



## Pandora's box: academic perceptions of student plagiarism in writing

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### Abstract

Plagiarism is viewed by many academics as a kind of Pandora's box<sup>1</sup>—the elements contained inside are too frightening to allow escape for fear of the havoc that may result. Reluctance by academic members of staff to discuss student plagiarism openly may contribute to the often untenable situations we, as teachers, face when dealing with student plagiarism issues. In this article, I examine the dilemmas English for Academic Purposes (EAP) staff face when dealing with student plagiarism in the tertiary classroom. The perceptions of all 11 teachers involved in teaching a first year EAP writing subject at South-Coast University<sup>2</sup> are detailed in light of the university's policy on plagiarism. My research indicates that not only is an agreed definition of plagiarism difficult to reach by members of staff teaching the same subject, but plagiarism is a multi-layered phenomenon encompassing a spectrum of human intention. Evaluating the spectrum can lead to differences in the implementation of university plagiarism policy, the result of which embodies issues of equity. The aim of the article is to encourage policy-makers and academic staff to acknowledge the concerns about implementation of plagiarism policy. Collaborative, cross-disciplinary re-thinking of plagiarism is needed to reach workable solutions.

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*Keywords:* EAP writing classrooms; Plagiarism; Teacher perceptions; University; Policy

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<sup>1</sup> From Pandora's box "there issued from it a multitude of evils and distempers, which dispersed themselves all over the world, and which, from that fatal moment have never ceased to afflict the human race" Lempriere (1864, p. 450).

<sup>2</sup> The names of individuals and institutions have been changed for the sake of anonymity.

## 1. Plagiarism: a cross-disciplinary approach

Plagiarism is a cross-disciplinary issue. Legal disciplinary studies have contributed to the understanding of the ways in which the concepts of misconduct and punishment have been applied to plagiarism, under the copyright umbrella of legislation. Cultural studies and second language writing research have also contributed to the increasing body of knowledge about plagiarism. This study is a cross-disciplinary examination of plagiarism, as my own background and that of some of the teachers is both ESL and Law. For myself, there are clear parallels in the way in which plagiarism is viewed from an EAP and legal perspective.

Mallon (1989, p. 6) explains plagiarism derives from the Latin term *plagium*, meaning *theft or literary adoption of the thought or works of another* and concludes that a plagiarist is “a thief in literature; one who steals the thoughts or writings of another” (Mallon, p. 11). Thus plagiarism is presented as kidnapping the words of others, as a child is kidnapped from a parent. Indeed, the English ‘Statute of Anne’ of 1709<sup>3</sup> legalized an author’s claim of proprietary rights over his literary work, as he was in the position of *father* or *begetter* of the work and the text itself was the *child*. The concept that words could be kidnapped or misappropriated with legal recrimination, saw the legal birth of ownership or authorial rights over literary work and with it, the notion of plagiarism. Although the term plagiarism itself is not embodied in law, university plagiarism policies reflect an institutional legislative stance by including words such as *wrongful*, *stealing*, *misappropriating* and *taking* to describe using of work of another and attributing it to oneself. A closer examination of the nexus between legal and EAP notions of plagiarism is warranted.

## 2. Plagiarism: a legal perception

The idea that plagiarism is a wrongful perhaps even a criminal act, intended to harm another author is aligned to the way in which copyright legislation penalises breaches of the copyright law. Where a person fails to give correct attribution to the original author, Australian legislation<sup>4</sup> makes it clear that there is wrongdoing by the perpetrator and that a violation of moral property rights to the literary work has occurred. This notion is paralleled in England<sup>5</sup> and in the United States.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, copyright as an international area of law has been embraced by many nations since the oldest international agreement on copyright, the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works of 1886, was propounded (WIPO, 1886). This agreement has been signed by 119 nations, including China and many other South-East Asian countries. Signatory nations to the Berne Convention agree to comply and uphold international copyright protections and regulations for authorship. Thus Mallon’s (1989) portrayal of a plagiarist as a ‘thief’ is supported by international legislative penalties for breaches of copyright (Sutherland-Smith, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Statute of Queen Anne, 1709 (c. XIX) s.1.

<sup>4</sup> Copyright Act 1968 (C’th) s.10; Copyright Amendment (Moral Rights) Act 2000 (C’th) s. 190.

<sup>5</sup> Copyright Act 1814 (54 Geo. 3) s. 56.

<sup>6</sup> Constitution of the United States of America 1787 (Art. 1, 8, cl.18); Copyright Act 1976 (Title 17 US Code).

This stance is not only supported historically in law, but is supported by university regulations governing plagiarism policy. As [Jaszi \(1994\)](#) points out:

The stakes are high in disciplinary actions against students accused of intramural offenses against authorship. Indeed, our institutions underline the seriousness of these proceedings by giving them the form, as well as some of the content, of legal actions for violations of copyright law. (p. 29)

Educational institutions have seized on legal notions of copyright protection and included them in plagiarism regulations. Such policies in universities across Australia, the UK and the USA, conceive of plagiarism in terms of academic misconduct deserving of punishment ([Pecorari, 2002](#)).

### 3. Plagiarism: an ESL perception

Second language teachers, however, perceive plagiarism quite differently to their colleagues in law. A number of research studies undertaken in tertiary classrooms around the globe characterize perceptions of plagiarism both by students and teachers. Some studies survey the attitudes of students towards plagiarism and academic dishonesty ([Dant, 1986](#); [Deckert, 1993](#); [Drum, 1986](#); [Kroll, 1988](#); [Matalene, 1985](#); [Myers, 1998](#); [Pennycook, 1996](#)). Other studies attempted to ascertain teaching methods to overcome the problem of plagiarism in student writing ([Belcher, 1995](#); [Bloch & Chi, 1995](#); [Braine, 1995](#); [Howard, 1995, 1999](#)). These studies found that there were widely differing conceptions of plagiarism by students, staff and institutions.

Early studies such as those of [Dant \(1986\)](#) and [Kroll \(1988\)](#) concluded that students had differing notions of plagiarism which ranged from considering copying text as a legitimate activity to plagiarism as a moral wrong. [Matalene \(1985\)](#) argues that broader understandings of non-Western writing traditions are necessary. She asserts that “ethnocentrism is a less and less appropriate response, we need to understand and appreciate rhetorical systems that are different from our own” (p. 790), based on interview data from 50 undergraduate Chinese students at Shanxi Daxue University. Similarly, [Myers \(1998, p. 13\)](#) contends that traditional Western notions of plagiarism “splinter on close examination...and a new order is needed.” This order is inclusive of the writing traditions of non-Western backgrounds.

[Sherman \(1992\)](#) noted that first year students in an Italian university gave verbatim answers without analysis or sourcing. She observed that “what we all saw as plagiarism, they clearly saw as not only legitimate but correct and proper” (1992, p. 191). Sherman concluded Italians value mimetic practice in written text whilst promoting oral debate for spoken text. Interestingly, Sherman’s study highlights the fact that strategies such as rote learning and recounting tracts of text from the original are seen not only as acceptable, but desired. [Bloch and Chi \(1995\)](#) agree that cultural traditions shape preferred writing styles. They state that “each form of rhetoric reflects the cultural traditions in which it is developed” in their study of Chinese students’ use of citations in academic writing (p. 271). The authors add that simplistic views of

Western and Eastern views of differences in citation methods should be cautioned and that “Chinese rhetoric is as complex and ever changing as is Western rhetoric” (p. 271). Deckert’s (1993) survey of 170 first year Chinese students’ attitude to plagiarism makes similar findings. He notes, “the student is simply pursuing the writing task in a manner consistent with her educational background and broader cultural experience” (p. 95). It is in this sense that the student is engaging in what Deckert terms “learned plagiarism” (p. 95). Although supporting the idea that cultural context influenced his students’ writing, he added:

They are the proverbial rote memorizers or recyclers. In other words, egocentric concerns of learning well and feeling right about oneself together far exceed concern for either the college, the original writer, one’s own classmates, or one’s relationship with the teacher. (p. 140)

This conclusion drew criticism from Pennycook (1996), who suggests that Deckert (1993) operated within Western notions of value within academic writing. Pennycook considers that Western notions of plagiarism are not cross-culturally applicable. He argues that in cultures where rote learning and huge feats of memory are regarded as displaying intellectual superiority, that notions of Western citation styles are inapplicable or inappropriate. Pennycook claims that Deckert’s Western framing of the notion of plagiarism and ownership of authorial work has been protected by laws of intellectual property. He observes that:

Given the emphasis on the creative individual as producer and owner of his or her thoughts, it seems that the borrowing of words is often discussed in terms of *stealing* (author’s emphasis) of committing a crime against the author of a text. This particular connection presumably has its origins in the peculiarly Western conjunction between the growth of the notion of human rights and the stress on individual property, thus making the reuse of language already used by others a crime against the inalienable property rights of the individual. (1996, p. 214)

Pennycook’s view that Western notions of plagiarism are merely one way of viewing the issue has received widespread support from other academics, particularly those writing in the cross-cultural studies area. Shen (1989) observes, when he was instructed to “write what you think and be yourself” when learning English in the USA, that:

To be truly myself, which I knew was the key to my success in learning English composition, meant not to be my Chinese self at all. That is to say, when I write in English I have to wrestle with and abandon (at least temporarily) the whole system of ideology which previously defined me in myself...I had to put aside an ideology of collectivism and adopt the values of individualism. (p. 461)

Many academics (Angelil-Carter, 2000; Howard, 1995, 1999, 2000, 2002; Lunsford & Ede, 1994; Pennycook, 1996; Scollon, 1994; Woodmansee & Jaszi, 1995) consider that plagiarism is not a simple matter of ascertaining whether text was copied or not by students without attribution. There are deeper issues underlying such practices, which will be explored in this paper.

## 4. The study

The aims of the study were to explore the perceptions of plagiarism by 11 EAP teachers at South-Coast University. Specifically, these EAP professionals teach an introductory writing subject in the Faculty of Business and Law. A further aim was to probe the EAP staff's attitude to the university plagiarism policy and their experiences in its implementation.

### 4.1. Data collection

Data were collected during Semester One 2002, from the 11 EAP staff who teach the subject *Writing for Academic Success* at South-Coast University. The subject is a preparatory academic skills unit for first year international students in the Faculty of Business and Law. Its aim is to prepare students for academic writing tasks such as case study reports and research essays as well as legal and business citation methods. The subject is offered at three campuses within Australia, two metropolitan and one rural, as well as campuses in Indonesia and Malaysia. Data were collected by questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews.

#### 4.1.1. Questionnaire

Questionnaires were distributed to staff by internal mail and e-mail. Questionnaires contained mostly closed questions requiring yes/no or multiple-choice responses. This design was adopted to make the document short and quick to answer, thus encouraging staff to take the time to complete it. Staff returned questionnaires via mail. From the overall questionnaire responses, a list of 10 interview questions were drawn up.

#### 4.1.2. Interviews

Ten semi-structured questions formed the basis of interviews as these questions focus on individual perceptions of plagiarism, definitions and teaching strategies to overcome plagiarism. Teachers were asked the same questions, in the same order for interview consistency. Interviews were intended to last approximately 40 min, but some ran longer due to lengthy responses. Interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed.

### 4.2. Data analysis

For data analysis, both interview transcriptions and survey responses were examined. An initial reading of interview transcripts gave a general impression of responses. Interviews were then coded using the N\*Vivo computer software program, which allows rich text documents to be coded and comparisons across transcripts to be made. Patterns of response may emerge which are then coded as *nodes* or *themes* across texts. In this study, common issues for teachers about plagiarism were sought and they are identified as *elements* in this paper.

## 5. Results and discussion

The elements discussed below indicate the areas in which EAP teaching staff experience problems in implementing South-Coast University's plagiarism policy. University Regulation 4.1(1) states:

*Plagiarism* is the copying of another person's ideas or expressions without appropriate acknowledgment and presenting these ideas or forms of expression as your own. It includes not only written works such as books or journals, but data or images that may be presented in tables, diagrams, designs, plans, photographs, film, music, formulae, web sites and computer programs. Plagiarism also includes the use of (or passing off) the work of lecturers or other students as your own. The University regards plagiarism as an extremely serious academic offence.

Penalties are outlined in Regulation 4.1(2) which states:

Students should also be aware that there are laws in place to protect the ideas and expressions (i.e. the intellectual property) of individuals and/or groups and their right to be attributed as the authors of their work. These are known as 'copyright' and as 'moral rights' and are included in the *Copyright Act*. Plagiarism offences may also be breaches of the *Copyright Act* and students may be subject to penalties independent of the University's regulations and procedures. Unauthorised collaboration is a related form of cheating.

The following section presents teacher perceptions under theme headings called elements, which emerged from the coding of teacher responses with the N\*Vivo software. Each element initially presents different teacher perceptions of plagiarism as transcribed and coded from the data. These perceptions are then related to comments presented by teachers and researchers from around the globe.

### 5.1. Element 1: intention

Staff at South-Coast University are divided on the issue of intentional and unintentional plagiarism. Nine of the eleven teachers consider that some writing is plagiarism as defined under regulation 4.1, but lack of intentional wrongdoing by the student means plagiarism is not present. Two teachers maintain that all acts of plagiarism are, by definition, intentional, as students are well aware of the policy and know that copying texts is punishable under the regulations.

#### 5.1.1. Unintentional plagiarism

Nine teachers feel that a distinction needs to be made in official policy between intentional and non-intentional plagiarism. These teachers characterize plagiarism as only deliberate or deceptive acts of copying, such as downloading papers from commercial websites. Other acts are unintentional plagiarism, which is not, in the teachers' eyes, a punishable offence. Comments by Dave (aged 41) typify

the comments made by the nine teachers and characterize the essential differences between these actions. Dave said:

Where a student deliberately takes an essay from an Internet papermill site and hands it in, then *that's* plagiarism. But where you've got kids with poor referencing skills and you know...no earthly idea of academic conventions and they just copy stuff out of the textbook, then that *shouldn't* be considered plagiarism in my book. (Dave's emphasis, interview, 25 June 2002).

Dave's view is supported by the literature. Pennycook (1996, p. 226) asserts "it is certainly important to distinguish between good and bad plagiarism, that is between those who reuse parts of texts very well and those who seemed to randomly borrow." Similarly, Howard (1995, 1999) says intention is the key. She states, "if the plagiarism was not intentional...was it engendered by an ignorance of citation conventions? By a monologic encounter with unfamiliar words and concepts?" (1999, p. 797).

The thrust of Dave's assertion is that academic writing genre may be unfamiliar to many EAP students. De Voss and Rosati (2002, p. 193) agree and consider that "students aren't necessarily evil or thinking, but instead they're learning to negotiate and do research in new spaces." Hawley (1984) contends that plagiarism is on a continuum from unintentional to intentional action by students. He believes that plagiarism can occur where "sloppy paraphrasing to verbatim transcription with no crediting of sources" is evident (p. 35) and may, in fact come "more from simple ignorance rather than deceit" (p. 38). Lea and Street (1999) in an examination of higher education textual practices concluded that students found it "difficult to identify their own ideas separately from sources" (p. 80). Academics such as Gardiner (2001), Hawley (1984), Howard (1995, 1999), Larkham and Manns (2002), Martin (1992, 1997), and Pennycook (1996) consider that investigating the plagiarist's intention is a positive step towards decreasing plagiarism itself. They believe a closer examination of intention may reveal that cases classified as plagiarism, may not, in fact, be so.

### 5.1.2. *Intentional plagiarism*

Two members of staff, Luke and Claire, believe all acts of copying are plagiarism, and intention is therefore automatically proven. These teachers believe that all acts of plagiarism should be punished stringently. Claire's (aged 47) attitude is: "Saying that there is such a thing as unintentional plagiarism is a bit of a cop out, really. I mean, how do you know what a student really intended?" Luke (aged 51) was more adamant. He said:

When they copy verbatim from the textbook, if I'm particularly shocked by what I see, then I'll usually write the word PLAGIARISM across the page, usually across the text itself. In some cases I'm able to prove where it's come from and I share that with the student with great glee. I don't think they're as naïve as they pretend to be. (interview, 30 May 2002)

The view of plagiarism as "intellectual murder most foul" representing a "clear and present danger to intellectual liberty" (Mirsky, 2002, p. 98) is also shared by second language researchers. In Angelil-Carter's (2000, p. 3) work on plagiarism in South Africa, a teacher describes plagiarism as "the scourge of academic life." A similar perspective is

found in Le Heron's (2001) six year study of plagiarism in an information systems course in New Zealand, where plagiarism is characterized as a synonym for cheating and learning dishonesty. Kolich (1983, p. 141) views plagiarism as "the worm of reason" and contends plagiarism is morally reprehensible but says it can only be prevented when teachers encourage a sense of intellectual curiosity and discovery in their students. Loveless (1994) claims that academic plagiarism is "the cardinal sin of academe" and argues that transgressors should be "dealt with harshly" (p. 510). Similarly, Laird (2001) considers plagiarism as an "academic felony" and to minimize the chances of plagiarism by her students, keeps "rhetorical fingerprints" of her students' writing for comparison (p. 56). For these teachers and researchers, plagiarism is an offence of automatic admission of wrong. The teachers interviewed in this study reflect the general division in the second language community over the issue of intention in plagiarism.

### 5.2. Element 2: detecting plagiarism

A key concern for academic institutions is detection of plagiarism. The teachers interviewed in this study did not regard detection of plagiarism as a problem. All considered they were experienced enough to detect instances of plagiarism in their students' writing. Kate (aged 49) encapsulated the attitude in the following extract:

Kate: Well you just know when the writing isn't theirs.

Wendy: How do you know?

Kate: Oh, well...there's just a thousand little give-aways, you know...like the sophisticated vocabulary that suddenly appears in contexts that are totally inappropriate

Wendy: Anything else?

Kate: Yeah... the fluent grammar... idiomatic use of phrases that in no way relate to their oral skills. I mean...you just *know* it's not theirs  
(Kate's emphasis, interview 9 April 2002).

Additionally, most teachers in this study were comfortable using Internet software and free website search engines, such as CopyCatch (2003) (<http://www.copycatch.com>), Wordcheck software or Plagiserve (2003) (<http://www.plagiserve.com>) to check through Internet search and retrieval techniques. When asked about the Internet as a source of detection of plagiarism, some teachers considered it to be very useful. They claimed that as the subject was taught across different campuses, so cases of cross-campus plagiarism could be monitored and reduced using such devices. Jean (aged 44) said in her experience, it is "a great help." In the previous semester Jean encountered a case where two students attended different campuses of South-Coast University, but shared a house, submitted the same essay in the same subject. Jean said:

I knew it wasn't Rani's, but no-one else on this campus had the same essay. It wasn't until I photocopied it and sent it to the other campuses asking if anyone had seen the same piece of work that I found out that Mark, the guy at Riverside campus, had the same one in his class...I couldn't believe it! (interview, June 10, 2002).

Not all teachers interviewed were in favour of using electronic detection devices. Kate considers that any detection device involving the retention of student work breaches student's rights to the copyright over their essays. She said, "after all, it's their work and...well...why are we sending all the class work to this site? Shouldn't it just be the suspicious ones?" The teaching staff are divided as to the moral or ethical use of software to detect plagiarism, with nine supporting the use of software detection tools and two not condoning the use of such devices. The point is that such devices are provided by South-Coast University for staff, should they choose to use them. The teachers interviewed did not feel detection of plagiarism was linked to ineffective implementation of university plagiarism policy. They expressed reservations, which will now be outlined for electing not to pursue plagiarism in their students' work.

### 5.3. Element 3: poor academic image

One problem identified by the academics interviewed, and supported by comments from the literature, is that academics don't want to reveal any flaws in their teaching practice. Nine of the eleven academics interviewed felt that their colleagues would view detection of plagiarism in their classrooms as a failure on their part to ensure a suitably stringent learning environment. Comments like Gemma's that, "I know they'll think that I'm mothering the students and say I'm not tough enough," reflect a perception of *herself* as the teacher and *they* as the Academy. As a sessional teacher, she does not consider herself an integral part of the university hierarchy and is reluctant to increase the tenuousness of her position. Angie, a contract employee, expressed similar concerns saying that if plagiarism were detected in her class and not others then, "doesn't it just seem that I am the weak link in the chain?" (interview, 3 May 2002).

The perception of five members of staff is that if cases of student plagiarism are detected in their classrooms, it may be interpreted as professional negligence on their part. They do not want to engage in activities that might discredit their academic performance, so prefer to deal with plagiarism themselves or ignore it. Conversely, two teachers hold the view that plagiarism is entirely the students' choice and does not reflect their teaching performance at all. The other four teachers are unsure about negative aspects of reporting cases of plagiarism, but suggest they would not report plagiarism because they do not feel the committee responsible would deal with the instances adequately. Therefore, of the 11 staff members, only two feel comfortable in officially reporting suspected student plagiarism in their classrooms.

These views are supported in the literature. Instances of harassment of academics pursuing plagiarism (Schneider, 1999), high school teachers being forced to reverse decisions to fail students or resign (Brandt, 2002) and general uneasiness about collegiate attitudes to open discussion of plagiarism were revealed.

### 5.4. Element 4: burdensome administration

All staff note that heavier workloads, larger classes, increased pressure to publish, lengthy grant application processes and dealing with overwhelming degrees of

administration have encroached on teaching time. When academics balance immediate tasks such as entering exam grades against pursuing plagiarists, many simply do not have the time to invest in the often lengthy chase. Detection of plagiarism is only the starting point. Verifying plagiarism, collating student work and presenting evidence to the responsible committee takes an inordinate amount of time. One female lecturer estimated it took her an extra 15 hr to prepare evidence for the relevant committee. When the committee found that plagiarism had not been conclusively proven, and *warned* the student without penalty, she said she would not pursue cases formally again. Such perceptions are again supported by instances in the literature. [Whiteman \(2001\)](#) writes that her similar experience consumed an “astonishing amount of time” and she “finally gave up... and returned to my grading a more cynical educator” (p. 26).

### 5.5. *Element 5: it is really worth it?*

Nine of the eleven academics interviewed feel that the time, effort and “sleepless nights” utilized in deciding to take a case of student plagiarism through the correct channels is not worth the effort, Lyn (aged 45) elaborates. She said she was worried about a suspected case of plagiarism and sought advice from a senior academic, who advised her that she would ‘regret’ the decision as ‘the hassle involved’ was not worth the time taken. After “agonizing about it for a couple of days,” Lyn decided not to formally report the case, and said she “reluctantly let it go” (interview, 7 June 2002).

Another issue arose where one junior academic who alleged plagiarism in her class, found there were counter-claims by the student of poor teaching. The student claimed she had been forced to plagiarise because the level of teaching was so poor. Documentation held by the junior academic in question, clearly indicated this was not the case, but she said it was “off-putting” as far as her career was concerned. Additionally, she is now both unsure whether merely being associated with an inquiry may affect her chances of promotion and whether she would choose to pursue student plagiarists in future. There is a feeling by nine of the eleven staff that being involved in student plagiarism inquiries tarnishes teacher professionalism. To counteract this problem, two teachers simply direct their students’ attention to the university plagiarism regulations (4.1 and 4.2) and state they have performed their duties. The reluctance by academics in this study to acknowledge openly that plagiarism can happen in any classroom is supported by findings in the literature. Current researchers agree this is largely the attitude, particularly by senior academics ([Young, 2001](#); [Zobel & Hamilton, 2002](#)).

### 5.6. *Element 6: teachers as judge, jury and executioner*

Nearly all teachers interviewed felt that past experience of colleagues indicated that the relevant university committee would “let the students off”. Gemma discussed a case of student plagiarism that went to the relevant committee and said:

It stunned me...because when you saw these two essays and the ten paragraphs out of fifteen that were the same...it was pretty amazing for that decision to be made. I mean how could that be true? (interview, 12 June 2002).

At interview, all teachers related stories about colleagues, from different departments, who had pressed for inquiry hearings in cases of student plagiarism. In all instances, the committee dismissed the case against the student as not sufficiently proven. This is not to suggest that the committee's process or procedure was incorrect, but rather the staff perceived the committee's decision as a "lack of professional support" and a "waste of time." All interviewees propose that 'minor' cases of plagiarism should be handled by individual staff, although there is no agreement on what constitutes a 'minor' act of plagiarism. Some teachers believe 'minor' means one or two sections of the writing task are missing citations. Other staff consider a couple of copied paragraphs, or ineffectively paraphrased text are 'minor.' There is no synthesis of opinion on this point. Most teachers consider it is "more effective" (Luke, aged 48) if cases of plagiarism are handled by teachers and not through formal academic processes. Mark and Claire considered the system "fails the staff," therefore it is better to "handle things yourself" (Mark and Claire).

Naturally, this means uniform application of plagiarism policy is difficult to achieve.

### *5.7. Element 7: research versus plagiarism*

One senior academic interviewed said that research was the key to promotion, not teaching. His view was that pursuit of research dollars was valued more by departments and promotion committees than pursuing plagiarists. He said, "There's no point. On the scale of things, it just doesn't count" (Ben, aged 62). Similar sentiments were echoed in Schneider's (1999) study where one academic said, "Why bother when there's no future in it, particularly from the standpoint of promotion and self-interest—it just isn't important" (p. A5).

## **6. Recommendations**

Patently, university departments must re-evaluate their approaches in dealing with the issue of student plagiarism with their staff. The findings indicate that open and intellectual engagement with the issue of plagiarism itself and individual reactions to the policy is overdue. Additionally, attempts must be made to find methods of implementing the plagiarism policy in a more uniform manner. From the comments of staff it is clear that little confidence exists in current university procedures and processes to deal with cases of alleged plagiarism. Where staff consider that the system fails them, and are creating a sub-system of dealing with cases on their own, the university runs the risk of allegations of inequitable treatment of individual cases. I consider the re-establishment of confidence in the system is a top priority, which requires dialogue between policy makers and staff for effective implementation. Increasing awareness of the importance of intellectual honesty and endeavour may be achieved through professional development sessions for staff and re-kindling a sense of the value that intellectual rigour has for the institution and its academic reputation.

## 7. Conclusion

Clearly, plagiarism is a multi-faceted issue. One key observation emerging from this research is that whilst teachers operate collaboratively in the preparation and delivery of academic writing preparation programs, they approach issues of plagiarism within those programs individually. The concerns staff raised about negative collegiate responses to involvement with plagiarism inquiries and lack of confidence in the existing university structures require careful consideration by institutional policy makers and departments. As teachers we must decide to either ignore plagiarism completely and engender new generations of writers with a sense that all writing is freely available to take and use without any attribution or we must decide to tackle this difficult and sensitive issue. One step towards overcoming plagiarism in tertiary environments is to open Pandora's box. Once opened, the elements need to be publicly and effectively discussed. Until such discussion takes place, plagiarism remains hidden in the shadows of academic discourse.

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