Study Guide

Plagiarism

Why It Happens • How to Prevent It

Barry Gilmore

Heinemann
361 Hanover Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801–3912
www.heinemann.com

Offices and agents throughout the world

© 2008 by Barry Gilmore

Plagiarism in Your School: Two Surveys

The following two surveys make good discussion starters for any school wishing to promote a dialogue about plagiarism and academic dishonesty. It's important to give the surveys anonymously—the idea is not to "catch" anyone but to gauge the prevailing attitudes toward academic dishonesty at your school. It's also important to remember that the results of such a survey may not reflect the actual truth about what happens at your school—rather, they reflect perceptions and beliefs about what happens.

I recommend giving these surveys to students and teachers before starting a discussion about plagiarism but revealing the results after some of that discussion has taken place. The answers can be quite illuminating, but the discussion questions that follow these surveys offer a broader base for reflection than the survey results alone might.

The results of the student survey from my own school are shared in the first three chapters of *Plagiarism: Why It Happens • How to Prevent It.*

Student Survey

1. Within the past year, I have: (circle letters of all that apply)
   a. downloaded a paper from a website and turned it in as my own work
   b. cut and pasted work from an online source into my own writing (without using quotation marks or citing the source)
   c. cut and pasted work from a print source into my own writing (without using quotation marks or citing the source)
   d. copied a paper or homework assignment from another student
   e. copied a sentence into my own writing but rearranged a few of the words
   f. made up a fake source for a bibliography
   g. none of the above

2. I think plagiarism at my school is:
   a. very common
   b. somewhat common
   c. not very common
   d. rare

3. I think copying written work from another student and handing it in as your own is:
   a. a very serious offense
   b. a somewhat serious offense
   c. not a very serious offense
   d. not a serious offense at all

4. When a teacher discovers that a student has plagiarized, I think he or she *should:*
   a. give the student a chance to rewrite the assignment and no other penalty
   b. give the student a chance to rewrite and report the incident to an administrator and/or the student's parents
   c. assign a failing grade
   d. assign a failing grade and require a rewrite of the assignment
   e. assign a failing grade and report the incident to an administrator and/or the student's parents
   f. do nothing

5. At our school, when teachers discover incidents of plagiarism, I think they mostly:

    a. ignore it
    b. handle it themselves without involving administrators
    c. report it to the administration and/or contact the students' parents

6. I think the MAIN reason students at our school plagiarize is:

    a. laziness
    b. concern about grades
    c. a lack of understanding of how to cite and do research
    d. pressures that arise because of getting behind on work and in other areas
    e. the perception that everyone else does it

7. The following do/might effectively discourage students at our school from plagiarizing: (circle letters of all that apply)

    a. submitting papers to an online detection service
    b. a school honor code
    c. knowing that getting caught will lead to disciplinary action
    d. discussing assignments and citation requirements with teachers in advance
    e. knowing that others students have gotten caught and faced consequences
    f. feeling excited about and invested in assignments and projects

8. Please add any other comments about plagiarism at our school in the space below.

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

Teacher Survey

1. I believe that students in my classes plagiarize on written assignments:

   a. frequently
   b. sometimes
   c. rarely
   d. never

2. When students do plagiarize, I believe they do so mainly because of:

   a. laziness
   b. concern about grades
   c. a lack of understanding of how to cite and do research
   d. pressures that arise because of getting behind on work and in other areas
   e. a culture created by a large number of students who cheat

3. When I suspect that a paper includes some plagiarism, I usually:

   a. ignore it
   b. use Google or another search engine to see if I can find the source
   c. use an online detection service
   d. confront the student directly

4. When I determine that a student has, in fact, plagiarized, I usually:

   a. ignore it
   b. talk to the student only
   c. enforce a consequence without reporting the incident
   d. report the incident to an administrator and/or contact the parents

5. I believe that most plagiarism in my classes consists of:

   a. downloaded papers turned in as student work
   b. cut and pasted work from an online source
   c. cut and pasted work from a print source
   d. work copied from another student
   e. copied work in which a few words have been rearranged
   f. false sources made up for a bibliography
   g. work that is completed by parents

6. I believe the best way to deter plagiarism is to:

    a. enforce policies and consequences consistently
    b. educate students about research and citation formats
    c. design assignments that make it difficult or impossible to plagiarize
    d. use an online detection service to catch offenders
    e. try to avoid placing students in high-pressure situations that might lead them to plagiarize

7. I discuss issues of academic honesty and integrity, along with strategies students can use to practice these skills, in my classes:

    a. regularly
    b. sometimes
    c. rarely
    d. never

8. Please add any additional comments in plagiarism or academic dishonesty at our school in the space below.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Discussion Questions for Teachers

The questions below are designed for teachers who wish to discuss issues of plagiarism with their colleagues, but they may also be used by individuals to reflect on practices concerning plagiarism and cheating. These questions have been organized to correspond with discussions and activities in chapters of the book *Plagiarism: Why it Happens • How to Prevent It*.

Chapter One—Introduction: Taking the Plague Out of Plagiarism

1. What personal experiences, as a teacher or student, color your own response to incidents of plagiarism and academic dishonesty? What attitudes toward plagiarism do you hold that others might not share?

2. How important is the topic of academic honesty in your school community? In your opinion, would more discussions about, and policies concerning, plagiarism and cheating be helpful?

Chapter Two—Copies (and Robberies): How Students Plagiarize

1. How do teachers or administrators in your school gauge the frequency of, types of, and attitudes toward plagiarism in your school? Are there formal mechanisms in place for tracking incidences of academic dishonesty consistently? Should there be? Take a look at the survey at the beginning of this study guide and consider whether it might be useful as a way to gauge student attitudes and behaviors.

2. In the perception of teachers and administrators at your school, what types of plagiarism occur most often and why?

3. How do most teachers in your school detect plagiarism? Does your school use or has it considered using online detection services or software? If so, how effective have discussions and trainings been in guiding faculty toward using such services effectively? If your school does not use such services, do you think it would benefit teachers and students to do so? How?

4. To what extent do teachers in various disciplines teach students to paraphrase material and attribute that material to an original source? At what point in their educational careers are students expected to have mastered concepts such as paraphrasing, attribution, and appropriate quotation? How successful are students in meeting those expectations of mastery?

Chapter Three—Shades of Gray: Why Students Plagiarize

1. Are there assignments or teaching strategies in your classes that might confuse students about when and how to cite? If so, what might teachers do to clear up such confusion?

2. Do teachers in your school regularly cite the material they use with students? Do you think it is important that they do so?

3. What strategies do teachers in your school employ when they suspect cases of plagiarism? What kinds of conversations go on with students and which are most or least helpful in correcting the problem?

4. Is most of the plagiarism that goes on in your school intentional or unintentional? How might teachers uncover intent in cases of plagiarism, and to what extent should intent sway their reactions to those cases?

5. What kinds of pressures in your school might drive students to plagiarize? How are students expected to handle those pressures?

6. On page 50 of *Plagiarism,* you'll find a series of questions teachers might ask themselves when setting deadlines or outlining expectations for student work. Take a look at these questions and discuss the ways in which you, personally, approach deadlines, expectations, and assignment delivery.

7. Do you believe in cryptomnesia? (See the vocabulary section at the end of this guide for a definition of this term.) How much credence do you lend to students who claim they "copied" material only because they didn't recall having read it earlier?

8. To what extent does the "ethics gap"—the difference between students' and teachers' perceptions of intellectual property and the ethics of attribution—influence decisions made by members of your school community? How might you address the ethics gap with students?

Chapter Four—Reducing the Sentence: How We Respond to Plagiarism

1. Have you ever ignored a case of plagiarism even when you had proof of the offense? If so, why? Why might some teachers choose not to respond to incidences of plagiarism? What might the consequences—positive or negative—be to such a choice?

2. Do you prefer to respond to cases of plagiarism informally (through dealing with the student directly or using classroom policies) or in a more formal manner (involving administrators or following an overarching school policy)? What are the benefits and drawbacks of each approach?

3. Do you have a formal system for responding to plagiarism, recording cases, or enforcing consequences in your classroom? In your school? Is such a system desirable?

4. At what point should administrators be involved in handling cases of academic dishonesty? Are there times when administrators should not be involved? Do administrators and teachers generally agree about the process for handling plagiarism and, if not, what are the potential consequences of that disagreement for student learning?

5. What are the benefits and drawbacks of using a two-strike system for responding to plagiarism? Of assigning a grade of zero in cases of plagiarism (including papers in which a portion is plagiarized)?

6. At what point should parents be involved in discussions about student plagiarism? How should such parent contact be handled? Are the parents of your students generally aware of school policies concerning plagiarism and the possible consequences? Could you or should you do more to educate parents about plagiarism, why it occurs, and how it is handled at your school?

7. In discussing cases of academic dishonesty with students, how can emphasis be placed on student learning as well as (or more than) on the offense and its consequences? What points might you make about plagiarism to a student who has committed an offense?

Chapter Five—Acting, Not Reacting: Giving Students the Tools to Avoid Plagiarism

1. How do you teach rules and styles of attribution in your classes? How do your colleagues teach attribution? In what ways might teachers from various disciplines work together to reinforce both the rules of attribution and the reasons for employing them?

2. Are multiple citation formats (MLA, APA, Turabian) used by the various disciplines in your school? If so, how can teachers in these disciplines help students

understand not only the differences between styles but also the reasons for these styles to co-exist?

3. What opportunities do you offer students to see *why* citation is important? What means might you use to show students that citation is important?

4. What kinds of note-taking strategies do you or your colleagues encourage students to use as they read and research? How do these strategies assist them to produce work that is both original and acknowledges source materials? Which strategies do you think students will mostly likely continue to use after they leave your classroom?

5. How do you clarify the rules of collaboration for students? Under what circumstances should students be allowed (or not allowed) to collaborate on projects and papers? What are the benefits and drawbacks of collaborative activities in your classes?

6. How are students in your classes or school taught digital literacy skills such as online searching techniques, website evaluation, and consideration of intellectual property? What means might you use to help students improve their digital literacy skills?

Chapter Six—Copy That! Designing Assignments and Assessments

1. Describe an assignment or project in your classes or school in which students are given a sense of ownership by choosing a topic, helping to develop a grading rubric, or otherwise helping to design the parameters for the assignment. Do you think students are more or less prone to plagiarize when completing this assignment? Why?

2. How might teachers in your school better communicate with one another about the kinds of research they expect students to undertake for specific assignments? How might such communication assist teachers in designing appropriate projects that enhance student learning?

3. When research projects are assigned in your classes or school, are they assessed mainly based on content, the research process, or both? How might the balance between grading based on content and grading based on process influence students as they work on a project?

4. Besides teachers, what audience is provided for student writing and other projects in your school? How might students react to the knowledge that their work would be read or viewed by an audience other than the teacher? Would such knowledge have any effect on student originality?

5. In what ways do rubrics and other scoring criteria in your classes reward risk-taking and creativity?

6. When students write in your classes, how do you provide authentic feedback that encourages student originality and creativity? What practices do you or your colleagues use to balance the need for authentic feedback such as narrative response with the need to manage your paper load?

Chapter Seven—The Big Picture: The Role of School Culture

1. What perceptions of cheating do students in your class or school hold? Is it possible that they think more or less cheating and plagiarism take place than teachers do? If so, why do those misperceptions exist? How might the perception of a "culture of cheating" affect the decisions students make about their work?

2. To what extent does your classroom or school emphasize grades, rankings, and competition over or in addition to learning? How does such emphasis affect students and their work habits?

3. What rewards, intrinsic and extrinsic, are offered in your classroom or school for high achievement? How might those rewards or the lack of them influence the way students think about academic misconduct?

4. Does your school use an honor code? Why or why not? If not, might your school benefit from an honor code and how? If your school does use an honor code, how is it enforced? Is enforcement consistent? Is the honor taken seriously? Is it treated as part of the curriculum? As a tool for justifying punishments? As a last resort?

5. The last chapter of *Plagiarism* mentions athletes, males, top achievers, and academic underachievers as groups more prone to cheat or plagiarize. Which of these groups face this risk in your classroom or school and why? What other groups in your school might be prone to plagiarize and why? What measures can teachers take to help these students avoid acts of academic dishonesty?

Discussion Questions for Students

The following ten questions may prove useful for leading informal discussions about plagiarism with small groups of students.

1. How would you define plagiarism? Do you think teachers and students in your school have the same understanding of the term? If not, how and why do they differ?

2. What reasons do you think most students would give for committing plagiarism? Is plagiarism by students ever justified? If so, under what circumstances would you consider an act of plagiarism by a student justified?

3. How do you think teachers should respond when they discover that a student has plagiarized? Should your school have a consistent policy for handling cases of plagiarism or should such incidences be handled on a case by case basis?

4. Do you think a school honor code influences students in their approach to academic work? In other words, does an honor code actually work in deterring plagiarism or cheating?

5. How common or acceptable is plagiarism in your school? If plagiarism does occur, what actions might teachers, students, or administrators take to lower the frequency of such incidences?

6. If your school uses online detection software such as turnitin.com, how effective do you think that service is in deterring plagiarism? How effective is it in educating students about plagiarism and how to avoid it? If your school does not use such a service, do you think using one would be effective or helpful for students?

7. What kinds of assignments make it easier for students *not* to plagiarize? Give an example of an assignment on which you would find it hard—or would not be at all tempted—to plagiarize.

8. When you search for material online or in a library, how do you keep track of your sources? Do you feel confident that you'll be able to find the source again later on? How might your note-taking procedures affect the quality of your finished papers or projects?

9. Do teachers in your school have clear expectations for how and when students cite material? Do you ever feel confused about how or when to cite in your classes? If so, what might you do to clear up that confusion?

10. What is your personal attitude toward plagiarism? What are your personal policies toward academic dishonesty? Do those policies mirror those of your school and, if not, why not? What personal experiences have shaped your attitude and policies toward plagiarism?

Vocabulary You Need to Know

The following terms appear throughout this study guide and the book *Plagiarism: Why It Happens • How to Prevent It.*

- *academic dishonesty*—actions by students that violate the explicit or implicit rules of scholarship. Plagiarism, cheating, and false attribution are examples of academic dishonesty.

- *attribution format*—a system or set of rules used for identifying source material in written work in a text and/or bibliography. Commonly used attribution formats include MLA, APA, and Chicago, but many others exist.

- *cryptomnesia*—the unintentional use of another's words or ideas caused by a failure to remember that the words or ideas came from another source. Some authors, for instance, may not even remember having read an original source but may have adopted concepts located in that source.

- *digital literacy*—the ability to navigate online material effectively and knowledgably. A digitally literate student is able to discern the credibility of a website and to find multiple creditable sources on a topic using a variety of search tools.

- *Google Scholar*—a tool on the Google search engine that allows students to narrow a search to sites that are academic in nature.

- *modified honor code*—an honor code that involves students in the judicial process and expects a high level of student responsibility in following policies regarding academic conduct.

- *self-plagiarism*—using words one wrote for an earlier project in a later project without attribution. Turning in a paper for two courses without notifying the appropriate teachers is an example of self-plagiarism.

- *term paper mill*—a website that provides prewritten or custom-written papers to students free or for a fee.

- *two-strike system*—a system in which a student is given a warning for a first offense (often in writing, with a record kept) of academic dishonesty and faces consequences upon commission of a second offense.

- *unintentional plagiarism*—plagiarism that occurs because of a misunderstanding of the rules of attribution or the parameters of the assignment.