

The Scholarship of Plagiarism: Where We've Been, Where We Are, What's Needed Next

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Blum, Susan D. *My Word! Plagiarism and College Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2009. 229 pages.

DeSena, Laura Hennessey. *Preventing Plagiarism: Tips and Techniques*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 2007. 117 pages.

Gilmore, Barry. *Plagiarism: Why It Happens, How to Prevent It*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2008. 144 pages.

Haviland, Carol Peterson, and Joan Mullin, eds. *Who Owns This Text? Plagiarism, Authorship, and Disciplinary Cultures*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2008. 196 pages

Marsh, Bill. *Plagiarism: Alchemy and Remedy in Higher Education*. Albany: SUNY P, 2007. 176 pages.

Pecorari, Diane. *Academic Writing and Plagiarism: A Linguistic Analysis*. New York: Continuum, 2008. 213 pages.

Sutherland-Smith, Wendy. *Plagiarism, the Internet, and Student Learning: Improving Academic Integrity*. New York: Routledge, 2008. 224 pages.

Seven monographs published on the topic of plagiarism in just three years constitutes a substantial level of activity on a topic that only a few years ago received scant attention in the scholarly literature. A search for the simple term *plagiarism* in the *CompPile* search engine suggests that the first article published in a composition journal that might be called extensive scholarship was R.G. Martin's 1971 "Plagiarism and Originality: Some Remedies." A.E. Malloch published a reflective piece in 1976, as did Augustus M. Kol-

ich seven years later. Keith D. Miller offered a 1986 study of the intertextual practices of Martin Luther King, Jr., and in 1988 Barry M. Kroll published the results of a survey of first-year students' attitudes toward plagiarism. For the first twenty-five years of the discipline of composition and rhetoric (assuming one dates the inception of the field, as does Parks, at 1966), these five articles were the only extensive journal articles.

The year 1992 marks a change: Susan H. McLeod and Michael A. Pemberton both published articles on plagiarism that year, followed by seven articles the following year (Deckert; Devoss and Rosati; Howard, "Plagiarism *Pentimento*"; Jameson; Lunsford; McNenny and Roen; Wells).¹ The pace of publication has remained brisk since then; plagiarism is now well established as a topic for scholarly inquiry.

Historically, much of the scholarship on plagiarism has been based on authors' own classroom experiences or has been based on authors' research, drawing from surveys or interviews of students and faculty at the authors' own institutions. Most of this historical scholarship shares the common purpose of better understanding the extent of and reasons for plagiarism. These works usually offer teachers practical advice based in better policies, better pedagogy, or better policing. Indeed, some of the most recent books continue in this same vein. Some, however, offer new perspectives and approaches. As two scholars studying authorship—and specifically plagiarism—from opposite ends of the career spectrum (Rebecca has long worked in the field, and Missy is focusing much of her doctoral studies in authorship), we wish not only to review the books considered in this essay, but also to pull from our collective perceptions, illustrating how these books might point scholars toward what we see as important work remaining to be done.

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In *Preventing Plagiarism: Tips and Techniques*, author Laura Hennessey DeSena draws from her own teaching experiences to support her recommendations for handling and preventing plagiarism. Specifically, DeSena argues that the prevention of plagiarism can successfully be accomplished by assigning student research projects that focus foremost on students' analysis of primary sources and on students' freewriting their original ideas before engaging secondary sources. She offers some tools for instruction and assessment, including strategies for preventing plagiarism as well as for addressing and managing the issue should it arise. In her concluding chapter, DeSena does acknowledge the complications that can develop when one is teaching conventions of academic writing to non-native (L2) speakers of English; she recognizes that both instructors and assignment design may be setting L2 students up for failure, since these students' cultural back-

grounds may conflict with Western notions of intellectual property (99-100). Her advice beyond this chapter, however, is based on her own experiences as a teacher, and as we will explain, this approach—while probably helpful to other teachers of secondary-level-writing—does not contribute to a critical understanding of the issue that will push forward the scholarship in the field.

Based on his experience as a high school teacher and author of books on pedagogy, Barry Gilmore offers *Plagiarism: Why It Happens, How to Prevent It*. Gilmore's purpose is to talk instructors down from the precipice of responding hysterically and juridically to incidents of plagiarism. He recognizes, though, that many of his readers are educators looking for fast answers to thorny, pressing problems. He starts the book, therefore, with practical advice for those immediate situations. Then he proceeds to offer more reflective advice about crafting assignments and designing lesson plans. Included in Gilmore's book is information from a survey of 200 students at his high school, illuminating their definitions of and attitudes toward plagiarism. The survey results are, however, only occasionally woven into Gilmore's argument, and he does not include a copy of the survey instrument. Thus while the book may be useful for faculty development purposes, its research cannot be studied, evaluated, or replicated.

Bill Marsh offers a fresh take on plagiarism, pulling together a disparate collection of theoretical perspectives, from Vitruvius to Montaigne to George Herbert Mead to Bakhtin. Among other things, he scrutinizes the plagiarism-policing program *Turnitin.com*, finding that it assumes an ordinary, solitary author. Given the popularity of *Turnitin* among instructors not schooled in the philosophies of writing and writing instruction that are widely shared among compositionists, Marsh's task is a bold one. He offers a history of the plagiarism debates from a cultural perspective, reflecting on the commodification of text and the institutional managerialism inherent in these debates. And he examines the role of handbooks in fixing the dominant representations of textual activity. In past scholarship of plagiarism, even authors who analyze plagiarism as a cultural phenomenon have felt it necessary to conclude with a list of pedagogical "fixes." At the conclusion of *Plagiarism: Alchemy and Remedy in Higher Education*, Marsh sagely resists the will to pedagogy, instead opting to identify what he believes are important challenges facing scholars of authorship and teachers of plagiarism. Most provocative is a question he proposes to readers, one whose answer he leaves to the scholars of the future: "Does Internet plagiarism in the age of post-media composition represent one of many laudable literacies students with a new 'communication ability' bring to the classroom. . .?"(154).

Susan D. Blum's *My Word! Plagiarism and College Culture* reports on the results of three years' of interviews with undergraduates at Blum's own institution. These interviews reveal that students at her university adhere more to a "performance self," adjusting to circumstances so as to please others with as little effort as possible, than to the "authentic self," concerned with unified subjectivity and personal integrity, a model to which their instructors adhere. As an anthropologist rather than compositionist, one who addresses a wide academic audience, Blum takes up the job of reviewing a wide range of rhetorical scholarship on her topic. She includes the standard pedagogical conclusion, and it is full of good advice based on the premise that academic integrity is a "constellation of skills" (170).

Who Owns This Text? Plagiarism, Authorship, and Disciplinary Cultures takes an unusual approach to coauthorship. Carol Peterson Haviland and Joan Mullin serve as editors of the volume, but the contributions are not freestanding essays. Rather, the chapter authors work from a shared interview protocol to investigate how faculty in a variety of disciplines experience and perceive intellectual property, and how those instructors represent intellectual property and citation to their students. The contributors to *Who Owns This Text* find that faculty have rich, discipline-bound experiences with intellectual property and authorship but tend to offer their students only surface-level generic instruction in citation. This constitutes an urgent problem: "Unless we are more forthright with ourselves about plagiarism and why we disapprove of it, our students may simply make the pragmatic association of grades, labor, plagiarism, and punishment, and, therefore, feel more intrigued with 'getting away with it' than with understanding it" (164).

Wendy Sutherland-Smith, in *Plagiarism, the Internet, and Student Learning: Improving Academic Integrity*, argues for a more complicated understanding and treatment of plagiarism in institutional settings than is offered by many of the texts reviewed here, an argument accompanied by an assortment of complex methodological approaches. The author begins her investigation with a theoretical analysis of the legal, historical, and cultural influences of the phenomenon, highlighting in particular the apparent effects the internet has on plagiarism. Her survey of students showed that a large majority (91%, n=170) use the internet as a reference for academic research and writing, and approximately one third of students (32%, n=60) admitted to cutting and pasting from the internet. Most interesting, however, was the finding that of the students included in the percentages above, a majority confessed they could not define plagiarism (52%, n=89 and 65%, n=39, respectively). Later, based on interviews and surveys with faculty, policy makers, and 186 L2 students, Sutherland-Smith urges edu-

cators to reflect upon and revise how plagiarism is managed in academic institutions. Throughout the text, these claims are developed in relation to Sutherland-Smith's own proposed theoretical framework—what she calls “the plagiarism continuum”—in which she identifies nine interlaced ideological and pedagogical forces that illustrate the range of complex influences on plagiarism. Her multi-analytical approach, theoretical model, and empirical evidence is exemplary and will no doubt be useful for teachers and policy makers alike. Although we were left wanting calls for further research, her suggestions in her conclusion nicely summarize what challenges remain for instructors regarding plagiarism.

In *Academic Writing and Plagiarism: A Linguistic Analysis*, Diane Pecorari employs a noticeably different approach compared to the other authors reviewed: she challenges common notions of the concept of plagiarism by exploring the complex relationship between students, texts, and sources. Pecorari presents her empirical study of the writing of 17 postgraduate nonnative-English-speaking students and combines the results of interviews with students, interviews with their faculty mentors, and a textual analysis of students' sourcing practices. Pecorari also historically contextualizes and culturally complicates the phenomenon of plagiarism, claiming that students need explicit instruction and guidance with learning to write from sources in Western academic writing contexts since students' cultural and linguistic communicative competencies will affect their writing practices and perceptions of plagiarism. This triangulation of research leads her to locate problematic contradictions among perceptions of plagiarism: plagiarism is prevalent in student writing, yet it remains difficult for administrators and teachers to define and identify; students often do not intend to cheat and instead exhibit patchwriting, yet instructors are often unaware of students' struggles to appropriately borrow from their sources. By viewing plagiarism as a linguistic and cultural phenomenon and by drawing on a range of methodological approaches, Pecorari provides researchers and instructors with much to think about when it comes to addressing student plagiarism, especially when working with nonnative-English-speakers.

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Collectively, these authors make some important contributions to current discussions in the field: they remind us that academic plagiarism is a problem and that it is prevalent within student writing; that plagiarism is a historically, legally, and culturally shaped textual and social phenomenon; and that educators should be mindful of these contextual issues when determining how to interpret, prevent, evaluate, and respond to student plagiarism. Issues were raised by these authors that indeed deserve attention from stu-

dents, teachers, scholars, and administrators alike: it is crucial to consider intention when addressing instances of plagiarism; students often do not intend to cheat or deceive; plagiarism and patchwriting should not be conflated; students' culture and first language influence their understanding of Western writing conventions and plagiarism; and students and teachers from different cultural backgrounds and disciplines understand and define plagiarism differently.

These authors also contribute to the field of plagiarism scholarship by employing a variety of research methodologies. As our description of the texts indicates, they engage in both qualitative and quantitative research, often supporting their claims with empirical evidence in the form of surveys, interviews, and textual analysis (of student work and of institutional policies), in addition to providing pedagogical anecdotes, historical analyses, and theoretical critiques of plagiarism definitions, policies, pedagogies, and practices.

Still, at least some of the texts employ single-method approaches or make generalized claims from studies conducted at a single institution, which diminishes the range of uses that can be made of the research. Such scholarship has established the field of plagiarism studies, but it contributes little to the goal of producing data-driven research that is replicable and aggregable and that can therefore be used to influence decision-makers—in and outside of the discipline of rhetoric and composition—who are themselves neither teachers of composition nor scholars of authorship. Chris Anson makes this need apparent when he documents the ways in which replicable, aggregable, data-based research has served WPAs' efforts to fend off demands for direct grammar instruction as the motor of first-year composition (22). At this moment, however, WPAs have little such research to help them fend off the demand for universally applied plagiarism-detecting programs; for extensive current-traditionalist, top-down instruction in the mechanics of citation; for universalized plagiarism policies that allow only punitive responses and exclude pedagogical remedies; or for the anti-plagiarism agenda as the motor of first-year composition.

Considering the material and ideological obstacles that still remain for academics interested in investigating and challenging current methods for approaching the issue of plagiarism, we concur with Pecorari's and Marsh's call for pan-disciplinary deliberations about managing and representing plagiarism. Pecorari argues that

A solution to the complex problems associated with plagiarism can only come about as a result of conversation in the academic community(ies), aimed at identifying the kinds of source use that best serve the needs of academic discourse,

and the kinds of textual plagiarism which are (and are not) disruptive of the community's activities. Reaching consensus on issues like those is no easy objective, but the very attempt to reach it will be beneficial. (Pecorari 166)

In chapter five of Marsh's text, he critiques the static representations of current handbooks and suggests that they should include background information on "copyright, property, and authorship conventions" so that student writers can successfully apply the rules instantiated in the handbooks (102). To facilitate a more critical and interdisciplinary conversation on the issue, the results of current scholarship could be disseminated across the disciplines. For that scholarship to be persuasive to folks outside of rhetoric and composition, it must include replicable and aggregable research that explores students' sourcing practices and assesses ways of teaching students how to borrow from sources both ethically and transparently.

The published scholarship on plagiarism has repeatedly shown how complicated and contextual the issue is; has revealed perceptions of teachers, students, and administrators alike; has critiqued pedagogical approaches historically, theoretically, and culturally; and has suggested (not assessed) new approaches to teaching students how to work more transparently with their sources. Much more work remains to be done. These (and other) pressing questions remain:

1. What are the effects of anti-plagiarism pedagogies on students' practices of writing from sources?
2. How effective are current administrative measures at educating, preventing, and managing instances of plagiarism?
3. How many (and which) institutions are reframing their definitions and penalties for charges of academic plagiarism, and with what results?
4. What effects does the use of plagiarism detection software have on students' use of sources?
5. Which teaching methods are most effective in helping students learn how to write effectively from sources?

For researchers interested in pursuing these questions, we particularly recommend Pecorari's book for its textual methods and for its full disclosure of her methods; Pecorari's and Sutherland-Smith's for their use of multiple research methods; and Haviland and Mullin's for their multi-site

inquiry. To move beyond essayistic reflections on plagiarism issues, single-method reports from single sites, and recommendations from master teachers, the scholarship of plagiarism now needs research that can be replicated and aggregated for the purpose of developing a deep, broad understanding that will be persuasive and useful not only to compositionists but to decision-makers across and beyond the academy.

NOTES

1. In some cases *CompPile's* publication dates are inaccurate; we have corrected those that have come to our notice. *CompPile's* listings are also incomplete; neither Marsh nor DeVoss and Rosati, for example, are indexed under the keyword *plagiarism*. For the purposes of this brief overview, nevertheless, we are drawing exclusively on *CompPile* as the most comprehensive compilation of composition scholarship available. We are also including business and technical communications and TESOL journals in this survey of published articles.

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