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Writing centres as dialogic spaces: Negotiating conflicting discourses around citation and plagiarism

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Abstract
Citation is fundamental in successfully constructing academic discourse. There has been much discussion concerning the considerable difficulties tertiary students experience when writing using sources, especially for those who speak English as an Additional Language. This paper interrogates the predominantly negative discourses that surround plagiarism, involving notions of honesty, integrity, punishment, trust, and deceit. These negative discourses tend to perpetuate hierarchical and impenetrable spaces in higher education. Drawing on our experiences in South African writing centres, and using key concepts from academic literacies, this paper explores ways of addressing plagiarism that can serve to empower students, including developing academic voice through citation, acknowledging "mimicry" as part of writing development, and developing critical thinking.

Keywords: citation; plagiarism; power; space; writing centres

1. Introduction

Citation is a central feature of academic writing, and is fundamental in successfully constructing academic discourse. Citation involves more than just the mechanical aspects of referencing but focuses on attribution, a complex sociolinguistic practice of using other written texts in the construction of one's own (McGowan 2006). There has been much discussion concerning the considerable difficulties tertiary students experience when writing using sources, especially for students who speak English as an Additional Language [EAL; Abasi and Graves (2008), Cumming et al. (2016), Pecorari and Petrić (2014)]. In addition, there is ongoing debate about what constitutes plagiarism and how it should be addressed in higher education institutions.

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Our interest in plagiarism arises from our experience with students at the writing centre. Students often suffer immense anxiety about plagiarism, which caused us to reflect on how plagiarism is dealt with in different spaces within South African universities. Writing centres tend to conceive of plagiarism as a complex inter-relationship between intertextuality and development of academic writing. They provide "access to academic and disciplinary discourses through making explicit how texts work in a critical manner, whilst at the same time inducting students into these discourses" (Archer 2010). This is a very different approach to meaning-making than those approaches that focus on student "deficit" or managerial approaches to citation practices. In this paper, we discuss the features of various discourses surrounding plagiarism, and the consequences of a predominantly negative discourse for teaching and learning. In particular, we highlight how negative discourses might perpetuate hierarchical and impenetrable spaces in higher education. By "discourse", we mean the "socially constructed knowledges of (some aspect of) reality which gives expression to the meanings and values of an institution or social grouping" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001: 4). Using key concepts from academic literacies (Lea and Street 1998), we explore various pedagogical approaches for addressing plagiarism which we believe might serve to empower students in higher education spaces.

2. Discourses around plagiarism

A review of the extensive literature on plagiarism in academic institutions reveals three major discourses. The first is the discourse of moralism which portrays plagiarism as intentional dishonesty and a reprehensible "moral crime" (Hu and Sun 2017: 58). It propounds that plagiarism strongly conflicts with the academic honour code which values honesty, the avoidance of cheating and plagiarism, and the maintenance of academic standards. When a moralistic discourse prevails, pedagogical approaches to prevent plagiarism typically involve some form of ethics education and the use of honour codes to obligate students to abide by institutional ethics standards (Hu and Sun 2017). The success of the moralistic discourse relies on students' personal integrity and willingness to abstain from dishonest behaviours (McCabe and Trevino 1993).

Related to but distinct from the discourse of moralism is the regulatory discourse of proceduralism (Kaposi and Dell 2012). This discourse views plagiarism as a breach of academic rules or conventions rather than an issue of morality. It acknowledges the existence of unintentional plagiarism which, as opposed to intentional deception, may result from students not knowing citation rules or conventions. Pedagogical interventions focus on emphasising institutional rules, teaching academic conventions, and providing students with referencing and administrative guidelines. The success of the regulatory discourse relies on students' willingness to be obedient and follow institutional rules and policies.

Overall, these two discourses construct plagiarism as a choice behaviour; instances of transgressive intertextuality are the result of a deliberate intention to deceive or a blatant disregard for academic rules and conventions. Through this understanding, plagiarism is perpetuated as a student "deficit": an inability to self-regulate their choices and behaviours, an "infection of the student body" (Zwagerman 2008: 692). Disciplinary action is deemed as the most suitable remediation strategy. In many ways, this punitive approach is exemplified by the rise of text-matching software, such as Turnitin, which is used to catch cheats "red-handed" (Hu and Sun 2017).

A third type of discourse views plagiarism as an issue of learning and development rather than one of moral transgression or the inability to follow institutional rules (Angelil-Carter 2000). This approach, which is adopted in many writing centres, emphasises that novice writers need to be socialised into legitimate academic practices, and require educative support in their acquisition of academic discourse (Lea and Street 1998). The success of this "academic literacies" approach relies on educators' commitment to facilitating a developmental process. It is also relies on students' willingness to make mistakes and engage in a process of learning. The implication is that power is often renegotiated: the role of the educator can be shifted from policing and punishing to facilitating and mentoring.

3. Consequences of negative discourses

The predominance of punitive discourses around plagiarism and the absence of educative strategies can have several deleterious consequences for various stakeholders involved in teaching and learning. Firstly, a focus on moralistic and regulatory approaches can lead to the development of plagiarism stigma (Pecorari 2003). This is perpetuated by university policy documents which often highlight the "severe consequences" of plagiarism including getting zero for plagiarised works, failing a course, disciplinary action and a conviction for cheating, and possible expulsion from the institution. Perpetuating plagiarism as a crime contributes to the spread of "moral panic" (Clegg and Flint 2006: 373). This, along with the perceived threat of legal sanctions, can cause considerable anxiety amongst students. These feelings are often compounded by students' uncertainty about what constitutes plagiarism or how to avoid it, despite receiving lectures and guidelines (Power 2009). Those who have been "caught" or accused of plagiarism express feelings of shame, embarrassment, and guilt (Cochrane et al. 1999).

Research has shown that plagiarism also evokes a variety of emotions amongst academic staff. Educators express feelings of anger and disappointment when they discover an incidence of plagiarism, as though it is a "personal betrayal" (Zwagerman 2008). There is anger and frustration at the amount of time required to gather "evidence" against offenders and pursue plagiarism charges (Zwagerman 2008). Educators express feelings of guilt for not knowing what to do to help or prevent plagiarism, anxiety around punishing their students, and also fear of judgement from colleagues (Vehviläinen et al. 2018). In the context of such turmoil, it is unsurprising that plagiarism is viewed amongst academics as a "Pandora's box" (Sutherland-Smith 2005). Overall, the dominance of moralistic and regulatory discourses around plagiarism creates an atmosphere of anxiety and suspicion for educators and their students, which is not conducive to the teaching and learning process.

In addition, negative discourses around plagiarism fail to support learning in various ways. One concern is that, when the dominant discourse focuses on punishment of so-called "moral" and academic transgressions, students could learn to conceptualise referencing as a strategy of obedience and punishment avoidance rather than as a valuable rhetorical practice (Bouville 2008). This might have a crippling effect on writing development and academic confidence. Another concern is that the discourses of moralism and proceduralism do not account for why students continue to use sources inappropriately despite moral and regulatory explanations about plagiarism (Pecorari 2003). Novice academic writers tend to use a variety of source-based strategies which could be identified as plagiarism, such as paraphrasing through synonym substitution, repeating selected sentences from a source, and alternating between repeated language and independently written language (Angelil-Carter 2000). This "patch-writing"

approach, originally coined by Howard (1995), should be viewed as distinct from intentional, deceptive plagiarism since it is indicative of the developmental process of academic writing (Pecorari 2003). When patch-writing is conflated with deceptive plagiarism, especially in environments that typically refer plagiarism cases to a disciplinary body, students may not be afforded a pedagogical response (Howard 1995). Punishing students for engaging in a process of learning may have a detrimental effect on their motivation to learn (Gu and Brooks 2008, McGowan 2006). Negative discourses around plagiarism may, therefore, be in conflict with educators' commitment to creating learning spaces that are both enabling and empowering.

As well as failing institutional goals for teaching and learning, negative discourses could undermine current transformation efforts in South African higher education spaces. Students who speak EAL are particularly vulnerable to the charge of plagiarism because they tend to patch-write more than first-language speakers (Pecorari 2003). This presents challenges in the South African context where EAL speakers make up the majority of the student body, and where sustained educational deprivation has led to a heritage of educational under-preparedness, especially in terms of language competence (Linder et al. 2014). The absence of adequate institutional policies that take into account these challenges and accommodate students from disadvantaged backgrounds could perpetuate current inequalities.

There is also a need to consider how dominant plagiarism discourses might be related to systems of institutional power. When moralistic or regulatory plagiarism discourses prevail, power is granted to educators who act as monitors and enforcers of rules and ethics. Furthermore, disciplinary action, which is a specific technique of power (Foucault 1995), and the use of surveillance technology perpetuate the subordination of student to educator (Howard 1999, Zwagerman 2008). Since current transformation efforts in South Africa are driven to "empowering those involved in the higher education process" (Waghid 2002: 59), our concern is that the persistence of negative discourses around plagiarism might reinforce the existing hierarchies of power and inequality in our institutions.

4. The need to shift towards positive plagiarism pedagogy: What writing centres can offer

It is clear that there is a need for a paradigm shift in institutional approaches to plagiarism. Specifically, we need to shift away from moralism and proceduralism as the dominant measures for dealing with plagiarism, toward an educative approach that aligns with institutional goals for learning and transformation. However, positive approaches to pedagogy around plagiarism appear to be somewhat underdeveloped in the literature. There is much criticism regarding different plagiarism management practices but few proactive and practical strategies for dealing with plagiarism beyond basic monitoring and detection. Consequently, many educators are still unclear about how they can or ought to contribute to students' positive writing and citation practices. In a study by Power (2009), students expressed that academic staff often warn about the consequences of plagiarism but do not make explicit the knowledge or skills required to successfully avoid it. There is therefore a need to define and promote approaches that educators can use to adequately facilitate students' acquisition of legitimate intertextual and citation practices (Hu 2015). This shift in focus from monitoring, surveillance, and punishment to pedagogy could create opportunities for student empowerment (Hendricks and Quinn 2000).

Writing centres focus on developmental approaches to academic writing and citation, and can work with lecturers to integrate writing centre-type activities within departments and curricula (Archer 2010). Our concern, however, is that this collaboration can be strained if there is conflict between writing centre values and the dominant practices in the greater university environment. In our experience, students are sometimes sent to the writing centre for "remediation" when they are suspected of plagiarism. We resist this "quick-fix" model and deferment of responsibility for two main reasons. Firstly, it is difficult to teach writing and citation in isolation from the disciplines because knowledge and literary practices are socially constructed and highly contextualised within different academic communities (Archer 2010, Lea and Street 1998). Secondly, writing centres do not have the resources to carry the responsibility for every individual student's academic literacy development. Writing practices are a curricular responsibility that should be addressed within the disciplines, which means that all academic staff should be adequately prepared to facilitate students' acquisition of textual practices. As a step towards addressing this, we will now share some of the practical teaching strategies we use in the writing centre. We believe that these can be easily replicated within the disciplines, which could contribute to the development of positive and empowering approaches to plagiarism in other higher education spaces.

5. An integrated approach to plagiarism pedagogy

We propose an approach where the three major discourses around plagiarism become integrated as complementary components of an educative strategy that strives to address plagiarism, whilst at the same time empowering students.

5.1 Acknowledge that moralism and proceduralism have their place

Ethics education is necessary to teach students about academic integrity or the moral code of academia, which includes values such as honesty, trust, respect, fairness, and responsibility. Students also need to be explicitly taught about what constitutes plagiarism, and the basic conventions and rules for appropriating sources. Fazilatfar et al. (2018) provide a sample set of classroom notes and exercises as well as citation test items which can be used for these purposes. Such "overt instruction" (New London Group 1996) is important because students are sometimes unsure about what constitutes plagiarism and how to reference properly (Vehviläinen et al. 2018). Comprehensive plagiarism guidelines that make explicit the nature of transgressive textual practices can serve this purpose. At the writing centre, we have often used the Turnitin White Paper on the "10 types of plagiarism" for these purposes (Turnitin 2016). Students also need to be taught the "mechanics" of different referencing conventions and styles. While teaching these academic rules and conventions, educators should simultaneously inform students that correct attribution is a complex textual practice which extends beyond moral choice or obediently applying a set of technical skills or citation styles.

5.2 Develop academic voice through citation

Students are more likely to understand referencing as a rational and legitimate practice when they understand its relevance and value. Therefore, we emphasise the importance of engaging students in conversations about "referencing beyond conventions" to make more explicit the value of citation practice as fundamental to their personal construction and communication of knowledge. Citation is not simply an issue of "accurate attribution", but also involves learning

how to "ventriloquise the words of others" whilst developing a voice of one's own (Thompson et al. 2013: 106). Educators should explain to their students that citation involves appropriating sources into one's own argument, and using the voices of others to negotiate one's own position in a particular discourse community (Archer 2013).

Previous research has shown that students desire a sense of competency and agency with regard to their ability to use sources in a way that supports their own voice (Power 2009). However, the concept of 'voice' is complex and, therefore, sometimes difficult to teach and learn. One teaching strategy we find helpful at the writing centre is to alert students to the different citation choices available to them, and we explain how these carry certain rhetorical and social meanings (Hyland 1999). Writers can make certain choices about the form of the citation, such as whether to quote or paraphrase from a single source, or generalise from a number of sources. There are also choices around signalling and reporting structures, such as the use of foreground/integral citations where the name of the cited author appears within the sentence, and background/non-integral citations where the citation appears in parenthesis (Swales 1990: 148). In choosing one form or the other, writers can show their decision to give greater emphasis to either the reported author or the reported message (Hyland 1999). We have also had success in drawing students' attention to the use and rhetorical value of reporting verbs. Using specific examples, we explain the evaluative potential of reporting verbs: that they can convey a writer's attitude towards a source, and signal whether the writer feels the reported information is true or false. For example, using the word "claims" as in "Martin (2017) claims that …" indicates that the writer may be somewhat sceptical about the reported source, whereas the reporting verb "states" is more neutral, and "demonstrates" could indicate greater belief in the source.

Discussion and reflection within the disciplines is important to teach students about the connection between rhetorical choices and the "social activities, cognitive styles and epistemological beliefs of particular disciplinary communities" (Hyland 1999: 352). For example, integral citations are more common in texts produced in philosophy and sociology, while writers in hard sciences tend to downplay the author. Allowing students the opportunity to explore in depth how texts work, and teaching them about the range of available rhetorical choices available to them can contribute to the development of a notion of 'voice' as well as a greater sense of agency, power, and freedom as students generate texts.

5.3 Acknowledge patch-writing as part of writing development

As novice writers learn to write within academic disciplines, they might make use of "borrowed" words or accepted forms of expression in an attempt to "upgrade" their language to more appropriate academic styles (Bartholomae 1985, Pennycook 1996). They might also substitute words, swap phrases or stitch together pieces of repeated language with their own (Angelil-Carter 2000). This type of source-dependent composition, or "patch-writing" (Howard 1995), should not be conflated with intentional plagiarism. As a stage in the development of academic writing, patch-writing should be viewed as a neutral and non-stigmatising practice. It also deserves a pedagogical response that focuses on providing novice writers with careful guidance to ensure that they emerge from the patch-writing phase (Angelil-Carter 2000). As noted by Pecorari (2003: 338), "today's patchwriter is tomorrow's competent academic writer, given the necessary support to develop". This clear distinction between "evidence of an intention to defraud" and "inappropriate textual borrowing" (Abasi and Graves 2008: 221) successfully removes unintentional plagiarists from the disciplinary system.

During this developmental process, students learn that quoting is the most basic way to transfer knowledge. However, educators encourage students to paraphrase, that is, "to use different phrasing and wording (requiring citation) to blend the other's idea smoothly into one's own writing" (Campbell 1998, in Hirvela and Du 2013: 87). One of the most common suggestions given to students to help them avoid plagiarism is to "use their own words". Although this advice is well-intended, it is not necessarily helpful since words are socially constructed, and are always shared by the cultural community that devised them (Halliday and Hasan 1985). Students soon discover that educators do not necessarily value texts written in their own words, containing awkward transcriptions or culturally inappropriate translations from their first language, and that "unless they can use accepted forms of expression, they remain at a disadvantage" (McGowan 2005: 4). Students may therefore choose to "borrow" words and phrases from their texts in an attempt to "upgrade" their language to more appropriate academic styles. This realisation of what is valued in the context of academic writing is a necessary stage during the acquisition of academic literacy. If, however, students are punished for plagiarism as a result of their textual borrowing, they may be likely to develop a "fear" of paraphrasing, and could prefer to rely heavily on quoting (Hirvela and Du 2013). Novice academic writers cannot be expected from the outset to have total command of disciplinary language. When students borrow language from their readings, they are already on the right track for improving their level of academic writing, but it is at this point that careful guidance is needed.

5.4 Develop critical thinking

According to Pecorari (2003: 320), one of the causes of patch-writing may be uneven reading comprehension, that is, students cannot frame alternative ways for conveying a message if they do not understand what they are reading. Furthermore, making good choices about what texts to cite, and generating meaningful and accurate reconstructions of readings depends on how deeply students engage with their sources (Archer 2013, Thompson et al. 2013). Critical thinking is a complex cognitive process, and being able to write critically within the disciplines requires sustained engagement. There is thus a need to identify teaching strategies that can enhance the development of reading, comprehension, and critical evaluation.

One strategy we have found useful is to engage students in discussions about their reading and evaluative practices. During workshops, we ask students to establish a list of questions that they could ask when critically evaluating a text. After a reflection on and discussion of critical reading and its relationship to critical writing, we provide a handout of key questions (see Appendix), and explain the importance and value of each question. The most valuable aspect of this activity is that it models ways in which students could engage with their readings. In doing so, we help students better understand their role as authors. We emphasise that it is not the academic writer's role to be a conduit of incontestable knowledge claims. Rather, we encourage writers to foster their agency as authors who must always make conscious and rational decisions about their position or attitudes toward their readings.

Another useful discussion to have with students relates to citation function. During workshops or individual consultations, we ask students to analyse the function of the citations in a piece of academic writing (either their own or a published article). We use the following prompts as a guide: "What are the functions of your citations? What is the author's motivation for using these citations? Feel free to ascribe as many functions to each citation as you wish". After providing some time for students to work through this task, the facilitator then leads a discussion of the

different types of citation functions. We also use some of the citation functions identified by Harwood (2009) to prompt discussion, and emphasise that that there are many reasons why authors choose to include citations in their texts. For example, "signposting" refers to the use of references that direct readers to other, more comprehensive, content (usually to save space), "supporting" references are used to justify knowledge claims, and "advertising" references alert the reader to the writer's earlier work.

5.5 Use plagiarism detection software for critical feedback

A large component of writing centre work involves providing constructive feedback on students' texts. However, as discussed earlier, writing centres cannot meet the needs of an entire institution, and there is a need for individual departments to contribute to students' writing development. One strategy for providing feedback within individual disciplines and curricula, perhaps as a part of tutorial sessions, is the mindful use of Turnitin reports. When first implemented, text-matching software was used mainly for detecting overt plagiarism, but it has also been shown to be valuable in teaching appropriate source use (Bretag and Mahmud 2009, Dahl 2007). When Turnitin is primarily used as a detection tool, students rarely see their full Turnitin originality report. Most often, they see only a percentage of plagiarism, and do not have the opportunity to engage with flagged sections of text. Educators can make better use of text-matching software by allowing students to bring their full originality reports to a tutorial session where they can discuss their texts with a trained tutor. This allows students to explore plagiarism in a safe environment, and to re-work flagged sections of text with appropriate support and guidance. This approach has been applied successfully at the writing centre where we work, and has also been shown to be useful in other contexts (Davis and Carol 2009).

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that addressing plagiarism involves negotiating conflicting discourses and the implementation of educative strategies that empower students. Plagiarism is complex in nature, and it can fall into the realm of choice. However, we have argued that transgressive intertextuality is not always the result of blatant misconduct or a deliberate intention to deceive, but rather an issue of learning and development. Being able to transform and construct knowledge, as opposed to simply displaying it, requires writers to engage deeply and critically with the content of their disciplinary fields. This means that the acquisition of academic writing competency is often a lengthy process that is neither linear nor terminal. For this reason, there is a need to reframe the current negative discourses surrounding plagiarism, and to focus on how educators can better develop dialogic spaces in the classroom and the curriculum to better facilitate the developmental process of writing beyond teaching morals and conventions. Students need more opportunities and spaces in which to experiment with different intertextual practices. In an attempt to address a lack of pedagogical frameworks that contribute to a positive and educative approach to dealing with plagiarism, we have shared various writing centre strategies which can be replicated in other spaces. These strategies involve making explicit the knowledge and practices underpinning accurate source use, which can contribute to students' sense of power and agency as they produce academic texts. The approaches discussed here may have the potential to contribute to transformation of teaching in higher education in South Africa.

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Appendix: Examples of questions to ask when reading critically

- Who are the authors? Are they considered experts in the field?
- In which country was the research conducted? Developed or developing country? High income or low-to-middle income country? What socio-political factors might have influenced the text?
- When was the article published? Have there been major developments in the field since then?
- What is the author's central point, main argument, conclusion, thesis, contention, or question?
- What findings and conclusions are presented?
- What evidence is used to support the conclusions?
- Is the evidence relevant? Was the methodology appropriate and robust?
- What are the strengths, limitations and implications of this study?
- Does the author make any assumptions?
- What is not being said? Has anything been overlooked?
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