: In a case where a Chinese student was accused of plagiarising there was an obvious difference in interpretation of the definition of plagiarism. The student did not think it was correct to rewrite an author's words since the author was well known and respected. Hence he/she included it in his/her text. This reverence for authority clearly comes from a cultural worldview where respect for betters and elders is paramount.

Indian: This student understood that plagiarism was not acceptable in the UK. However the student chose to plagiarise because he/she felt that his/her English was not sufficiently proficient to explain the point clearly enough. He/she felt that the original author's English was better.

Greek: This student had plagiarised from the Internet. His/her interpretation was that copying from textbook was wrong, but that copying from the Internet was acceptable.

Spanish: This student was accused of plagiarising although what he/she had written was apparently acceptable in Spanish academic circles. This student was actually a visiting student and he/she was not fully aware of the Universities rules for plagiarism.

African: When a Mauritian student was accused of plagiarism he was shocked as he had written as he would have done in his home institution. In Mauritian academic culture plagiarism is not considered wrong, but is widely accepted.

2.2.3 Some Emerging Issues

It is clear from the interviews and cases that there are significant local and cultural differences with respect to the definition of plagiarism. Although it is easy to define plagiarism it seems that it becomes much more complex to deal with individual instances that may or may not be deemed to be plagiarism. Equally, cultural

differences with respect to pedagogical model, assessment practices, writing practices and institutional arrangements may place many writing practices of foreign students, legitimate in its local context, within the realms of what one may deem plagiarism. It seems very important to understand these cultural differences if we are to treat plagiarism in an appropriate and fair manner.

3 LITERATURE SURVEY: WHY DO STUDENTS PLAGIARISE?

3.1 Introduction

Over the last 20 years there has been an increase in the number of international students studying at UK higher education institutions (CCIS Annual Report 2000-2002). This increasing multicultural mix of students in the classroom brings challenges for both staff and students as conflicting styles of teaching and learning collide. Different cultures view the world in different ways, they have different value systems and hence the ways of teaching, learning and communicating vary (Hofstede 1991). When international students enter western academic institutions they bring with them their own cultures that include different ideas, assumptions and experiences that have been learned from early childhood (Fox 1994). Fox (1994) suggests that these different cultural worldviews affect the way students interact with each other and their teachers, how they read and study and how they understand and write assignments. It is therefore, not surprising that difficulties arise for both students and staff in a cross cultural educational environment.

In western academic institutions the perceived problems with teaching and learning relate to students from non Anglo-Celtic backgrounds (Biggs 1999). In relation to the west, the cultural differences are more acute with students from African, Middle Eastern or East Asian countries. These differences in learning styles can lead western teachers to view international students from these particular backgrounds as 'problems' to be 'solved' (Ryan 2000). However both Biggs and Ryan encourage teachers to see international students as an asset to the academic community and exhort teachers to become more sensitised to the differences in learning styles in order to help international students adjust to western academic environments and subsequently reach their academic potentials.

The issue of plagiarism in western academic institutions has become more prominent over recent years (Ashworth et al 1997, Carroll 2001, Errey 2002) and although this issue is not restricted to international students there appears to be evidence that there are different interpretations between differing cultures about what is and what is not acceptable in academic writing. It is clear that not all cultures agree with the generally

accepted western definition of plagiarism; that of stealing someone else's words and passing it off as your own, is morally wrong. In a typical example, Sherman (1992), an English teacher, writes of her experiences with Italian students. These students frequently failed to name sources and quoted from these sources extensively without acknowledgement. After 2½ years of trying to get her students to write 'correctly' she concluded that "what we call plagiarism they clearly saw as not only legitimate but correct and proper" (Sherman p191). The wide disparity of interpretation of the use of the written word has stimulated research into this area resulting in a body of literature relating to international students and issues of academic writing.

The literature related to international students studying in western environments reveals that there are many factors involved in whether a student is involved in plagiarism or not. These factors include the pressures involved in adapting to new surroundings, writing in a different language, different learning and writing styles of different cultures and the differing ideologies concerning the written word. For our purposes here the literature can be broadly categorised into three main areas; socio-cultural adjustments, learning styles and ideological perspectives of the written word.

3.2 Socio/Cultural Adjustments

When international students arrive at western educational institutions they often experience significant culture shock. Students have to rapidly adapt to their new surroundings in order to cope with living in a different cultural environment. They also have to adapt to unfamiliar ways of academic learning and assessment if they are going to succeed by western academic standards. In a recent study Bamford et.al. (2002) interviewed over 100 post-graduate international students to see whether their experiences of studying in the UK matched their expectations before they came to study in London. Results showed that the issue of cultural difference and cultural 'shock' experienced by international students was directly relational to their success or otherwise academically. The level of support students felt from their institution and peers was influential in allowing students to adjust to the new academic environment.

The adjustments international students make to living in another culture can be helped or hindered by the institution at which they study. Biggs (1999) advocates strong institutional support for international students in helping them adjust to their new

environment insisting that where this is the case students perform at a higher level. In a survey of Malaysian Chinese students studying in Australia, O'Donaghue (1996), found that one of the students' key perceptions for their academic success was that lecturers should be involved in facilitating their learning process. Newly arrived international students expressed a preference for teacher-centred, passive learning (O'Donaghue 1996, Bamford et al 2002). However, given time and support they can adapt to the more student-centred hands-off approach more commonly adopted by western academic institutions and indeed may even prefer this new way of learning (Bamford et al 2002).

Because of the increase in international students studying in western institutions there is a recognition that teachers need to be more aware of the needs of students from different backgrounds. Ryan (2000) has produced a booklet entitled "A Guide to Teaching International Students". This is intended to help teachers of international students to become more effective in their teaching practices and to help them recognise the different needs of international students. Ryan challenges educational institutions to adapt to the differing needs of internationals and instead of trying to make them fit into the existing academic structures, institutions themselves must change teaching and assessment practices to accommodate different ways of learning. In fact, this is generally viewed as good practice, regardless of the cultural background of students. In his book "Teaching for Quality learning at Universities", Biggs (1999) says that many of the perceived difficulties of teaching overseas students are overrated and can be minimised by having a more inclusive attitude towards teaching. Carroll (2002), too, offers practical tips for teaching international students including the need for explicit instructions regarding assessed work, clear feedback on work, increased cross-cultural sensitivity leading to a clearer understanding of one's own culture, and teaching 'western' academic practices rather than assuming the student knows what to do. Ryan, Carroll and Biggs recognise that students from different cultures are undergoing rapid adjustments when they come to study in a different cultural environment. The pressures students face must be recognised by the academic staff of their institutions and staff must be more sensitised to the needs of these students.

One of the major pressures international students face is that of coping with learning and writing in a second language. In order to be academically successful in a British academic institution a student must have communicative competence in all four language skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing (Cammish in McNamara & Harris 1997). A high score in TEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) examinations is not a guarantee that a student will cope with the language demands in the west. Chinese and East Asian students often perform very well in these exams but have poor oral communication skills when situated in English medium institutions (Wan 2001). Students who struggle with language, who cannot comprehend what the lecturer is saying, who have difficulty in following group discussions, and who have to produce an abundance of written assignments will experience stresses which will affect their learning processes and ultimately their ability to produce work.

Financial pressures can often contribute to the stresses international students face while overseas (Harris 1995). Like many home students, overseas students course fees are funded by their family. High cost of fees, with potentially unstable exchange rates, increase pressure on students to perform well in order for the financial sacrifices of the wider family to be worthwhile. The sense of obligation, particularly for Asian students, puts great pressure on individuals to do well and gain good marks (Harris 1995). In Bamford et al's (2002) research all the international students interviewed found it necessary to seek part-time employment to supplement their income. While this may be a good cross-cultural experience, working obviously takes time away from studying making the whole educational experience more intensive and potentially more stressful.

Another pressure which can affect an overseas student's ability to adjust to a new cultural environment, is the presence or lack of support networks. O'Donoghue (1996) found that in adjusting to a new environment friendship networks were of vital importance for international students with most important network being with those of a similar cultural background. Furnham (1997) confirms this, but also indicates that other friendship networks, primarily those with host nationals should also be encouraged. Furnham (1997) suggests that overseas students with strong supportive

friendships will be happier and better adjusted than those who do not experience this kind of support.

In summary, it is clear from the literature that international students undergo major adjustments when coming to study in western educational institutions. They experience particular pressures relating to cross cultural adaptations, language difficulties and financial pressures. The amount of pressure and their ability to cope with the adjustment will determine how these students perform academically.

3.3 Learning & Writing Styles

Many students studying in the west come from cultures where learning styles are vastly different from western educational practices. Nearly 40 years ago Kaplan (1966) investigated how different thought patterns in language lead to different ways of learning and writing. In his analysis of various writings of students from different cultural backgrounds he deduced that the way students write was influenced by their cultural background. For example, he found that English students write with a linear progression of ideas while oriental students' writing is of a spiral nature. These differences in learning and writing styles can lead to difficulties for international students studying in western environments.

The most documented learning style is that of the Chinese. Chan (1999) shows how the Chinese style of learning evident in China, Hong Kong and South East Asian countries, is influenced by Confucian philosophy. These societies are often termed Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHCs). Confucious teachings began as a set of moral rules for society (Chan 1999). Rulers were to govern with benevolence and justice while the people must obey and respect their leaders. By providing a clear hierarchical structure based on mutual respect society would be able to live in harmony. Confucianism has developed into a philosophy which permeates all aspects of Chinese society today and is a critical element of Chinese cultural identity (Chan 1999). It is particularly evident in education influencing the relationships between students and teachers. This relationship is strongly hierarchical, with a deep respect from both sides (Biggs 1994). Chinese learners have been brought up to avoid challenging authority and to respect those who provide knowledge. Chan (1999) says that the connection between Confucian philosophy and the behavioural practices are obvious. Because of

the pressure to preserve societal harmony, to conform to the system and avoid loss of face, she suggests that Chinese students prefer particular methods of teaching and learning that endorse these cultural beliefs. These include memorisation of texts and the acceptance of taught ideas.

This style of learning involving rote or repetition and memorisation is often viewed disparagingly by western academics leading to the conclusion that it produces surface learning rather than deep understanding of a subject. Biggs & Watkins (1996) view this as a western misconception saying that CHC students often achieve considerably higher academically than their western counterparts. If their levels of understanding were only surface deep then this would not be possible. Biggs & Watkins (1996) make a distinction between rote and repetition learning. Rote learning is memorising without understanding whereas repetition learning can lead to a deepening of understanding over time. They believe that many western academics confuse these types of learning stereotyping Chinese learners as rote-learners. The Malaysian students in O'Donoghue's (1996) study recognise that 'rote learning is not good' and had a desire for a deeper level of understanding. Therefore this learning style should not be dismissed by western educationalists.

Memorisation is valued highly in Chinese society. Chan (1999) says that the traditional Chinese view of an educated civilized person is one who could memorise the classics. Children are taught social obligations by memorisation from an early age and throughout schooling students are expected to memorise large amounts of texts. In this way students show respect and acknowledgement for an author. However, Chan (1999) acknowledges that for Chinese students taught to memorise in this way problems may arise in relation to plagiarism when studying in western institutions.

It is not only Chinese Heritage Cultures that indulge in repetition and memorisation processes in education. For example, Italian students rely on repetition learning and memorisation of large amounts of texts in order to pass examinations. Sherman (1992), when teaching Italian students, found that they considered it appropriate to rewrite word for word pieces of text which had been memorised.

It is therefore not surprising that when students who have experienced these kinds of learning processes come to the UK that they have difficulties in changing their learning styles to become analytical and critical of texts with the ability to express their own opinions in their own words. Students write the way they have written in their home country and are sometimes shocked to discover that this is not acceptable in their western academic institution. In her book "Listening to the World: Cultural issues in Academic Writing, Fox (1994) gives many examples of highly qualified, intelligent international academics who are well respected in their home country but who are struggling to produce work that is acceptable within an American academic environment. For many, what is being asked is to change their cultural identity, their way of thinking and writing, and produce work that conforms to a particular western academic norm.

However, in spite of the huge cultural differences in learning styles international students are willing to change and adapt to western academic norms. The Malaysian students interviewed by O'Donoghue (1996) recognised that their learning styles and writing practices had to change if they were going to be successful in the Australian educational institution. They learned that they had to do more independent reading before lectures and tutorials, and they learned to ask more questions to clarify what was actually being taught. International students interviewed by Bamford et al (2002) in London saw large differences between the learning styles of their undergraduate degrees in their home countries and their post-graduate studies in Britain. The move to a more independent learning style was generally seen as a positive thing although they needed time to adapt to new learning styles.

Differences in learning styles can initially lead to stresses for international students when studying in western academic institutions. For many cultures the emphasis on repetition learning and memorisation of texts can be a disadvantage when they are asked to analyse texts, express their own opinions and write using their own words.

3.4 Ideological Interpretations of Plagiarism

The notion that plagiarism is morally wrong is a common perception in western academia. Kollich (1983) describes how he pursued offending plagiarists 'like an avenging god' and describes what they have done as 'deception'. He views the act of

plagiarism as an insult against the teacher and sees the need for punishment against what he views as a crime. These views, while seemingly extreme, are all too common in western academic circles. Different cultures have different perceptions of morality and these are determined by ideological perspectives which have generally developed and changed over time. (Hofstede?) The morality of plagiarism is linked to the western ideological perspective of the ownership of texts. Scollon (1995) says that in the treatment of academic plagiarism there is a presupposition of a common ideology of thinking which assumes that the author is the sole creator and originator of his/her texts. In western ideology therefore, plagiarism is a violation against the author and consequently viewed as morally wrong.

Pennycook (1996), argues however, that plagiarism cannot be viewed as a black and white issue but that it is a far more complex phenomenon relating to the relationships between text, memory and learning. He suggests that the way cultures understand the notion of authorship and ownership of text determines their definition of plagiarism. Pennycook (1996) says that the notion of ownership of text is a particularly western concept which can be attributed a paradigm shift in thinking in western society during the Enlightenment era. He cites Kearey (1988) and describes three distinct paradigm shifts in western thinking; the pre-modern, modern and post-modern. During the pre-modern era, which includes the biblical, classical and medieval eras, inspiration and individual creativity were attributed to a divine God. Literary work during this period was un-authored (Foucault 1977). In the 17th Century, the Enlightenment brought about a shift in western thinking. This modernist era placed man as the subject and the human replaced God as the creator of the imagination. It became, therefore necessary to attribute work to specific authors and so consequently the notion of individual ownership of texts developed. Angelil-Carter (2000) agrees with this notion of development of ownership of texts and says that the introduction of copyright laws in the 18th Century helped this ideological perspective to take hold. The idea of originality in writing has been highly valued since this time. Scollon (1995) also identifies the concept of plagiarism as having its roots in the Enlightenment era.

In the post modern era there is a shift away from thinking that the individual can be the true originator of the text. Foucault (1977) examines the possibility that authorship

can no longer be attributed to an individual but that the text itself is the creator. Pennycook (1996) also describes the postmodernist view of authorship showing that it has moved from the author owning and giving meaning to text to the notion that meaning is derived from the interaction with a text. However the modernist definition of ownership of text is still prominent in today's academic circles with the emphasis on individual ownership of text and the need for attribution.

It is evident that the western notion of plagiarism is not clear cut. Pennycook (1996) discusses some of the tensions and ambiguities surrounding this issue. There is a historical precedence for plagiarism from the Roman era, through the Renaissance to present times. Pennycook discusses how difficult it is to be original and at the same time give respect to previous authors. He concludes that language and text may be seen as the circulation of words and ideas rather than a linear production of original and creative work. He also suggests that the western emphasis on attribution may be a device to retain the status of authorship within academic circles. The emphasis in writing is on the author rather than on the text itself.

Other ambiguities areas when writing practices in fields outside academia are considered. Kollich (1983) is concerned that there are different standards in writing practices for academic institutions and those in what he terms the 'real world'. He questions why there is moral outrage regarding plagiarism in academic circles while it is common practice in business circles to reuse previous texts for reports etc. Deckert (1993) also mentions the ambiguities of western notion of plagiarism. He asks why is it acceptable for politicians to use professional speech-writers without giving credit but not acceptable to use others work in academic circles. These discrepancies with regard to what is and what isn't acceptable use of text in a western context obviously cause difficulties for students and particularly those from different cultural backgrounds.

The ideological concepts of ownership of text influences the way an author writes. From a western perspective, arising from the modernist view of the individual being the creator of ideas and words, there is a need to attribute particular texts to particular authors. This perspective has developed over the last few hundred years into what is

now considered acceptable academic writing practices across the western academic world. The idea of plagiarism as a violation against academic norms has therefore developed from this particular cultural worldview. Since a high value is placed on originality and ownership of text then to violate this is deemed morally wrong.

Students from non-western cultural backgrounds may have different interpretations of the ownership of texts and therefore different interpretations of plagiarism.

3.5 Relationships to Plagiarism

In conclusion then the reasons why a student plagiarises work are complex. The three areas discussed above; socio-cultural adjustments, learning styles and ideological perspectives of the written word can all play a part in whether an overseas student indulges in the practice of what is in the west termed plagiarism.

The stresses an overseas student faces when studying in a different cultural environment are great. Students can feel overwhelmed with new ideas and concepts leading to feelings of insecurities in their understanding of their subjects. They may feel unable to express their own thoughts and be more likely to copy from others. These feelings are emphasised when having to write in a second language. Students may find that what is already written in English expresses what they wish to say better than if they had written it themselves and therefore they use existing work from other authors. The financial pressures and the obligation to family to succeed in their studies put more pressure on students to produce work that is acceptable. In some instances students submit work that has been copied because they believe that this will get them a better mark than their own individual work.

The different learning styles of overseas students can cause problems when studying in a western institution. Students who have good memorisation skills and who have been encouraged to reproduce large quantities of text in previous assessments will obviously tend to employ this learning method in their new educational environment. However, if the word for word reproduction of text is viewed as plagiarism then these students will be penalised for this method of learning.

Finally, the most fundamental reason why students might engage in plagiarism is that they may simply not view the written word in the same way as it is generally viewed in the west. The ideological perspective that an author owns his/her text may not be a concept that is prevalent in the student's cultural background. Hence, there is not the same emphasis on attribution of sources.

4 STUDENT'S ATTITUDES TO ISSUES OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

4.1 Introduction

The empirical findings reported in this section are based on the views recorded by students currently undertaking postgraduate courses at Lancaster in Computing, or Information Technology, Management and Organisational Change. With regards to the students on the latter course, we asked them to complete a questionnaire (see Appendix A) and then based on their responses to the questionnaires, we held focus groups with each of the national groupings to pursue the questionnaire findings further. With regards to the MSc Computing students, we only distributed the questionnaire. The response rate for both courses was high, with 40 responses from the 45 MSc ITMOC student currently registered, and 57 responses from the 85 students registered on the MSc in Computing. With regards to the focus groups, we divided the focus groups based on the nationality of the students on the course, The numbers attending each of the focus groups varied, with 6 UK students, 4 Chinese, 3 Asian (Pakistan, India and Thailand) and 12 Greek students attending the respective focus groups. It is also worth noting that our research not only focussed on plagiarism in coursework but also academic integrity in exams.

Thus this case section is structured as follows. The first section outlines the views students raised with regards to plagiarism and coursework. Section two considers their views with regards to cheating in exams. The third section considers the role of technology, while the final section examines the pressures that some students encountered to gain good marks.

4.2 Academic Integrity in Coursework

This first section considers the views that students from the different national groups raised with regards to plagiarism and coursework. First we examine what constitutes substantive plagiarism. Following this we will outline how many students suggest that plagiarism can arise unintentionally. Third, we will present the view of several students that degrees of plagiarism still offer opportunities for learning and development. Fourth we consider the issue of whether students consider plagiarism to be linked to language and disciplinary proficiency. Finally we document the views of

students with regards to providing unpermitted help with another student's coursework.

4.2.1 Degree of plagiarism

A limited degree of plagiarism in coursework was seen to be acceptable by all the British students interviewed. They suggested that it was generally acceptable to at least plagiarise what they termed very general and background information (such as company information or general facts and figures). Other students further suggested that it was acceptable to copy some degree of text that you had already thought of yourself, but was merely written in a way that was better than they felt able to do themselves. In this sense it was about English proficiency, rather than content, even though they themselves had English as their first language.

		Asian	Chinese	Greek	UK
Action	Once or more	20%	40%	21%	19%
	Never	80%	60%	79%	81%
Moral Judgement	Not or trivial cheating	40%	30%	7%	25%
	Somewhat or very serious	60%	70%	93%	75%

Table 1 Copying material, almost word for word, from any source and turning it in as your own work

When asked what they considered substantial plagiarism, the British students first responded that it depended on the length of the essay. However, with regards to a typical 3000 word essay, their responses ranged from the majority viewing it as being more than two sentences, for another a whole paragraph, while one student said he would not try to quantify it, but more generally could be considered substantial “*at the point when the text they were copying began controlling what they were writing.*” When asked if this was done by combining one or two sentences (patching) from the work of different authors the student said this was a typical approach they adopted when plagiarising coursework. However, several other British students responded vehemently to this by stating that if students were consciously copying extensive amounts of material from an author, this was substantial plagiarism. Interestingly, one

student suggested that it was well known that copying one or two sentences in coursework was viewed as acceptable by markers. This reinforces why all UK students did not view copying at least one or two sentences word for word as being acceptable.

Table 1 highlights the mixed response UK students provided in relation to whether they had, or considered copying material word for word from any source and turning it in as their own to be serious or not. 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. Interestingly, as Tables 2 and 3 below illustrate though not discussed during the focus groups, 38% of UK students admitted to fabricating or falsifying a bibliography at least once during their undergraduate education, while 56% saw it as being at worst a trivial form of cheating. In relation to citing or referencing a source they had not read, 31% of UK students admitted to doing this, while an overwhelming 67% did not consider this a serious form of cheating.

		Asian	Chinese	Greek	UK
Action	Once or more	25%	40%	43%	38%
	Never	75%	60%	57%	63%
Moral Judgement	Not or trivial cheating	75%	70%	29%	56%
	Somewhat or very serious	25%	30%	71%	44%

Table 2 Fabricating or falsifying a bibliography.

		Asian	Chinese	Greek	UK
Action	Once or more	0%	40%	50%	31%
	Never	100%	60%	50%	69%
Moral Judgement	Not or trivial cheating	75%	70%	57%	67%
	Somewhat or very serious	25%	30%	43%	33%

Table 3 Citing or referencing a source you have not actually read

In relation to non-UK students, surprisingly most students explained that they had little experience of coursework in their undergraduate education and thus were not

able to comment extensively on the issue of plagiarism in coursework. Typically, the only form of coursework they had completed were group project reports or business reports. As one Greek student stated, "*there is no notion of submitting academic work in Greece, just Business plans really.*" In China, it was estimated that they only write one essay during their undergraduate education.

Though all of the national groups did reference in these different forms of coursework, they claimed it was not as rigorous as it is in the UK. They explained that this was due to most courses only requiring students to consult one textbook, and consequently referencing was not required. UK students reinforced this view, stating that it takes quite a bit of practice to learn how to reference in an essay, and were sympathetic to students that are, "*coming to essays for the first time.*" Indeed, all of the non-UK students claimed they were not aware of plagiarism until they had come to the UK. The only exception to this was a Greek student who had been an undergraduate at the American College, a private university, in Athens. He suggested that it is the decision to commit plagiarism that is important not the amount. Thus, the non-UK students largely attributed their lack of awareness about what plagiarism is to them having no experience in writing essays or referencing strictly.

Other Greek students from government run universities offered a few insights into their attitudes towards whether degrees of plagiarism are acceptable or not based on their insights gained at Lancaster to date. One Greek student suggested that copying a few words as long as they were not copying a concept or an idea was acceptable. Another Greek student suggested that everyone plagiarises to some degree and as such the concept of plagiarism needs to be reassessed. He suggested that it is a matter of degree, claiming that it was only important when it became significant. Interestingly, based on their recent experience in the UK, several Greek students mentioned that they resented the emphasis placed on plagiarism in the UK as they felt that academic staff did not trust them.

In relation to the non UK students responses to the questionnaire, due to most of them either not having done coursework, or at best only having completed one or two non-essay based pieces, it is more revealing to look at how serious they judge cheating in

coursework to be rather than their previous practices. As Table 1 indicates, 40% of Asian and 30% of Chinese students did not judge copying material word for word as being serious. With regard to Tables 2 and 3, approximately three quarters of Asian and Chinese students judged fabricating a bibliography and citing a reference they have not read as being not cheating or merely trivial. In contrast, 93% of Greek students viewed copying material almost word for word as being somewhat or very serious, fabricating a bibliography was viewed as being serious by 71% and citing or referencing something they have not read was viewed as being serious by 43% of Greek students.

		Asian	Chinese	Greek	UK
Action	Once or more	75%	56%	57%	56%
	Never	25%	44%	43%	44%
Moral Judgement	Not or trivial cheating	100%	60%	64%	63%
	Somewhat or very serious	0%	40%	36%	38%

Table 4 Copying a few sentences of material without referencing them.

Table 4 highlights that all the different student groups judged copying a few sentences word for word without referencing it as being not or merely trivial cheating. In relation to previous practice, 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. This supports the view that a small amount of plagiarism is acceptable. In relation to the judgement of non-UK students, 100% of Asian students viewed this as not being cheating or only being trivial cheating, while for the other groups approximately two thirds of the students saw copying a few sentences of material without referencing them as being not cheating or trivial. This indicates that across all cultures, not only that copying several sentences is likely to be endemic in coursework submissions, but also that it is not seen as being serious or unacceptable practice by students regardless of cultural background.

4.2.2 Unintentional plagiarism in coursework

Several UK students highlighted how plagiarism is often unintentional as a consequence of the way they make notes while researching their essays. They

explained that they collect numerous electronic and non-electronic references whilst writing the notes they prepare when researching a particular essay question. In this sense they argued that it was easy to lose track of what is their own work and what is the work of others as they patch it together in their final coursework submission. In this sense UK students viewed some form of plagiarism as being unintentional.

One UK student suggested that not fully referencing the patchwork could come about due to *time constraints* and / or the poor time management of projects. He suggested that time is an issue saying that *“most of the cases arise when students are short of time, and just do not have time to think about it.”*

4.2.3 Learning and plagiarism

One surprising view that emerged amongst both the UK and Greek student focus groups was that plagiarism is inextricably interlinked with student learning and development. For example a UK student commented that when students plagiarise work (well), it often still requires an understanding of the topic, and thus exhibits a degree of learning, saying that, *“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 view, claiming that being able to generate an argument in a coursework assessment, even if some of it was plagiarised from different sources (patching), demonstrated a good degree of learning.

4.2.4 The enforcement of plagiarism in coursework

In relation to the detection of plagiarism in coursework and the enforcement of plagiarism regulations in their previous institutions, all of the UK students mentioned that they did not think that plagiarism in coursework was detected very often, nor did they consider it to be taken very seriously by academics. Indeed, several of the students were disappointed that more cases of plagiarism in coursework were not detected saying, *“I resent it when students get away with it.”* In this sense, students were keen that they would be treated with some level of equality.

In relation to the non-UK students, only one Greek student had previously regularly submitted coursework at his previous institution (American College in Athens),

however, this private institution merely lowered their students' marks rather than failing or excluding them. However he suggested this was a stringent punishment as in the Greek context, merely gaining a pass mark was viewed as being worthless when trying to gain entry into the job market. He also stated that as it was a private institution they were reluctant to exclude people from the institution even for repeat offences.

4.2.5 Ability and plagiarism

The issue of academic ability or competency in English and / or the subject matter was seen to be linked to understanding why some people plagiarise. Based on their insights gained since arriving in Lancaster, several Greek students suggested that due to English not being the first language that, *“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, and often if an author had written something clearly and you agreed with it, then there was nothing wrong with copying this. 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.”*

4.2.6 Collaboration and coursework

In relation to Tables 5 and 6 for the non-UK students, the results are problematic, as they have not completed much coursework, especially essays, during their undergraduate education. Thus disregarding the data in terms of if they had done coursework and instead focussing on whether they judge receiving unpermitted help to be trivial or not, the questionnaire data highlights some important results. Receiving substantial unpermitted help from fellow students was viewed as being trivial cheating by between 50 – 75 % of the students, and in relation to working on an assignment with others when it was intended to be individual work was seen to be not cheating or trivial by between 70-80% of students.

		Asian	Chinese	Greek	UK
Action	Once or more	25%	40%	50%	31%
	Never	75%	60%	50%	69%
Moral Judgement	Not or trivial cheating	75%	50%	50%	38%
	Somewhat or very serious	25%	50%	50%	63%

Table 5 Receiving substantial, unpermitted help on an assignment.

		Asian	Chinese	Greek	UK
Action	Once or more	50%	60%	71%	50%
	Never	50%	40%	29%	50%
Moral Judgement	Not or trivial cheating	80%	70%	86%	63%
	Somewhat or very serious	20%	30%	14%	38%

Table 6 Working on an assignment with others when the instructor asked for individual work.

Furthermore, Table 7 suggests that 80% of Asian students do consider writing a paper for another student to be trivial or not cheating, while the same applies for 40% of Chinese students and 29% of Greek students. This highlights how non-UK students, to varying extents, consider unpermitted collaboration with others to be an acceptable practice and thus individuality does not appear to be as highly regarded by non-UK students.

		Asian	Chinese	Greek	UK
Action	Once or more	60%	40%	36%	6%
	Never	40%	60%	64%	94%
Moral Judgement	Not or trivial cheating	80%	40%	29%	13%
	Somewhat or very serious	20%	60%	71%	88%

Table 7 Writing or providing a paper for another student.

In relation to the essay writing practice of UK students, 31% admitted to receiving unpermitted help with a coursework assignment, 50% confessed to working with others on work that was intended to be individual and 6% of UK students admitted to providing a coursework 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 much lower (13%) than any of the other national groups.

4.3 Academic integrity in examinations

This second section considers the issues raised by students with regards to academic integrity during exams. These findings presented in this section are particularly insightful with regards to non UK students due to their lack of familiarity with coursework. First we consider the views students raised with regards to the detection of cheating and the enforcement of institutional sanctions. Second, we highlight the views of many national groups pertaining to exams as being merely memory tests. Following this we explore the extent to which students have helped, or judge helping other students to cheat in exams. Fourth, we discuss issues pertaining to trust and the integrity of the examination process. Finally, we highlight how many students viewed cheating in exams as being more serious than coursework malpractice.

4.3.1 Detecting and enforcing exam malpractice

Surprisingly, in all the cultural groups other than British, the detection of cheating in exams and the enforcement of any institutional penalties was not thought to be strong. In essence, most students saw the chances of being caught cheating in an exam as being quite low. This was largely attributed to the low student/ invigilator ratio among non-UK students. For example, in India, exams were explained to be conducted in halls with a thousand or more other students and only a few invigilators. Indeed, the Indian student explained that he had never known of anyone being caught cheating during an exam. He said that in rooms such as this, it was impossible to enforce regulations pertaining to looking at another student's work, and on the odd occasion an invigilator had noticed this, they had just told them to stop looking. He thought the only time invigilators would intervene was if cheating during exams became disruptive noting, *“unless it is really serious then nothing will be done.”* In Pakistan

the experience was similar with regards to national examinations, but in contrast smaller institution specific examinations were explained to be strictly invigilated and regulations strictly enforced. A Pakistani student recalled the example of, “two top students who got caught cheating during an exam being thrown out of the institute for one year.” She also suggested that they were lenient with these two students, as she had heard of people being excluded permanently. In this sense, the detection and enforcement policies of specific institutions were rigorous.

	Asian	Chinese	Greek	UK
Severity of penalties for cheating at your institution?	60%	90%	79%	80%
Chances of getting caught cheating at your institution?	40%	50%	36%	60%

Table 8 Those students that rate the severity of penalties and chances of getting caught as high or very high?

However, Table 8 indicates that the views among Asian students suggests that this was the exception rather than the rule. Our questionnaires ascertained that only 60% of Asian students viewed the penalties in their institutions as being severe or very severe, while only 40% saw the chances of getting caught as being high or very high. Furthermore, Table 9 below indicates that 60% of Asian students did not view teaching staff as handling instances of cheating uniformly, while 80% of Asian students did not perceive teaching staff trying very hard to catch students cheating, while 40% of Asian students viewed cheating to be a problem in their previous university.

Chinese students suggested that rules in Chinese institutions are rigorously enforced to the extent that if someone commits malpractice during examinations they will be excluded from the university within twenty-four hours. The Chinese student that raised this issue viewed the consequences of this strict enforcement policy as being very serious, as in the Chinese context, not having an undergraduate degree and the stigma of being excluded would, “change their whole life.” However, he also suggested that catching someone cheating was rare due to the numbers of students sitting exams and

the few invigilators in the room. The questionnaire data reinforces this view, Table 8 indicates that 90% of Chinese students saw the penalties as being severe in Chinese universities. This represented the highest rate among all the national groups. However, though they perceived the regulations as being severe, only 50% thought there was a high or very high chance of getting caught cheating. Furthermore, Table 9 highlights how though 80% of Chinese students viewed cheating to be a serious problem at their previous institution, 50% of them did not perceive teaching staff to try very hard to catch those offenders, while 30% did not consider teaching staff in Chinese institutions to deal with it uniformly.

	Asian	Chinese	Greek	UK
Teaching staff at your institution show little uniformity in handling instances of cheating.	60%	30%	50%	19%
Teaching staff don't try very hard to catch cheaters.	80%	50%	36%	38%
Cheating is a serious problem at your institution.	40%	80%	29%	0%

Table 9 Cheating and Enforcement in their previous institution

The Greek students also suggested that due to the high student / invigilator ratio, cheating was commonplace and typically went undetected or at least penalties were not enforced. Students from the ten or so Greek national institutions represented, could not recall an instance when someone had been caught cheating in an exam. They all mentioned that looking at other people's scripts, taking notes into exams and even swapping exam scripts during exams was commonplace in Greece. The only exception to this was the Greek student from the private American College who noted that exams were carefully invigilated. He did not recall any cases of cheating during exams at this institution. However he did state that as it was a private institution, students were not excluded, and instead merely given low marks, and as such may not have heard of examples. As Table 8 highlights, 79% of Greek students viewed the penalties for cheating at Greek institutions as being severe or very severe. In terms of the chances of getting caught cheating, then only 36% of respondents thought that the

chances of getting caught cheating were high or very high. Further to this Table 9 suggests that in their previous institution, 50% of Greek students did not view the teaching staff at their previous institutions dealing with cheating uniformly, while 36% did not view their previous teachers as endeavouring to catch cheaters. Interestingly, though during the focus group interviews, Greek students suggested that almost 100% of Greek students had cheated once or more. As such, cheating was said to be endemic in Greek institutions yet only 29% of Greek students saw this as being a serious problem at their previous institution. As such, one could suggest that cheating is not seen to be problematical in Greece, regardless of how endemic it may be. It is an accepted practice by almost all students.

UK students saw cheating in an exam as being very serious. One student explained this was due to exams typically having a higher weighting than coursework and thus if you were caught cheating then *“it is much more of a risk.”* Another UK student concurred with this noting, *“Yes, I strongly agree, if 80% of marks are exam based, then it is much more of a gamble to cheat.”* Another British student suggested that markers could more easily identify cheating in exam scripts (rather than plagiarism in coursework), as the text would switch from being written perfectly back to a much lower standard. Finally, several UK students knew of a student that had been caught cheating in an exam and the UK institution had taken serious action against the student. They suggested the enforcement of regulations by UK institutions was not to the same extent with regards to coursework. As Table 8 indicates, 80% of UK students saw that the penalties were serious or very serious in UK institutions, while 60% of UK students saw the chances of getting caught cheating as being high or very high. This represented the highest rate among the national groups, but does highlight the perceived discrepancy between the institutional penalties and the chances of getting caught. Table 9 highlights that none of the UK respondents considered cheating to be a serious problem at their previous university, while only 19% viewed teaching staff not handling instances of cheating uniformly. However, 38% of students did not consider teaching staff at their previous UK institution to try very hard to catch cheaters.

4.3.2 Exams as Memory Tests

One significant issue that arose across all the different non-UK different national groupings was how most students associated exams with being purely memory tests. This high reliance on memorising vast amounts of material and regurgitating it in exams was not only an explanation for why these students engaged in malpractice in exams, but also (and relatedly) why they saw exam assessments in their own country as being a futile exercise. For example an Indian student mentioned that in his undergraduate examinations, more marks were awarded when students regurgitated lecturers notes or the course textbook word for word as opposed to if they paraphrased them. Indeed, he said that the exam questions *“will ask us to repeat definitions word for word from the textbook.”* He went on to explain that they are not required to reference quotes or definitions in exams as it is assumed that it derives directly from the lecture notes or the textbook. The Chinese students provided similar views. They suggested that there was one book for each course and exams were designed so they allowed students to demonstrate how well they have memorised a textbook. Many of the Asian students considered the books to be out of date, and thus saw no intrinsic worth or interest in reading the textbook. This was an explanation raised by all non-UK students for why they felt that cheating was acceptable. For example, one Chinese student suggested *“sometimes it is not worth putting much effort when we just want to get the credit for the course – it is not important.”* Furthermore, students did not make any extensive use of a library, as there was no credit given for reading outside the course textbook.

The Greek students were particularly animated with regards to the futility of the examination processes. They too perceived exams as being purely memory tests. Greek students explained that often during their undergraduate education, they were required to memorise many pages of text word for word, or memorise fifty different mathematical formulae. They all agreed that this was ridiculous, as one Greek student illustrated, *“the point is that it is about knowing how to use them not memorise them.”* Indeed, he argued that due to the emphasis on memorising material, all Greek students were forced into a position where they had to cheat. Another student was even more vehement in his opposition to the Greek assessment methods noting that *“We did not believe in the system of grading due to the requirement to memorise formulae etc, it was stupid. We are required to memorise 600 pages of a text book.”*

One particular Greek student explained that even though he had studied and revised very hard for exams, he was not confident that he would pass or do well due to the nature of examinations in Greek universities. He explained that it is quite possible to still fail due to the amount of prose, facts, figures and formulae that students are required to commit to memory. He gave the example of previous exams requiring him to memorise pages of poetry in ancient Greek word for word or fifty mathematical formulae. It was on this basis that he felt cheating was justified.

		Asian	Chinese	Greek	UK
Action	Once or more	0%	30%	43%	0%
	Never	100%	70%	57%	100%
Moral Judgement	Not or trivial cheating	20%	30%	21%	0%
	Somewhat or very serious	80%	70%	79%	100%

Table 10 Using unpermitted crib notes (or cheat sheet) during a test/exam

The figure in table 10 also reinforces these qualitative views about exam malpractice. It highlights how 43% of Greek students admitted to using unpermitted crib notes during an exam, 30% of Chinese students admitted to this, while none of the UK and Asian students admitted to using them in an exam. With regards to none of the Asian students having used unpermitted crib notes, one student mentioned, that they did not take crib notes into an exam as that *“would be getting caught red-handed.”*

4.3.3 Reciprocity and exams

The issue of unpermitted collaboration during examinations was seen by all national groupings, other than the UK, to not only to have taken place in their previous institution, but also to be judged by many as not being serious. The Asian and Chinese students all said they knew it occurred in different forms, but did not respond readily when being interviewed. The most forthcoming national group once more were the Greeks, and perhaps as a consequence, once again surprised us with their comments. Greek students mentioned that they would frequently provide unpermitted help to each other during exams, as was graphically explained by one Greek student who mentioned, *“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."

When asked what individuals and education may lose when people cheat, then most students suggested that in the end it is the individual that loses out, as they do not learn anything, as one UK student mentioned, *"it is the cheat that loses out in terms of personal development. It is about gaining skills, and you do not gain them if you cheat."* However, one UK student said he felt aggrieved that some people could pass exams *without sacrificing* their social time, saying, *"it annoys me, as I adjust my life and work hard, and if others go out and enjoy themselves without working it is not fair."* Students from the rest of the world tended to agree with this view about marks, but were not as resentful as they saw cheating as being inevitable and in some cases necessary. In addition to this, one UK and one Chinese student suggested that if it becomes too pervasive it would devalue a university education, and lead to a poor reputation at course, faculty, university and higher education more broadly.

		Asian	Chinese	Greek	UK
Action	Once or more	20%	40%	14%	0%
	Never	80%	60%	86%	100%
Moral Judgement	Not or trivial cheating	60%	20%	14%	0%
	Somewhat or very serious	40%	80%	86%	100%

Table 11 Copying from another student during a test (or exam) without his or her knowledge

The questionnaire data contradicts the focus group data. As Table 11 indicates, copying from another student without their knowledge once or more was seen to be quite low or non-existent (UK) for all but the Chinese group (40%). This was despite 80% of the Chinese students judging this to be serious or somewhat serious. However that particular response must be considered cautiously in the light of their qualitative responses. In respect of copying from another student during a test with his or her knowledge, Table 12 below indicates that in contrast to the Chinese, though the Asian students do not copy from another student without their knowledge, 80% of Asian

students admitted to doing this, and significantly, 80% judged this to be trivial or not cheating.

		Asian	Chinese	Greek	UK
Action	Once or more	80%	20%	36%	0%
	Never	20%	80%	64%	100%
Moral Judgement	Not or trivial cheating	80%	30%	21%	6%
	Somewhat or very serious	20%	70%	79%	94%

Table 12 Copying from another student during a test with his or her knowledge.

		Asian	Chinese	Greek	UK
Action	Once or more	80%	40%	79%	0%
	Never	20%	60%	21%	100%
Moral Judgement	Not or trivial cheating	60%	50%	50%	6%
	Somewhat or very serious	40%	50%	50%	94%

Table 13 Helping someone else cheat on a test/exam

Table 12 highlights that 36% of Greek students admitted they have copied from another student once or more with their knowledge, even though 79% of them thought it was somewhat or very serious. However, Table 13 casts a different light on the issue of unpermitted collaboration during an exam. In relation to the Asian group, 80% admitted to helping someone else cheat once or more, which though is high, is consistent with the responses summarised in Table 12. However, double the number of both Chinese and Greek students admitted to helping someone else cheat once or more than admitted to copying from another student, even though 50% of them judged it to be a serious form of cheating. This questions whether the responses in Table 12 may in fact be higher.

This collaborative malpractice was partly explained during the focus groups by non-UK students to exams often being viewed as being meaningless exercises, but was also attributed to cultural norms of reciprocity. In essence, students helped each other so

they could later call for help on a subsequent assessments, 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 that copied did not get as high a mark as the person they copied it 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 the student copying did not get as high a mark. In relation to the UK students, they suggested copying from another in an exam or helping others during an exam was very serious and had never done this. Their responses to the questionnaires confirmed this, with 100% viewing all of these categories as being somewhat or very serious.

4.3.4 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 students were forced to cheat not only because of the reliance on memory or their meaninglessness, but also because they did not trust Greek academics to treat all students equally, saying *“sometimes I cheat because you know other people do so, other people do so with the professors 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 twelve Greek students who attended the focus group agreed with this, as did other Greek students and an academic that we subsequently asked. 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 memorise 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.”* This theme was not developed by any other grouping.

4.3.5 Importance of Examinations

The UK student body held the view that cheating in an exam is not acceptable. One explanation for this was that as the exam is the final assessment then students should have, *“an equal opportunity to prove themselves, cheating is something that is frowned upon.”* Another student agreed with this saying that people work hard for exams, and they are a very stressful period, which leads students to resent others that take crib notes into exams or cheat in some way. Another UK student said that the lecturer’s expectations are not as high with exams as they are with coursework, and thus students feel less pressure to cheat. In addition, as has already been explained, exams often carry a much higher weighting than coursework, and as such the risk of being caught cheating in exams was seen as being considerable by UK students. Though another UK student concurred with the above views she also added *“markers are well aware of degrees of plagiarism in coursework – while an exam they feel that you should do it alone.”*

4.4 Technology

Technology was thought to be an interesting theme to pursue in our research when investigating plagiarism in coursework. However, due to the limited coursework that students engaged in during their undergraduate education, this was again mainly an issue for UK students. However, two themes emerged, the role of the internet in coursework, and electronic detection in coursework.

British students suggested they made use of the Internet mainly for finding case studies, and company information pertaining to a particular academic topic. One student mentioned that many students were well aware that plagiarising from the web was easy to identify and as such those that did it were very stupid. One of the UK students was aware of a student at his previous institution who had *“taken his dissertation from the web.”* He laughed as he said that he and other students resented this, though by laughing indicated that he was still surprised the student had got away with it. All of the UK students mentioned they were careful to identify what they had copied and pasted from the web, but did recognise that for some students if they had language problems or were short of time then it could be tempting to pass it off as their own work.

The issue of patching was reintroduced at this point, and several students mentioned that some do keep a few windows open at one moment in time and copy and paste sections / paragraphs into the essay they are working on. They recognised that this could be dangerous in terms of not clearly identifying the work of others, or alternatively, very tempting in terms of passing it off as their own work. This was said to be most likely among foreign students due to their levels of language proficiency, or among students struggling to understand material, or merely due to time pressures.

As before, due to non-UK students having limited experience of coursework, we focus on their judgement of whether they considered using the internet to assist in plagiarising a paper to be serious or not.

		Asian	Chinese	Greek	UK
Action	Once or more	25%	44%	43%	6%
	Never	75%	56%	57%	94%
Moral Judgement	Not or trivial cheating	75%	60%	29%	19%
	Somewhat or very serious	25%	40%	71%	81%

Table 14 Plagiarizing a paper in any way using the Internet as a source.

Table 14 highlights that the Asian and Chinese students do not consider this to be very serious, while the UK students and the Greeks to a lesser extent consider it to be somewhat or very serious. For all groups, plagiarising material from the internet was seen by students to be a much less serious form of cheating than plagiarising from non-electronic sources (as indicated in Table 1). This suggests to some extent that the notion of ownership of intellectual property may be regarded as being more definitive with regards to non-electronic than electronic sources.

In addition, several Greek students that had also previously studied in the USA and the UK mentioned that at their previous institutions they had submitted work electronically which was then checked through plagiarist detection software. This they suggested acted as a significant deterrent, and implied that they supported this approach as it endeavoured to ensure uniformly.

4.5 Motivations for Cheating

This final section considers what may motivate students to cheat in exams or to plagiarise during their coursework assessments. Students suggested that this was due to pressures arising from attaining a certain level of marks, getting a job or their family.

Marks were seen by all respondents, but specifically the Asian and Chinese students to be the main motivation behind cheating. All Asian and Chinese students concurred that competition was fierce at their previous institutions. A student from India explained that it was particularly fierce in certain subjects such as law and medicine, where marks of around 90% were required for acceptance into the professions. He went on to explain that in other subjects such as commerce, gaining a high mark was only important if students wanted to gain entry onto a postgraduate course abroad. Otherwise student's satisfied by merely endeavouring to gain a pass mark, as there was not a correlation between high marks and job opportunities. This was due to the job market being based on personal contacts rather than the marks that students graduated with. However, it is worth noting that the particular student raising this point was from a well-connected family. The student from Pakistan viewed this link between grades, jobs and postgraduate study similarly.

However, in China, though high marks were seen as important so as to undertake an overseas postgraduate programme, they were also important in terms of finding a good job. Chinese students suggested that it was due to this that students felt they may need to cheat, as one Chinese student mentioned, *"marks mean everything when students have no work experience. Marks are the only thing that companies judge them on."* Greek students also saw marks as being vital for providing employment opportunities and in gaining places on overseas postgraduate courses. One Greek student explained that they are allowed to repeat a year and resist an exam as many times as they wish, which means that many Greek students write on a paper *"don't mark it if it does not get 8 or higher,"* indicating the importance for some in gaining a high mark. Interestingly, as the Chinese and Greek students viewed cheating to be endemic, they also felt compelled to cheat if they were to be able to get a good final mark. Indeed, Greek students suggested almost 100% of students had cheated once or more in exams. For those that would

not cheat, they felt they had to work even harder to get higher legitimate marks than those students who were cheating.

	Asian	Chinese	Greek	UK
from parents or other family	40%	50%	29%	29%
to get into a graduate program	40%	60%	62%	64%

Table 15 Pressures that motivate students to get good grades

Table 15 supports the views of the students with regards to the pressures they encountered to get into a graduate programme, highlighting that 60% of Chinese, 62% of Greek and 64% of UK students saw this as being fairly or very important. When asked about family pressure to get high marks, this was seen to be especially significant among the Asian and Chinese students, where 40% of Asian students and 50% of Chinese students saw family pressures as being fairly or very important.

Time has already been discussed as one reason why students may unintentionally plagiarise, but it was also seen as being an important point why, when desperate due to impending submission deadlines, students felt that their only option was to plagiarise. Further to this, some students cited the high expectations they perceived academics to have with regards to their coursework assessments was seen by some to explain why students felt they needed to plagiarise to either pass or gain a high mark. Further to postgraduate opportunities, job opportunities and family pressures, students also cited two other pressures that motivated them to get high marks. First, several students attributed cheating in exams or plagiarising coursework to ability or proficiency with the specific subject area. Second, proficiency in English was also cited as one of the key reasons why students plagiarised. Other than the above, the final, and perhaps most pessimistic of all explanations was that some students were lazy, and always wanted to find the easiest route through the assessment process.

5 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS WITH PARTICULAR FOCUS ON PLAGIARISM

5.1 Introduction

We now want to turn to the discussion of some of the themes that emerge from our data. This discussion will also draw on our ongoing discussion with students in our post-graduate programmes—in particular the skills sessions as well as the Director’s session we had with the students once a week. Thus, in this section we hope to also reflect on the issue within a broader context of ongoing concern of plagiarism as it manifests itself in teaching practice.

In considering this data, and in our interaction with students, we believe it is important to refrain from ‘moralising’ the issue of plagiarism. The reasons why students engage in plagiarist practices are both subtle and complex. Our empirical understandings highlighted that many students, if not most, who engage in some form of plagiarist practice may not be intentionally attempting to defraud the system. Furthermore, we do find that much of the literature on plagiarism tends to be polemical in this regard. Commentators on plagiarism treat the issue of plagiarism as self-evident and intentional and therefore tend to concentrate on how and why a student falls from grace, how to detect such instances, and how to discipline those in the wrong. These studies often draw their rhetorical force “on the assumption that no reader is likely to come forward in defense of any position which might be construed as favorable to plagiarism” (Scollon, 1995, p.4). In this regard this report does not intend to denounce or to defend plagiarism as such. Rather, the aim is to try very hard to *understand* the complex network of actors and conditions involved in practices construed to be plagiaristic. Furthermore, it is our view that it is vital for us to take the very concept of plagiarism in a critical manner as contested rather than as self-evident. We need to accept as a starting point that “the concept of plagiarism is fully embedded within a social, political, and cultural matrix that cannot be meaningfully separated from its interpretation (Scollon, 1995, p.23). In our discussion below we hope to show that such a stand is indeed necessary for us to make sense of cultural differences when it comes to plagiarism.

Thus this discussion section is structured as follows. First, we will attempt to open the landscape on ‘plagiaristic’ behaviour. We will show that it is important to reflect on the notion of ‘intentional’ when it comes to judging plagiarism. Second, we will discuss how cultural differences play into the notion of intentional, creating a complex sense of ‘why students plagiarise’. In particular, we will focus on the question of plagiarism and alienation—which we believe is central to understanding the plagiaristic behaviour of students from culturally diverse backgrounds.

5.2 Opening up the landscape

One of the problems with plagiarism is that we often, in practice, use one category to cover a very diverse set of practices (Howard, p.474). In trying to ‘disentangle’ the diversity of issues and practices involved, academic commentators and disciplinary committees often refer to two dimensions of any plagiarised piece of work: the degree of plagiarism involved (minor or major) and the nature of the intentionality involved (unintentional versus intentional), as indicated in Table 16 below. Commentators often argue that many cases of minor plagiarism arise due to poor study skills, sloppy writing practices and cryptomnesia (forgetting the origin of ideas). They see this form of plagiarism as being mostly unintentional in nature. They argue that it is possible to ‘understand’ this ‘soft’ form of plagiarism and that it can and should be addressed through appropriate guidance and support (Decoo, 2002; Harris, 2001; Lathrop, 2000).

For them the ugly face of plagiarism is work that displays major or relatively major—and by implication intentional—acts of plagiarism. Commentators tend to see such cases as being worthy of sanction and discipline. They argue that it is very difficult to be sympathetic to these cases. It is our argument that this taxonomy is too limited and does not reflect the diversity of instances we tend to encounter. Our particular concern is with the nature of intentionality assumed in such an argument. The prevailing assumption within accounts on plagiarism is that major or relatively major cases of plagiarism are intentional and that the intentionality at work is driven by a desire to somehow cheat or defraud the system. This may be so in some cases, however, we would argue that there are many instances of student work that one may judge as being relatively major where the overarching desire is *not to cheat* at all. Furthermore, in those cases viewed as being minor, it is equally difficult to judge the intent behind these lesser acts of plagiarism. Again, these polemical classifications do not help understand why students plagiarise.

Nature of the intentionality	Degrees of plagiarism		
	Weak case (Minor)		Strong Case (Major)
Unintentional / Unconscious	Poor writing practice Cryptomnesia		Unlikely to occur
Intentional <i>Coping with Unfamiliar Pedagogical and Writing Practices</i>	Patchwriting	Insufficient citations Borrowing words Patchwriting	Possible but unlikely
<i>Fraudulent Behaviour</i>	Unlikely to occur		Highly likely
	Cultural differences Pedagogical model Learning Style Modes of assessment Institutional practices Moral ambiguity of plagiarism Ideology of plagiarism		

Table 16: An expanded landscape of plagiarism

From the perspective of the overseas student, we would argue that there are two major influences at work that make such a necessary interpretation doubtful. First, based on the insights students provided on their previous practice with coursework, and especially examinations, we would argue that it is also possible that one explanation why we may engage in plagiarist practice is as a consequence of them endeavoring to *cope* with unfamiliar pedagogical and writing practices. The practices that overseas students engage in while studying in the UK, are based on a set of expectations and values quite alien to those encountering them. Once one becomes more familiar with the teaching and assessment practices our foreign students are familiar with in their own country, it is clear that there is a huge gap between the practices that served them well in their previous institutions and the expectations that we have of them within the British higher education context. For example direct ‘word for word’ memorization and recall is seen as an expression of ability and highly valued. In the British context it is often seen as intellectual immaturity. Second, these coping strategies already operate within a background

worldview in which the western notion of plagiarism, and the values supporting it, are not at all evident to these foreign students. Together these two mediating influences may lead to a situation where foreign students intentionally engage in practices we may deem as plagiarism and not ‘see’ them as such—even if they have a definition of what plagiarism is. In fact they may find our condemnation of their practices quite alien. In Table 16 above we attempt to depict this expanded landscape of plagiarism, which we hope to clarify further in the discussion to follow.

It is our argument that it is obviously difficult in practice to judge the nature of the intentionality at work—and we are not suggesting that this can and should be done as such. However, we are suggesting that if we address the reasons why foreign students turn to seemingly plagiarist practices to cope, then we will be more confident that our initial judgment that “major and intentional” means “attempting to cheat” might be more valid. Thus, our argument is that if we show that we understand why they might find themselves plagiarizing according to our definition and practices; if we show that we understand why they might often turn to ‘plagiarism’ as a coping strategy; if we show that we do not treat plagiarism merely as a set of rules and associated penalties; and finally, if we show a willingness to support them to develop appropriate writing practices, then we will be more confident that those that continue to plagiarise are indeed trying to cheat us all. Then we will be more confident in the justice of our disciplinary procedures.

In order to understand how ‘plagiarism’ can be intentional but not an attempt to cheat we will need to take a closer look at how cultural differences could potential play out in writing practices.

5.3 Making sense of cultural differences

Before turning to the discussion of cultural differences, and the way these may mediate certain practices, we want to make it clear that we do not want to present these differences as essential in any stereotypical manner—i.e. being typical Western, Eastern, British, Chinese, Greek, etc. We want to acknowledge that there are huge amounts of diversity in all cultures and that the notion of ‘culture’ is itself a contested category. We do not want to suggest that it is somehow acceptable for students from other cultures to plagiarise and that we should accept this simply because they are

different. We are rather hoping to open up a space for debate and reflection on the different ways in which these differences may play themselves out in the particular students we are confronted with. We want to point out that these foreign students come with practices and values that may be very different to our own and that this may lead them take what we say, and expect of them, in ways that may be very different to our own understandings. Each and every case will be unique in ways that are likely to transcend such crude notions such as culture.

5.3.1 The ideology of plagiarism

If we accept that the concept of plagiarism is fully embedded within a social, political, and cultural framework as Scollon (1995) has argued, then what are the cultural practices and values that inform our students' views of plagiarism? Obviously, it would be impossible to outline these for all possible contexts. However we do have one such an analysis that has been widely cited. This is the excellent article written by Pennycook (1996). Pennycook traces the question of authorship (and the attribution of authorship) as it shifts from God as the only author in the premodern era to the emergence of the modern creative individual in the modern, and finally, to the 'death' of the author in the postmodern. If we accept that the majority view is still a modern one then he notes that even in this view the matter is not quite settled. This is clear from the highly prestigious list of plagiarists one might be confronted with, these include Martin Luther King, Samuel Coleridge, Laurence Sterne and Helen Keller amongst others. Are these authors simply immoral cheats or are the significant anomalies that destabilize the integrity of the notion of originality and authorship? He concludes, quoting Lensmire and Beals, that in a postmodern era we have realized that "our words are always someone else's words first; and these words sound with the intonations and evaluations of others who have used them before, and from whom we have learned them" (p.211). Not only have our notions of originality and authorship become contested, our writing practices (or at least those of the word-processing generation) have also been transformed. Cutting and pasting is now a common form of writing practice in which many diverse sources are woven together into a new text. These shifts in our own notions of originality and writing practices are clear in some of the comments made by all students:

- *[Often] it was something that you thought of already, but the person who has written it has written it in a better way than you could [so you just copy it in]*

- *It [the copied text] is a mistake that you have just copied in.*
- *[It is not how much you copy but] when it is controlling what you are writing*

The most interesting part of Pennycook’s paper is when he turns to the Chinese form of learning by memorisation and the borrowing of words. He argues that the Chinese view of language is quite different to 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). In such a view altering the exact expression of something *is* altering the reality of the world itself. Also capturing the exact expression—through meticulous memorisation—is capturing the reality as such. Though our data did not represent this point as eloquently as Pennycook, several Chinese students said that ... Furthermore, the Indian, Greek, Thai and Pakistani students reinforced this... Once a western representational view of language is set aside one can start to understand the importance that memorisation and the use of exact expressions plays in this particular way of understanding and knowing the world.

Although Pennycook provides a rich and interesting account of the cultural ladenness of our notion of authorship, memory and plagiarism he does not help us much to explain why plagiarism and other forms of cheating seems to be so prevalent in the Greek group in our case study. We believe we can provide a possible interpretation for this data that will also add to, and further elaborate, the account already provided.

5.3.2 Alienation and coping

It is our hypothesis that cheating in assessments for many students, and particularly the non-UK students often become attractive as a possible ‘script’ to follow in situations where students have become alienated from the process, purpose and meaning of the assessment. This alienation is characterised by a situation in which the intrinsic reasons for assessment, namely self development and learning, is completely displaced by externally imposed reasons such as judgement, competition, discipline, regulation and award. In the extreme case this alienation could imply a situation in which the assessment is so ‘preconfigured’—due to politics, bias, etc.—that the outcome becomes completely meaningless and any cheating behaviour becomes

potentially morally justifiable. The Chinese students, but most notably the Greek students explained this to be the case. One can see such a the 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 memorise 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.”

It is this condition of alienation that is common to all the students in our case study. It also helps us to see why there can be such a paradoxical situation that although students believe cheating is wrong they still engage in it in quite and extensive way, as in clear from our data particularly among the non-UK students. The source of the alienation may be very different but the outcome is often the same. It seems that as the sense of alienation increase the students feel increasingly justified to cheat—indeed in such conditions cheating becomes so morally ambiguous as to become widespread (as was seen in the data of the Greek students above).

Thus, if we want to address the issue of plagiarism (and academic malpractice) we need to address the systemic conditions of alienation. As major actors in the network it is as much our responsibility to address these conditions as it is the students responsibility to respond to such attempts. In the absence of favourable conditions—which will obviously always be present to some degree—we see the students cope with their alienation in a variety of ways. Let us consider some of these in more detail.

5.4 Teaching and alienation

As was highlighted in the previous section, it is clear that most foreign students, especially those from Asia, arriving at UK universities are more familiar with a ‘textbook based’ teaching approach. In an Asian environment the lectures systematically covers the material in the textbook. The assessment is normally an examination in which the student must demonstrate that they can recall all relevant material from the textbook and the lecture notes—often verbatim. All the non-UK students explained this to be the case to varying extents, as was exemplified by an Indian student, who said, the exam questions *“will ask us to repeat definitions word for*

word from the textbook.” The level of interpretation, evaluation and commentary expected from the student is often minimal or non-existent. The underlying explanation for this is the teacher is taken to be the authority and therefore the only one authorised to have an interpretation. It is important that we understand this mode of teaching within the context of Pennycook’s comments above, not as inferior but as different, and as such are only rendered visible when transplanted from their local context of practice, and rebedded in the UK, or western context of academic integrity.

When faced with education in the UK, in contrast to their history of relying on one textbook, we expect students—especially at postgraduate level—to gain their understanding of a topic from a multitude of sources (journals, books, internet papers, case studies, etc) expressed in the reading list. We expect them to be able to read the material and distil from it the important points, arguments and issues, i.e. we expect them to be able to evaluate the material with regard to content, relevance and appropriateness. We expect them to be able to judge the ‘authority’ of a particular source, for example that a paper in a peer-reviewed journal would tend to have more authority than a paper on the Internet or even a chapter in a book. Thus, we expect them to know that ‘who’ said it, and ‘where’ it was said, is as important, if not more so, as ‘what’ was said. We expect them to give a critical account of the literature and to be able to formulate their own position, with regard to the material, which they must be able to justify. Valid justifications need to provide clear evidence of critical evaluations and reference to appropriate sources. We often expect them to present and justify these views openly through discussion and questioning in a group or lecture context. Furthermore, for the good students we expect them to move beyond the reading list, which most will already consider to be extensive. To find their own sources, evaluate them critically and incorporate them in an appropriate manner into their arguments is something culturally unfamiliar to them.

It is clear that completely different sets of skills are called for in these two approaches. In this situation the typical foreign student will often find himself or herself in a situation where they have a huge skills deficit. As the teaching term progresses and the expectations and workload increases the sense of alienation is likely to deepen.

Though our empirical discussions focussed on their experiences solely in their own country, the discussion often drifted into their experiences since arriving in Lancaster—concerns were also expressed in the skills and tutorial sessions. To summarise: they suggested that as they started to tackle the reading lists they became overwhelmed. They felt they lacked the reading skills to deal with the material effectively. They often started reading all of it ‘as if it were textbooks’, panicking at the prospect of having to recall *all of it* at some point in time. For example, they simply could not make judgements about ‘core’ material and ‘peripheral’ material. Thus, their uncritical reading strategies did not allow them to make the evaluations and distinctions we expected of them—they tended to view everything as equally important and equally relevant simply because it was on the reading list. They often struggled to formulate a view of their own without grabbing back to the supposed authority of the text. They often lacked the confidence to express and defend their own views. Thus, their views ended up as an indiscriminate stringing together of arguments—often verbatim—from a diversity of texts on the reading list without critical evaluation. In our view they turned into serial plagiarists. The evidence of this surfaces as the start submitting their first writing assessments—often quite late in the term when other factors such as workload are beginning to take affect.

5.5 Writing and alienation

In the UK, we typically expect a significant part of the assessment of a course to be some form of writing such as a critical review of reading material or an essay. For most our overseas students this is not familiar ground, as our data indicated. Most of them do not do any academic writing in the programmes. In fact most “*had never heard the word plagiarism before coming to Lancaster*”. It is not difficult to imagine that if you come from an institution that has a textbook based teaching model and assessments based on a ‘recall’ type examination that such a written form of assessment would be very difficult and very daunting indeed. If you add to this the issue of language, not just ordinary linguistic competence, but the ability to master *disciplinary academic language*, then one can see that such a task would tend to overwhelm the foreign student. Based on the focus group discussion, it seems that as the mismatch between their skills and the complexity of the task becomes evident their anxiety increases. This high level of anxiety not only inhibits their potential for learning but also limits their ability to deal

with this in a creative manner. In his work Csikszentmihalyi (1991) has shown that one can only be creative in the experience of 'flow' where there is a reasonable match between your skills and the expectations of the task. Clearly in the case of the foreign student this is mostly not the case. Add to this other things such as family pressures and financial pressures as well as a history of success in a different teaching approach, then it is easy to image the sort of pressure and anxiety they may feel. This is often manifested in the students insistence on the identification of the exact text, reference or books that are important or relevant as well as the inappropriate use of terms and phrases they deem important. When it comes to the writing tasks and assessments they tend to deal with this anxiety and sense of alienation by turning to a number of writing practices that may be more or less acceptable to us (Howard, 1993). Let us review some of these.

Patchwriting: Howard (1993) defines patchwriting as "copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym-substitutes" (p. 213). She argues 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). They understand how important it is to 'speak' like the teachers and the people they read to be accepted into the community. Is this type of writing plagiarism? Howard argues, following Hull and Rose (1989) that this form of writing is a legitimate attempt to "interact with the text, relate it to your own experiences, derive your own meaning from it" (p. 150). Something most writers do in unfamiliar contexts. It is indeed how we all learn by mimicking or copying others considered to be exemplary. It is well known that when one is not confident in a language one often knows and uses the language at the 'phrase' level rather than at the word level, as one might not have the confidence to construct the meaning from the 'bottom up' as it were. Obviously this will also be true for the use of an academic English as opposed to the everyday English, which most of our foreign students are somewhat familiar with when they arrive. Equally, it seems incorrect to assume that such patchwriting does not imply a serious attempt to make sense of the material, as 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 we not consider patchwriting as a legitimate pedagogical step towards becoming a competent ‘speaker’ of academic English in the academic community? As Pennycook (1996) comments 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 fix canon of terminology to go with it” (p.213). Indeed one could ask what other means are available for them to both progress to competency, and be seen to be using the language of the subject, but a sort of patchwriting?

Insufficient citations and the borrowing words: One may respond by saying that they should at least then cite and use quotation marks—as we normally do. Why is this not evident to them or why don’t they do it? One answer could be that they are aware that we expect of them to develop their own views on matters and since they lack the skills to do it they would rather use a source they believe already has the authority and then not cite it. Another interpretation, as argued by Pennycook (1996), could be that this form of citing is a very particular western type of writing practice. This view is also further elaborated by a Japanese professor in the work by Dryden (1999), she explains: “students are supposed to show how well they can understand several books and digest them in a report or a paper. They aren’t asked for original ideas or opinions. They are simply asked to show a beautiful patchwork...as long as you mention all the books in your bibliography, you can present the ideas from the books as if they were yours, especially if your patchwork is beautiful” (p. 80). The notion of a ‘beautiful patchwork’ may seem strange to us but it clearly seems to be quite unproblematic to our foreign students and the institutions they come from. For example a Greek student mentioned, “*taking a bit here and there helps with getting meaning across. Paraphrasing if you are not a native speaker is difficult.*” Furthermore, as the UK student suggested above, it still presents an opportunity to learn, when “*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.*” One could also argue that in a ‘cut and paste’ style of writing a ‘beautiful patchwork’ may indeed be something to be valued. It is not just students that feel they need to ‘borrow words’. In our focus group discussions our students often commented on the degree of

similarity between academic papers. It is also clear from the comments of foreign scientists below that this is a widespread coping practice (Myers, 1998):

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

After working hard in research, locally trained researchers with poor English writing skill still need to struggle very hard for translating their research findings into English. It is even more disappointing when their papers are probably rejected simply because of writing problems. As a result, imitating the "sentence structures" from well-written papers seems a good way to escape from the writing problems. (from a Taiwanese computer scientist)

5.6 Fairness and alienation

One aspect that is very evident from our case study is the issue of fairness. It operates on many levels simultaneously. If the context, process or content of the assessment is seen as unfair students generally feel justified cheating. As the Greek students commented: “*Why should I try not to cheat when even the professors are cheating behind my back. The competition was unfair from the start.*” However, even in cheating there is also a sense of fairness operating. One student said he will “*just [make] one or two random errors so they [the ones benefiting from cheating] did not get the same mark.*” Equally, those who do not engage in these practices at all often feel a sense of unfairness with the situation: “*it annoys me, as I adjust my life and work hard, others go out and enjoy themselves without working—It is not fair.*”

If there is indeed a sense in which students feel justified to engage in cheating practices in a situation perceived as unfair then we need to ask ourselves if such conditions exist, especially for the foreign students. One could argue that their situation is one that is unfair from the start. In many respects we determine all the rules of the game. The relations of power are substantially and systemically asymmetrical. They 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. This sense of powerlessness is captured well by this Korean engineer’s comments (Meyers, 1998):

I have learned English since I was in junior high school until now. This is 15 years after I started to learn English. Whenever I have a problem in English, I felt the same feelings as the slaves in the ancient period might did. The slaves might have an idea that if I were born in royal family, what would happen to me?

It seems clear that we should continue to interrogate and be critical of the sort of conditions we impose on our foreign students. Are our expectations of them fair? What are we doing to level the playing field?

6 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this report we have tried to show that the issue of plagiarism is not simply a matter of cheating or not cheating. We have shown that the practices we deem plagiaristic are often the outcome of many diverse and complex influences, especially for the overseas student, but also for all students who are not familiar with a particular academic discipline. On the one hand, the ideological basis of the notion of plagiarism and the alienation from the assessment task (due to learning skills, language, perceived unfairness, etc.) could potentially provide ample moral resources for students to feel justified when they engage in practices we deem plagiarism. On the other hand, when students make a sincere attempt to cope with the situation by engaging in practices such as patchwriting and the borrowing of words they may be further alienated by our attempts to impose rigid categories of judgement and sanction. Such attempts could further alienate, leading to an increased sense powerlessness and of being justified in the first place.

6.1 Some Implications

6.1.1 More research required

Clearly our research, due to its limited scope, is provisional and merely indicative of the issues at stake that may be generalisable. There is still much work to do. For example more detailed ethnographic studies of writing practices might help us to understand how 'cut and paste' writing and patchwriting are used to construct arguments. We need to understand what sort of learning is involved and how to develop steps to help the students move on to independent writing practices. We need to gain a much better understanding of the skill gap that foreign students arrive with. We also need a better understanding of the ways in which students become alienated from the assessment task. It seems that if we were serious about plagiarism it would be necessary for us to abandon the rhetorical and ideological stances and do more detailed research to understand the operation of these practices. Nonetheless, it is important to conduct research into the cultural assumptions that overseas students arrive in the UK with.

6.1.2 Addressing alienation

It seems that it is our task to do whatever we can to limit the alienation from the assessment task. If we succeed in doing this we will be more confident that the cases of plagiarism that do emerge are more likely to be those that are trying to defraud us, or at least to further their understanding of the western cultural expectations, and how they can respond to this. We need to develop a broader understanding of the skills students have when they arrive. This means having a better understanding of how they were previously taught and assessed. We also need to develop the infrastructure to support them in making the transition to an often radically different set of expectations and skills required. We need to communicate our expectations, explain the logic and values it is based on, and check that the students have the resources to develop the skills they require to meet these expectations.

We need to provide ongoing support to develop their linguistic competence, not only in everyday English but, more importantly, also in academic English. The latter (and the former to a lesser extent) also applies to UK students. We also need to develop the academic writing skills of the students. We need to acknowledge that patchwriting is a legitimate step towards developing the skills necessary for the independent articulation of a 'voice'. In this regard we must take careful note of the plagiarism detection technology we employ. For example the 'digital fingerprinting' algorithms that support services such as *Turnitin* will most certainly detect patchwriting as instances of plagiarism. If these outcomes are not carefully scrutinised and treated with caution we may indeed risk branding many 'coping' strategies as outright plagiarism.

Obviously the most basic thing we can and should do is to set meaningful assessment tasks. Tasks that are seen by the students as an opportunity to learn rather than ones that are seen as merely meeting the expectation of some externally imposed logic of judgement, competition, discipline, regulation or award. Within this context we must also be aware and be realistic about the workloads we impose on students.

6.1.3 Plagiarism as an inherent part of teaching and learning

In our view the most important implication of our research is that we need to treat plagiarism as an inherent part of the teaching and learning process rather than *as a*

disease that we would like to ignore or be rid of. We need to be open, honest and frank with our students about it—even to the point of admitting that these practices are also present in academics writing. This fact does not escape the vigilant students' attention—especially those practised at memorisation as one student commented: *“Sometimes in articles I have found exactly the same words by different authors, it is as if these authors are also plagiarising.”* We need to tell them that we do understand that the issue of plagiarism is fully embedded within a social, political, and cultural framework, as Scollon (1995) has argued. We need to show them that we understand their anxiety and sense of alienation. We need to make explicit that we see patchwriting and borrowing of words as a legitimate step towards independence. That they can freely discuss it with us and ask support to move beyond it. We need to teach them how they can use patchwriting, borrowing of words, and paraphrasing as ways towards developing independence of thought.

6.1.4 A Supportive Institutional framework

Our conversations with the students suggests that a supportive institutional framework that is seen to be fair and applied consistently can be a very effective vehicle to develop students and deal with plagiarism intended to cheat. However, it seems important that we require an institutional framework that supports rather than alienates. Our institutional framework must be sensitive to the issue of culture and alienation. It would be very unfortunate if our judgements about students within an institutional framework becomes an additional and final humiliation of a student already within such a asymmetrical power relationship. We must be careful that our dealing with plagiarism does not become a form of cultural imperialism that finally excludes the Other, not like us.

Having said this it seems evident that the amount of resources that academics have available to deal with the issues raised in this report is obviously limited. Our institutional framework must also take into account their already precarious situation. Nevertheless, we cannot continue to charge foreign students large amounts of money in tuition fees and not take their needs into account. We have a moral obligation to treat every other (than us) as always already Other and not violate them through our categories and systems of ordering.

7 References

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