

## **Academic Plagiarism**

by Rebecca Marsh, Head of Editorial, and Jenny Pickles, New Business Development Manager, at Emerald Group Publishing Limited

In the past, to plagiarise another person's work was a time-consuming and risky process. It involved re-writing text, which had quite possibly been read already by other researchers in the field or your supervisor, by hand. Today, with the number of electronic journals published in the UK alone predicted to quadruple to 193,000 by 2005<sup>1</sup>, plus the increase in printed materials and the proliferation of web-based resources, the ability to copy the work of others undetected has become far easier to achieve. Even the UK Government has fallen prey to the web's easy access to information over the infamous Iraq dossier ("Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction"). Many detractors claim that the '45 minute deployment' claim contained in the dossier came from an outdated student thesis, and that segments of the dossier were plagiarised<sup>2</sup>.

Plagiarism is a broad term that applies to many different types of copying. This ranges from claiming authorship of an entire piece of work to misattribution or insufficient attribution of source papers. The latter is far more common: 'content' being made available to scholars and academics through the internet and the ease with which it can be cut and pasted without rewording has, at least in part, contributed to this specific problem. Coupled with this, the discipline of recording all web sources and correctly referencing them is not easily undertaken. Finally, the pressures on academics to publish research to secure funding for future work and career advancement, in other words the 'publish or perish' principle, has led to a very small number of researchers taking short cuts in the past.

Stanford historian, James Sheehan, in an article for North Gate News Online, states "proper attribution is so intrinsic to research, that 'we don't even teach it to our graduate students'"<sup>3</sup>. However, as many recent cases have shown, students are not necessarily aware of the seriousness of this behaviour. From a study conducted by Don McCabe from the Center of Academic Integrity, the results demonstrated that out of 4,500 students who completed the survey, 52% had copied at least a few sentences from a website page without citing the source<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, a large proportion of students was not sure if copying from the web was bad practice. This finding is cause for concern and stresses the importance of explaining the implications of plagiarism to students early in their education. The problem goes deeper than this because often information published on the Internet has not been reviewed or validated. It is not always possible for a student to identify which sources of information can be trusted and to easily discern quality research and reliable theory. Inaccurate or plagiarised material can be quoted and used unwittingly, which creates a string of inaccurate references and multiple copied texts.

Emerald publishes over 120 journals and has the largest portfolio of management and library and information science journals of any other publisher. At Emerald, we undertake a number of initiatives to assist in establishing good practice amongst our authors. We have an author relations department and we regularly run 'author workshops'. As part of the workshops we offer guidance on how to avoid inadvertent plagiarism by making sure that any work cited is correctly referenced and we explain to an author that it is not appropriate to paraphrase large passages of text from other

researchers. Each publisher uses a standard form of referencing and we advise authors to check the style they use and adhere to it throughout a piece of written research. We provide 'Author Guidelines' in every Emerald journal to clearly outline our own referencing scheme and to remind authors about the importance of using appropriate references.

At Emerald we have a copyright policy which unequivocally states that cases of plagiarism will be pursued when brought to our attention – this applies to Emerald authors whose work has been plagiarised and to an Emerald author who is accused of plagiarism. We treat all cases very seriously. Stuart Hannabuss, from Robert Gordon University, highlights the severity of the action if plagiarism is proven against an academic: "Codes of academic conduct usually include guidance on plagiarism and the penalties it can lead to – failure of an assignment, suspension from a course, and, in retrospect, possible revocation of an academic award. For academic staff, working under an employment contract between employer and employee, there are added legal and professional sanctions and obligations, such as loss of livelihood and reputation."<sup>5</sup> Recently, three co-authors submitted work to an Emerald journal and were accused of plagiarism. Two of the authors claimed they were innocent and the third was guilty, however all were subsequently dismissed by their institutions. The consequences can be disastrous to one's personal reputation, career and income.

The editorial process in scholarly journal publishing is the first barrier to prevent plagiarised work from being published. Peer review (where independent reviewers who are subject specialists review the work) is an effective way of identifying whether or not research is original. The merit of a paper is judged in part on its originality and intellectual integrity. However, the system is not altogether fool proof. Some fields are research-rich, making it easier to plagiarise others' work without being detected. As the amount of research published grows, and particularly in sources that can not easily be referenced and acknowledged, so does the problem.

Plagiarism is rarely straightforward; each situation can be slightly different. For example, as in the case mentioned earlier, if a paper is authored by more than one person not all the co-authors may be responsible for the plagiarised text. Sometimes, authors reside in countries where the copyright law is not as rigorous as it is in the European Union and they do not understand the seriousness of plagiarism.

For these reasons it is important that a policy on plagiarism is unambiguous. At Emerald, we apply a structured and fair approach when addressing cases of plagiarism and we assess the circumstances carefully. As part of the Emerald Copyright Policy our response to plagiarism is specifically aimed at promoting and protecting our authors' work. In the event that an article published by an Emerald author is found to have been plagiarised by another author, Emerald would take immediate action on the author's behalf to protect the integrity of their work and their moral right to be acknowledged as its creator. If an article in the Emerald Fulltext Database is found to be a plagiarising copy of a previously published work, Emerald will always support the original author/s, whether published by us or by another publisher. It is our policy to uphold the principles of copyright and to protect the rights of authors, whether they are authors of articles published by Emerald or by another publisher. The steps we follow are as follows:

1. We would ask the author who is making a complaint to provide copies of the original and/or copied text for us to assess whether or not it genuinely contravenes copyright legislation.
2. If foul-play is suspected, we would then approach the author or being accused of plagiarism or the publisher and seek an explanation.
3. Again, we would fully evaluate their response.
4. If plagiarism can be proven, we would ask the offending author/publisher to make a written apology directly to us and to the injured author.

If an Emerald author is responsible for the plagiarism, we will include a statement to this effect along with an apology and erratum, which we have approved by the injured author, in the forthcoming printed issue of the relevant journal. Where the issue also appears in the Emerald FullText Database, we will also include this statement at the beginning of the title page of the article where it can be viewed online. We would also provide a direct link to the original article where possible.

5. If an Emerald article has been plagiarised, we would request that the publisher include a statement to this effect along with an apology on the electronic version of their paper and a link to the original paper in the Emerald journal. If the work has not been officially published but placed on a website or in an online repository, we would ask that the article be removed altogether.
6. If we were not satisfied with the response or with the subsequent action, Emerald would consider litigation. However, it should be noted that even where Emerald decides to take no further actions, this does not preclude the guilty author's own institution taking the issue further. By stealing the work of another author and passing it off as their own, their actions not only constitute a serious breach of their own employment contract, but also by association, bring disrepute upon the entire organisation.
7. Authors found to have been guilty of plagiarism will no longer have papers accepted for publication by Emerald.

Emerald thought long and hard about the implications of continuing to publish plagiarised articles online in our Database. Taking account of various stakeholder views expressed both directly to Emerald and on email discussion lists we decided that the best interests of all would be served by continuing to do so.

We believe that there are a number of important benefits to be gained by establishing this policy:

- It serves the requirements of the reader by ensuring an accurate historical record of published research;
- It maintains consistency between the print and electronic environments;
- It respects and protects the moral rights of the original author/s;
- It provides readers with the correct attribution;
- It ensures that reference links remain unbroken;
- It highlights the misconduct of the plagiarizing author/s;
- It presents a tangible and public deterrent to future acts of plagiarism;
- It maintains a publication record and highlights the series of events.

An article in the Emerald newsletter for authors and editors, Literati Club Newline, illustrates the benefits of having a publisher to fight plagiarism on behalf of the author. Jenny Pickles wrote:

“Recently, another case was brought to our attention by Literati Club members Selwyn Ellis and Robert Webster of Ouachita Baptist University, Arkadelphia, AR. Their co-authored article published by Emerald in the Journal of Managerial Psychology was reported to have been re-published in a peer-reviewed journal, which was freely accessible electronically via the Internet. An Associate Professor from a US university was claiming authorship of the paper, which once again was practically identical to the original paper throughout.

Having reviewed the evidence, we immediately issued a Cease and Desist order with a threat of impending legal action to the plagiarising author. Proof was sent to the online publisher that they had unwittingly been put in a position of infringing our copyright. Within a week, the plagiarised paper had been withdrawn from the other publishers’ web site and replaced with a notice stating why.

A week later the author admitted his actions, apologising profusely to the original authors and gave a written undertaking not to use the article again. With the agreement of Selwyn and Robert, we have informed all parties that no further action will be taken, however the plagiarising author awaits the decision of the Dean of his faculty having seriously breached the terms of his academic employment.

Robert Webster commented: ‘When the plagiarism incident was reported to me, I felt both mad and helpless. Thanks to the people at Emerald, assistance was forthcoming that restored my faith in the system and resolved a bad situation in a timely and professional manner.’”<sup>6</sup>

We recognise that plagiarism has been a problem since the early days of publishing and will evolve as technology and society develops. Several factors have contributed not only to increased levels of plagiarism, but also to the increasing ability to detect plagiarism. The web has made written research more accessible to a wider audience and therefore more people will be able to identify if their work has been used without acknowledgement. This process is assisted by the use of automated plagiarism checkers.

However, detecting instances of plagiarism after the event is only part of the problem. The importance of encouraging students at an early stage in their career to develop good research and citation practices cannot be overstated. The web is frequently used as a source of research but some of the material online is of questionable quality. In some cases, the work may not be peer reviewed and this can result in poor practice, for instance the inadequate citation of other people’s research. This, in turn, can lead to inadvertent plagiarism by others and a ‘string’ of incorrectly referenced works.

The Emerald website is a good source of information about avoiding and detecting plagiarism and provides a range of recommended resources for students, academics and librarians to assist in developing principles of research best practice. Our

Copyright Policy is firm on plagiarism; it is specifically aimed at promoting and protecting our authors' work. We believe the publishing industry must work alongside the academic community to protect academic integrity.

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<sup>1</sup> Finlayson, C. (2003), "News from member libraries: The British Library", SCOUNL, Newsletter 30, Winter, p.64.

<sup>2</sup> BBC News online (<http://www.bbc.co.uk>)

<sup>3</sup> Bentley, M. (2002), "Local academics react to historian's plagiarism", North Gate News Online, 13 March (<http://journalism.berkeley.edu/ngno/stories/000552.html>)

<sup>4</sup> McCabe, D. (2001), "An overview of research on academic integrity", Center for Academic Integrity 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, 20 October (<http://ethics.acusd.edu/Resources/AcademicIntegrity/Index.html>)

<sup>5</sup> Hannabuss, S. (2001), "Contested texts: issues of plagiarism", Library Management, Vol. 22, Nos 6/7, pp 311-16 (<http://www.emeraldinsight.com>)

<sup>6</sup> Pickles, J. (2002), "A cautionary tale", Emerald Literati Club Newslines, September/October (<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/vl=55289/cl=139/nw=1/rpsv/literaticlub/whatsnew/newsline/sept2002.htm#5>)