

Policy and practice in two academic settings: How the administrative structures of Australian and Swedish universities serve a culture of honesty

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Although institutional plagiarism policies around the world vary greatly in terms of the degree of specificity in their provisions, many share a number of common characteristics. Policies typically describe mechanisms according to which suspected individuals can be first judged, and then, if found guilty, sanctioned. Extending the criminal justice metaphor further, institutional policies and procedures for dealing with suspected instances of plagiarism can be said to have two closely related objectives: to identify and punish the guilty (while not mistakenly identifying or punishing the innocent) and to use the threat of detection and punishment to deter transgressive behaviour. The intrinsic value of both of these objectives is clear, but the extent to which institutional practices meet them depends not only on effective detection and deterrence, but also on promoting student learning. This paper questions the extent to which a culture of detection and deterrence promotes the core business of learning in two very different contexts, Sweden and Australia. Swedish universities are (with a single exception) within the public sector and funded, run and regulated by central government. Australian universities, by contrast, are much more heterogeneous in the way that policies are developed and implemented. The language, as well as the process, for plagiarism management varies across institutions

By comparing institutional approaches to plagiarism management in different national contexts, we explore ways in which cultures of honesty are shaped at the level of policy. What are the expectations of universities about promoting ethical learning and establishing a culture of academic honesty in their learning spaces? How are these expectations envisaged in policy? Are these visions achieved in practice? In addressing these issues through an analysis of policy documents and interview data from teaching staff, plagiarism policies apparently focus on detection and deterrence mechanisms at the expense of promoting learning for students. In both Sweden and Australia it appears that existing disciplinary mechanisms disappoint staff in their efforts to shape a culture of honesty.