# Literacy Issues and Plagiarism in Theological Education


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*The following article was first prepared as a seminar and was presented by my husband, Dr. Jack Whytock, and I at the Mukhanyo Theological College Curriculum Consultation held in Pretoria, South Africa in November 2013. The content of this seminar was first motivated by conversations we have had with each other and with colleagues in various theological colleges over many years and as a result I was driven to research. In my own role as an English teacher, I have felt particularly privileged to discuss language challenges with many students and have benefited greatly from their openness and insights. The following paper includes most of the material presented at the seminar along with some additional suggestions for improving academic literacy. The bibliography at the end is not exhaustive but includes materials that I have found particularly helpful both as an English teacher and librarian.*[1]

## Introduction

Anyone who is involved in higher education for any length of time will no doubt be able to attest to encountering the issue of plagiarism in some way or other. Sadly, Christian institutions are not immune. Plagiarism is not a positive word. It is associated with academic stealing, with using the work of another without properly acknowledging indebtedness.

It is difficult to get any statistics to demonstrate the apparent global rise of plagiarism. "It is clear, though, that plagiarism is not rare. In a UK study of students' self-reported behaviour, a majority of students were found to have


[1] Thanks to Dr. Rick Ball for his insights and also to Dr. Wm. Badke for providing such a succinct and helpful definition of information literacy.

engaged in acts which were equated with plagiarism" (Pecorari, 2013, 24). If students are actually reporting that according to the standards of their institution they are plagiarizing, then there can be little doubt that such activity is a **moral** issue.

However, the issue of plagiarism is not always so neatly defined or discerned. What one professor or institution considers plagiarism is not necessarily identical to the judgment of another. Such variations in understanding and policy may reveal **pedagogical** or **cultural** issues which greatly add to the complexity of this subject. Likewise, because students, professors and theological institutions may be confused as to the real nature of plagiarism, they may struggle to satisfy or support competing definitions of it simultaneously.

This complexity regarding plagiarism has been further complicated by the increase of two worldwide phenomena:

1. **Many students of theology are now studying in a language and culture other than their L1 (the mother tongue).** Susan McCulloch (2012, 56) very helpfully points out the unique pedagogical issues of L2 (a language other than the mother tongue) writing in relation to issues of plagiarism. For example, McCulloch shows that L2 students who copy work out of sources may simply be revealing their "lack of linguistic dexterity" and academic development and yet are often accused of academic dishonesty (McCulloch, 2012, 57). She further goes on to do an excellent job of showing that the academic community worldwide is being forced to address this issue of "plagiarism" in a manner that widens the concept beyond the narrow assumptions of dishonest intent and thievery that have traditionally defined it.

**AND**

2. **The explosion of information access through technology** which has led to a whole new challenge for institutions (not just institutions of theology), professors and students: information literacy. In a keynote address given at the Annual Conference of the Association of Christian Librarians in June, 2013, Dr. Wm. Badke noted, "Study after study finds the same thing that most of us are seeing behind a reference desk: students doing research are lost. They don't understand the information world in which they are supposed to function and have little experience using libraries. They don't understand the assignment. They don't understand what the professor wants from them" (Robinson, 2013, 60). **There may well be glaring pedagogical issues in many of our theological institutions**.

## Is plagiarism a Moral Issue? A Pedagogical Issue? A Cultural Issue?

### Is plagiarism always the diagnosis or is it sometimes the symptom of dysfunctional educational policies and methods?

In order to "widen the scope" on issues concerning plagiarism, it may be preferable to reword any discussion of this worldwide academic problem into

a more inclusive, constructive framework such as the following: ***the necessity and benefits of learning to properly use and document sources for academic writing purposes.***

Regarding the word "necessity", it is worth noting that conventions concerning source documentation are a relatively recent phenomena following the period of the Enlightenment. For example, Calvin's *Institutes* originally were without source citation (in-text, footnote, or endnote). Nevertheless, by the late 20th and early 21st centuries, we have arrived at strict academic conventions in formal academic writing.[2] And yes, this modern necessity and expectation of proper source documentation does have its benefits:

1) **Moral integrity** – the modern concept of intellectual property requires us to give the individual "their due". In our generation, we see copyright and individual ownership of property as paramount. Thus, when we can show honour through proper documentation, it becomes part of our Christian testimony. That is beneficial.
2) **Dialogue** – proper documentation allows for greater dialogue between the lecturer/tutor and the student as the professor has a better grasp of what material is influencing students. That is beneficial.
3) **Aid to Memory** – proper documentation allows us to return to sources to find ideas, quotations, etc. that we may want to look at again for future study. In an age of massive amounts of information, surely that is beneficial.

The question then arises: What kinds of literacy skills are needed in order to be able to properly use and document sources? The way an institution answers, or does not answer, this question will shape pedagogical policy and ultimately shape in some measure academic progress within the student body.

## Defining Literacy and Academic Literacy

### 1. Literacy

**The basic definition of literacy** is commonly said to be the ability to decode and encode words on a page. Yet this definition is somewhat simplistic.

**There are actually four basic functions or practices that are involved in literacy:**

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[2] It is important to note that there is a distinction between "academic" Christian writing and "vocational" Christian writing and oral communication; for example, devotional articles or sermons. This distinction can help to bring clarity to the topic of plagiarism. The concept of honour applies in both spheres but the manner by which honour is given will vary. More discussion and writing needs to take place on this distinction. The evaluations and discussions below focus on *academic writing* and are meant to be directed toward students, professors and institutions in higher learning, colleges and universities, with specific reference to the development of academic writing/literacy.

1) Breaking the code of texts – phonics and grammar.
2) Participating in the meaning of the text.
3) Using the text functionally by knowing and acting on the different social, cultural, religious functions that texts perform and using these to derive deeper meaning and understanding.
4) Critically analyzing the text and placing it within the framework of other ideas and concepts

Even at this very basic level, institutions should be aware that students may appear to function well in reading and writing by demonstrating competency in 1. and 2. above, yet their ability to use the text functionally and analytically may be very limited. Obviously then, the student's lack of advanced literacy becomes a major stumbling block to success in higher education. This limitation seriously affects the next level of literacy, that is, academic literacy.

## 2. Academic Literacy

Academic literacy refers to the literary practices or competencies that allow people to succeed in academic work in schools and universities.

One of the most helpful descriptions of academic literacy comes from a report prepared by the Intersegmental Committee of the Academic Senates based in California, USA. The report focuses on the four main areas of language competency: **reading and writing**, **listening and speaking**, but also includes two very interesting categories: **habits of mind** and **technology use** (Warschauer, 2002, 3). A fifth area, information literacy, has been added by the present author.

### 1. Reading and Writing

There is a range of skills here from very basic (eg. retaining information or identifying main ideas) to more complex (eg. understanding the rules of various genres of writing, anticipating where arguments or narratives are heading, and properly documenting research materials). NOTE: properly documenting research materials (avoiding plagiarism) is reported by the California study to be in the more complex range of reading and writing skills (Warschauer, 2002, 2).

### 2. Listening and Speaking

These skills range from fairly basic competencies (eg. recognizing digressions and illustrations) to more complex skills (eg. interrogating diverse views or recognizing the spoken form of vocabulary previously encountered only in written form).

### 3. Habits of the Mind

Skills related to habits of mind are listed first in the California Report and include "the ability to sustain and express intellectual curiosity, experiment with new ideas, exercise persistence in pursuing difficult tasks, and respect principles as well as experiences" (Warschauer, 2002, 3).

**4. Technology Use**

The fourth aspect of academic literacy is the realm of technology. This includes such tasks as using search engines effectively and consulting experts via email. In the case of online learning, it includes the ability to use programmes such as *Moodle* or *Angel* in order to participate in a cohort or engage in a virtual classroom setting.

**5. Information Literacy**

Dr. William Badke (Robinson, 2013, 62) suggests that this fifth aspect of academic literacy can be broken down into five elements that must be encouraged and developed if students are to be successful in higher education.

a.) Students need "a substantial understanding of the current information landscape" (Robinson, 2013, 62). Even such basic understanding as the difference between an article and a journal must be taught.

b.) Students must "understand the purpose of research and have the skills to design it well" (Robinson, 2013, 62). This includes teaching the concept of solving a problem through research.

c.) Students need to "know how to move beyond Google thinking in information acquisition" (Robinson, 2013, 63). Many students are now under the impression that everything there is to know can be found on Google. Institutions must provide training in library catalogue searches and alternative data bases that often contain higher quality research materials.

d.) Students need help "to develop solid skills in evaluation information" (Robinson, 2013, 63). This takes time and help from professors and librarians alike.

e.) Students need to be called "to join the academy as participants" (Robinson, 2013, 63). This means students should not be left with the idea that they are to learn about the professor's subject. In some way, through a process of mentoring, the student should be encouraged to "own" the subject and participate as an "insider" or "player" in the field, not an "outsider" or "spectator". This point relates well to the concept of habits of the mind found above.

Obviously, developing literacy, and academic literacy in particular, involves the active participation of institutions, professors and students as well as their purposeful commitment to the above incremental and long-range goals. Hence, ideally any discussion of plagiarism should be integrated with a discussion on literacy issues in order to avoid treating the symptoms without properly diagnosing the illness. With this in mind, the following charts are provided as guidelines for discussion and evaluation.

## Exploring Student Issues

**Pedagogical**

- Students may have varying levels of educational background and may have large gaps in some areas. For example, essay writing, critical thinking skills, and even "general knowledge".
- Students may lack a pedagogical framework that appreciates the structure of formal theological education and the necessity of building from the "bottom up".
- Students may be at the very basic end of "academic literacy" yet will be enrolled in courses that will require a much more advanced literacy level.

**Moral**

- There can be no debate that student moral issues (failing to honour, failing to respecting ownership and failing to tell the truth) contribute to a percentage of the problem of not properly using and documenting sources.
- There may be a lack of understanding or conviction of the seriousness of these moral offences.
- Temptation may be overwhelming (not meaning the behaviour is acceptable) especially for students who are struggling to keep up.
- The fear of failure and of losing financial sponsorship may be greater than the fear of willfully engaging in plagiarism.

**Cultural/Contextual**

- All over the world, many theology students are studying in a language other than their L1.
- Many students speak several languages and are therefore much more gifted in listening and speaking (skills that will probably be used more in future ministry) than in reading and writing.
- Some students come from an L1 that does not have a large corpus of literary material – studies have proven that this strongly affects literacy gains in a second language.
- Some students are considerably behind in terms of technology skills simply because they have not had access to and training in technology for as long as their fellow students.

## Exploring Faculty Issues

### Pedagogical

- Due to budget constraints or other factors, professors may be required to teach courses "out-of-order" at which point prerequisites are not fulfilled and teaching becomes less effective and frustrating to all concerned.
- Professors may be "too specialized" and may not see their place in "the whole" in terms of the overall flow of the theological education curriculum within a programme.
- Many professors have not received any in-service training to assist them in meeting the growing pedagogical challenges faced through technology, L2 learning and the globalization of education.

### Moral

- Faculty members may fail to advocate for pedagogical reform even when patterns of incompetency are evident and identified. Thus students may consistently be in a position of temptation due to inappropriate pedagogical standards or methods whereby faculty are teaching "over-the-heads" of the students.
- Educators lose sight of the first principle of excellence in teaching: meet the student(s) where they are and take them a little farther. (Consider Christ's example.) As a result, students may become exasperated.

### Cultural/Contextual

- In some areas of the world, a very high percentage of professors at theological institutions are from a foreign country. This can make it difficult for such professors to appreciate the educational differences of their home culture versus their present culture. For example, standards for receiving Grade 12/Matric Certificates vary greatly.
- Ex-pat professors often do not speak the L1 of their students. The onus is almost always on the students to accommodate the L1 of the professor (this must be acknowledged and appreciated).
- Examples, illustrations, even humour can sometimes seriously challenge the student as the professor may be speaking from a totally different cultural context.

## Exploring Institutional Issues

### Pedagogical

- Theological institutions may lack the services of an academic dean/curriculum council who will seek to ensure that the programmes incrementally address the needs of the students from the time of admittance to the time of graduation.
- Similarly, theological institutions may respond to one area of need (for example, skills based courses) without deliberately integrating the use of such skills in the overall curriculum.
- Theological institutions may feel pressure to perform at a certain academic level in order to participate in the globally-growing "obsession" with degrees. This can potentially weaken the actual educational effectiveness of the college while appearing to strengthen it.

### Moral

- Institutional standards may be inconsistently applied which may leave students with the impression that adherence to policies is optional.
- Finances or institutional ambition may interfere with proper goals. For example, the underlying motives for admitting students (to increase college finances, to increase student numbers, etc.) may overrule fair judgment as to whether the student would/could actually benefit from being admitted.
- Theological institutions may enter into academic partnerships for reasons of prestige or academic snobbery that may fail to protect the student body from unrealistic academic expectations.

### Cultural/Contextual

- Many theological colleges in the developing world receive funding from the international community – "money" talks and decisions may be made to please donors rather than in the best interests of the students and the college.
- Beyond funding, many theological institutions receive other types of donations from the international community (eg. books) and struggle to bridge the gap between being thankful and finding practical uses for such material versus the actual needs of the students.
- Many theological colleges are on a "subsistence budget" and are not able to respond properly to student needs because of financial constraints including lack of personnel.
- Many theological colleges do not have the IT support (personnel or equipment or both) to implement advanced technology in the classroom.

## Practical Suggestions for Improving Academic Literacy[3]

### The Student

**Reading:**

- Recognize that developing reading skills are vital to academic success.
- Set aside regular time (a daily amount of time) to read in a quiet environment.
- Try to slowly increase the amount of time you are able concentrate on silent reading (eg. add five minutes per month to your daily schedule until you reach your goal).
- Report to your professor if you are not coping well with assigned readings.
- Make notes as you read in order to keep your mind focused.
- Try to also read about your subject in your L1, if possible.
- Discuss what you are reading with fellow classmates.
- Read material outside of your assigned readings for courses.
- Read as much as you can (newspaper, stories, etc.) in your L1, not just in English.

**Writing:**

- Write down ideas (in English or in your L1) before you begin to write a report or essay.
- Organize your ideas so that they follow a particular order.
- Write notes when you hear preaching – a great way to get better at note-taking.
- Write a diary.
- Keep a small book with you – when you hear or read a new word, write it down and look it up – there are excellent on-line dictionaries as well as traditional print dictionaries.
- Take a computer course and start to make use of all of the writing help provided in software programs such as Microsoft Word.
- Write emails to friends and family to practice more writing.
- Start a blog and post your ideas in your L1 or English or both.
- Meditate on a passage of scripture and try to write it into a paraphrase.

[3] Over the past several years, I have tried to record suggestions. The following lists, though still works in progress, are provided as possible starting points for discussion.

**Listening:**

- Inform your professor if you find he is speaking too quickly.
- Listen to podcasts or radio and then try to tell someone about what you heard.
- Make notes as you listen to improve your concentration.
- Look for pointing gestures and other visual clues from your professor that will help with the meaning.
- Ask your institution to create a listening library and be sure to make use of it.

**Speaking:**

- When speaking publically, prepare notes so that you can be more confident and deliberate in your speech.
- Practice reading the English Bible out loud – use Bible Gateway online to help.
- Use English in conversation whenever possible.
- Repeat what others have said in order to add new words to your vocabulary.

## The Professor

**Reading:**

- Remember that the features that make a text attractive to a professor may not necessarily make the book more comprehensible for the student – when possible, solicit the advice of a language teacher and/or colleagues who speak the L1 of the students in deciding on reading material.
- Eliminate all nonessential pages and reading assignments.
- Provide a vocabulary list with definitions that will make the reading more comprehensible.
- Assign study questions to guide students rather than giving vague directions such as “summarize the reading”.
- When considering the amount of reading, remember that it generally takes at least twice the time for ESL students to read and comprehend text as compared to native speakers/readers of English.
- When setting the number of required sources for an essay, consider that fewer sources properly used are far superior to many sources improperly handled.
- If possible, extend class hours and work together as a class in the library/classroom as professor circulates to assist.
- Incorporate readings in the L1 if possible.

- Actively encourage students to read in their L1 – the Bible, newspapers, online resources, magazines, novels, etc.

**Writing:**

- Do not expect ESL students to write like native English-speaking students.
- Focus your evaluation on content and organization.
- Keep grammatical corrections to a bare minimum – eg. subject/verb agreement or correct word order.
- Endeavour to be consistent in your writing expectations by providing clear guidelines for the various types of writing you will be expecting: book reports, annotated bibliographies, research paper, journal of readings, etc.
- Communicate with the college librarian and solicit their help in assisting students with reading/writing assignments.
- Try to think of writing errors in a similar manner that you would think of a foreign accent, only in writing instead of speech.
- At college entry-level (and whenever deemed appropriate), give shorter writing assignments and more of them so that the overall amount of work is the same, but the work is broken down into manageable portions. Have students then put these portions together to see how they can follow this model to produce larger written assignments in the future.

**Listening Comprehension:**

- Make a conscious effort to speak at a reasonable rate.
- Write key terms on the board (chalkboard, whiteboard, smart board), spell out new meanings and explain their meaning.
- Use visual aids to enhance oral presentations – emphasis on "enhance".
- Distribute copies of lecture outlines ONLY – dense text is confusing – prepare hand-outs with careful attention to layout and readability (including font size).
- During lectures and course discussion, periodically summarize what has been covered so far in class.
- Encourage students to assist each other (partner together) in note-taking.
- When asking questions, provide plenty of time for students to consider the question and provide an answer – repeat the question at least once.
- If you use an idiom or make a joke and realize students do not under-

stand, explain it if time permits. Keep the use of idiom and jokes to a minimum because of the fact that they are generally culturally bound and do not translate well into other cultures.

- Use online technology such as *Voice Thread* and *The Spoken Test Language Lab* to upload or record your own listening material for students.

**Speaking:**

- For discussion purposes, break the students into smaller groups to facilitate increased participation and reduce anxiety.
- When you do not understand a student question, be careful to ask students to repeat the question in a manner that does not discourage them from asking questions in the future.
- If the technology is available, start an audio blog for your students so that prior to a class discussion students can listen to each other's opinions and familiarize themselves with the arguments (*Voxopop* would be great for this as you can upload photos, articles or audio clips for the "group" to consider).
- When listening to student presentations, have students provide an outline in order to facilitate listener comprehension.
- Use speaking assignments as training ground for writing assignments – integrate listening/speaking and reading/writing skills.
- Similarly, use oral assignments/discussion before and after reading assignments to see if students are able to interact with the readings – this will improve critical thinking skills.
- Use opportunities for casual conversation (before class begins, after class, during college tea breaks and meals) to familiarize yourself with student accents in order to increase your comprehension of student speaking.
- Do not assume that because students can speak to you in English socially they are fully bilingual and can handle academic English.

**Assessment:**

- Be aware that the speed and accuracy with which students can interpret the exam or test questions will be a major factor in their success during assessments – allow extra time when possible to compensate.
- Endeavour to make questions as unambiguous as possible – consider having colleagues read through assessment materials and provide feedback.
- Pay attention to assessment areas where all or most of the students fail – use this feedback to evaluate the root cause – lack of preparation, lack of clarity in the question, etc.

- Consider the modes of assessment for assignments, tests and exams and use a variety of assessment tools that incorporate all aspects of language – reading, writing, listening and speaking.

## The Institution

**Reading:**

- Carefully select and evaluate new library materials with ESL students in mind in order to better direct various students to appropriate reading levels.
- Endeavour to collect relevant reading material in as many of the student L1s as possible.
- Keep bilingual dictionaries in the reference section – be aware of online resources for students in this regard.
- Provide library support by assisting students to find appropriate materials.
- Provide students with helpful on-line reading lists – eg. filter massive data bases for material that is pitched at the educational level of the students within your own institution.
- Provide courses in library skills and computer skills in order to enhance research/reading capabilities.
- Provide a library environment that is conducive to reading: quiet, clean, organized, comfortable, convenient, and dependable (hours).
- Model reading through having professors regularly working in the library.
- Provide a form for students to make requests for new books, e-books, e-journals, etc.
- Ask incoming students to complete a questionnaire on their present reading habits – in their L1 as well as in English.

**Writing:**

- Develop academic writing policies as an entire faculty in order to maintain consistency – eg. use same referencing style (MLA, APA, etc.).
- Create a writing clinic/centre that provides one-on-one remedial help for students.
- Conduct a series of seminars that deal with student moral, pedagogical and cultural issues concerning properly using and documenting sources. Ask students to fill out a survey to provide feedback on whether or not these seminars were helpful – measure this feedback

against actual results.

- Select one or two senior students to run a student newspaper (can be a print copy or an e-copy) to encourage student writing.
- Solicit the help of students in translating English material into their L1 – should be reasonably short – pamphlet-style.
- Partner students with native-English speaking students in an on-line discussion forum – could be a partnership between two theological colleges.

**Listening:**

- Offer a list of on-line audio materials (podcasts, YouTube materials, etc.) to encourage students to listen to English as much as possible. Divide the resources according to the course catalogue so that students can use the materials as a supplement to their course studies.
- Offer a list of resources that provide audio lessons along with a transcription to enable students to follow the text while listening (BBC ESL website does this with current events).
- Provide a select list of metrical Christian music that can be accessed on-line (along with written lyrics). The slower sounds of singing can greatly enhance comprehension and the metre enhances memorization of content (numerous free websites for this – google "Christian music with lyrics").

**Speaking:**

- Implement a chapel mentorship programme whereby all divinity students are mentored in the public reading of scripture, public prayers, leading in song, and preaching.
- Identify a few able musicians and ask them to form a college choir – singing is a wonderful handmaid to speaking and is particularly useful for improving pronunciation.
- Invite students to represent the college in giving college presentations at English-speaking churches and schools.

**Assessment:**

- Develop/use proper assessment tools for incoming students to determine actual literacy/academic literacy level – some are available on-line.
- Consider the place of oral examinations in the overall curriculum and implement this form of assessment as a vital component of accurate student assessments.
- Use assessments to not only gauge student achievement but to provide important information on areas for improvement in the college curriculum as well as faculty approaches to teaching.

- Regularly evaluate the overall use of technology at the institution – is it being used to its full potential to ensure academic literacy is advancing in a globally high tech world?

**General Institutional Policies:**

- Develop a policy statement that outlines how the institution will deal with offers of donations, staffing, materials, etc. from the international community – begin the policy with a statement of institutional goals and objectives – measure all further policies against these.
- Encourage professors to make use of professional skills of the librarian in teaching information literacy.
- Whenever and wherever possible, hire professors who speak the L1 of the majority of students and if admissible, offer at least some of the teaching in that language.
- Provide in-service training for all faculty members that offers practical discussion on teaching L2 students in a higher educational setting. Focus discussions on the use of sources and strategies for effectively using reading material with L2 learners.
- Ensure that a person/committee is in place to evaluate the overall student body versus the curriculum and assess if the college standards are realistic, clear and unified given the needs/educational background of the student body.

## Conclusion[4]

Both the increase of technology use in education and the rapid growth of students studying in a language that is not their mother tongue have changed the way we can and should approach theological education around the world. A discussion of plagiarism often leads to a discussion on these two factors and this is positive. Actual lying, stealing, and failing to honour will always be part of the academic dilemma and discipline of a college, even a theological college. It is part of the reality of living in a fallen world. However, where students, professors, and institutions can band together to support each other in the pursuit of righteous academic development to the glory of God, there will at least be one practical response to the biblical exhortation, " … let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good

[4] Please note: Beyond listening, speaking, reading and writing, academic literacy also includes technology use, information literacy and habits of mind. Suggestions for improving these literary elements are consciously imbedded in the above suggestions. Website addresses mentioned above are available upon request. Contact Mrs. Nancy Whytock: nancywhytock@gmail.com.

deeds" (Hebrews 10:24). May theological colleges worldwide set an example of excellence in education before a watching academic world.

## Appendix

### Review of a Recent Work on Plagiarism

***Teaching to Avoid Plagiarism: How to promote good source use* by Diane Pecorari. Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press, 2013, paper, 192 pp. ISBN 978-0-33-524593-2**

The title of Diane Pecorari's book, *Teaching to Avoid Plagiarism: How to promote good source use*, provides a helpful summary of the author's intent and tone for this important contribution to the international issue of academic writing and plagiarism. Those involved in higher education will recognise immediately that Pecorari, Professor of English Linguistics at Linnaeus University, Sweden, intends to focus on understanding and prevention versus detection and punishment.

The book is divided into three main parts: understanding plagiarism, managing plagiarism, and contextualizing plagiarism. In part one (containing three chapters) the author begins by showing just how difficult it is to define plagiarism and how this lack of consensus on definition can and does contribute to the issue in a significant way. Consequently, Pecorari goes on to discuss the statistics concerning plagiarism and writes, "it is clear that identifying plagiarism is a problematic, contentious and sometimes haphazard affair, so it is not surprising that pinning down the frequency of plagiarism is very difficult, and figures and estimates diverge considerably. What is clear, though, is that plagiarism is not rare" (pp. 23-24). This begs the question: Why does plagiarism happen? Pecorari further develops our understanding of plagiarism by addressing this question. She looks at two different kinds of answers: "the reasons which impel students to cheat, and the reasons they feel they can justify or excuse cheating" (p. 29).

Part two (containing three chapters), managing plagiarism, provides specific guidelines for writers, teachers and institutions that Pecorari hopes will be implemented in an attempt to reduce plagiarism. This three-fold approach is very welcomed as the author clearly recognises that avoiding plagiarism in academic writing requires the student, the teacher and the institution involved to evaluate what changes are needed in order to produce the best possible outcomes in academic writing. "The most desirable outcome for a policy on plagiarism is that it is so effective in providing both a carrot and a stick, telling students what they will gain by not plagiarising and what they will lose if they do, that students never consider plagiarism" (p. 97).

The third and final section of this book (containing four chapters) is predictable and necessary, contextualizing plagiarism. Here Pecorari discusses a

host of subjects that reveal some of the greatest challenges to academic writing today: international students, second-language writers, policy differences across academic subjects, diversity of academic backgrounds, and the attitudes of millennials. For example, the author notes concerning students who are allowed university entrance but are poorly prepared: "The risk for students from backgrounds where academic literacy was not emphasised is that they may arrive at university less prepared to manage a heavy reading load, find information in the library, and accommodate to the demands of academic writing (p. 135)." Her comments on millennials are insightful, "For this generation, relating texts to each other in the way that academic writing traditionally prizes and requires is an alien and mysterious activity" (p. 138). This third section is definitely helpful for anyone who is facing the issue of plagiarism and is trying to untangle the various roots of its existence.[1] However, there is no evidence that Pecorari is writing as a Christian, so the matter of institutions, professors or students missing the mark concerning loving our neighbour as ourselves, as it applies to higher education in general and academic writing in particular, is never discussed. Theological institutions will certainly want to explore this root as they grapple with academic writing issues.

The book has a very logical layout and at the close of each chapter there is a suggested "activity" and then "Questions for reflection or discussion". The activities are meant to be used to apply each chapter's subject matter to the context of the reader and most involve some sort of informal research. Both the activities and the questions would make for effective faculty in-service training and development on this subject at Bible colleges and theological institutions worldwide. As Pecorari wisely notes, "Plagiarism is a complex phenomenon and an understanding of it complexities is a precondition for being able to respond to it effectively" (p. 1).

*Reviewed by Nancy Whytock*

[1] In discussing these roots, Pecorari never dismisses the fact that actual plagiarism should be punished. This is a welcome contrast to Angelil-Carter's work, *Stolen Language*, which leaves the reader feeling that the author finds plagiarism to be a necessary and unavoidable outcome of the developing writer.

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