

# TOWARDS A SOCIAL MODEL OF PLAGIARISM

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*“The future is not given, to be received, but is created.” Freire (1993) p21*

## ***Abstract***

In the ten years since the first International Plagiarism conference, little has changed in evolving the view of plagiarism as more than an academic offence. The importance of plagiarism from a student’s perspective, rather than that of the existing academy hierarchy, has never been more relevant. This paper builds upon previous practical work that identified the need for overcoming the power imbalance in Further and Higher Education, and the disruptive force of the Internet. A social model of plagiarism is proposed that builds upon a practical definition of plagiarism – The Four Cs – and identifies its cause as products of the power relationships and educational climate in universities and colleges today. This challenges us to simultaneously address the social and cultural aspects that give rise to the occurrence, identification and regulation of plagiarism. Finally, a call is made for us to recognise the forces that maintain the status quo in Education, and to take direct action against the ‘Institutional Plagiarism’ that this creates.

## ***1 Introduction***

This paper will be unlike any of the others at this conference, in that the last thing that will be discussed is plagiarism per se. This is not to make excuses for breaking one of academia’s most enshrined taboos, but to question whether it is a good principle; this should not be confused with post-modernist thought that anything is fair game. Deeper questions are needed, such as “What is the purpose of assessment?” and even “What is the purpose of learning?” Therefore, this paper will propose a social model of plagiarism and learning as ‘political acts’, which identifies the potential for improper power relationships and a lack of progress made in formal adult education in the last three decades. While the definition, identification and occurrence of plagiarism (and other academic offences) has undergone a phase shift in recent years, little work has been done to address the social and cultural factors that arguably create an environment where it can flourish. Therefore, a novel, if contentious, redefinition of plagiarism might be necessary.

The power structures in the established culture of Western academia has constructed systems to safeguard knowledge, but these rules can serve to limit learning. This ‘disabling’ process needs exploration because it provides a convenient smokescreen for those in privileged positions to maintain the status quo in education. This social model will attempt to make explicit novel perspectives of our current education system. This will aid recognition of the hierarchy of power that exists in education, which allows ‘institutional plagiarism’ to occur.

## ***2 It’s a Crime, isn’t it?***

The idea that plagiarism is an ‘academic offence’ has been almost universally accepted (Mallon 2001). Although, if it is a crime, it is hard to understand who the victim is, or what has actually been taken from them. “No concept is truly unique, and all ideas are created in the context of the society and culture in which they are engendered. Therefore, there cannot be any true ownership,

or indeed theft, of these artefacts as they are an integral part of the environment that learning is taking place within.” (Reddy & Jones 2004)

One argument is that plagiarism, or more simply the act of copying, is academic ‘self-harm’, because it removes learning opportunities for the ‘plagiarist,’ even where such behaviour may be justified by financial or personal circumstances. Isserman (2003) argues that we all stray into grey areas and are, therefore, unqualified to judge without being guilty of self-righteous vindictiveness. A view shared by Hunt (2002), who is concerned that there is a discrepancy between students and lecturers with regard to citation, because “*typically, the scholars are achieving something positive; the students are avoiding something negative.*” Isserman suggests that some acts of plagiarism might be the least worst solution, when personal and financial constraints apply, and that plagiarists are as much the victims as the perpetrators. So, in a world where ideas are infinitely reproducible, is taking credit where it is not due actually a criminal act?

Maybe this is true for Western cultures, such as in the USA and the EU where the free market gives value to the ownership of ideas. Foucault (1969) labeled this idea of authors creating not just publications but the idea itself as ‘transdiscursive’ (p114), but it may be less so for other cultures where intellectual ownership is not so rigid. This can be a commonly used explanation for non-western students use of plagiarism. McCabe (1997) suggests there is a grain of truth in this stereotype, but while his survey work is valuable, it does not query the implicit belief that plagiarism is cheating, rather than being a mere example of cultural norms; the difference being where one draws the line defining ‘unacceptable’. So, if plagiarism is not exactly illegal, is it immoral?

Josephson (2000) is concerned that “moral illiteracy” is a grave threat to Society, evidenced by increasing instances of academic misconduct. However, Goffman (1961) in his work on mental institutions saw the roles of server (lecturer) and served (student) as conducive to both unity and discord. Later he proposed the ‘cloak of competence’ that could explain the need for students to be (repeat) offenders, to achieve the grades they think they should. (Goffman 1963) “The idea of student as victim of education, rather than victor, has some mileage: It is not because one is a plagiarist that one is alienated, but because one is alienated that one is a plagiarist.” (Reddy & Jones 2004)

If the perception of plagiarism is defined by cultural phenomenon, it could be argued that it is a crime ‘by the State’, rather than ‘against the State’. However, students will only perceive oppression when its flaws are made self-evident, resulting in contrariness and a fatalistic acceptance of the situation as ambiguous, followed by acts of rebellion such as plagiarism, because appropriate responses – those that seek to confront contradictions in teaching practice – require reflection/experience to be guided towards legitimate action. The next section proposes a ‘practical’ definition of plagiarism that attempts (by exclusion) to hold up each important element to scrutiny, which will allow plagiarism to be viewed as a social construct for later discussion.

### ***3 Plagiarism: The Four Cs***

In order to better understand a phenomenon it is usual to define the term. This paper proposes a utilitarian definition of plagiarism. However, it might not sit well with traditional or formal interpretations of the term.

*Plagiarism is the 4 Cs: Conscious Copying of Content for Credit.*

Here the term ‘content’ might equally apply to ‘colleagues’ and could thus include collusion. By this definition, if any of the Cs is missing then an act might be something just as undesirable, but it is not plagiarism in the authors’ view. Inadvertent, or unconscious acts will be dealt with below.

### ***3.1 The First C – Conscious***

While many institutions have taken out the need for deliberate acts in their definition of plagiarism, in the authors’ experience, misconduct panels applying these regulations often require some evidence of ‘wrong doing’ or intent; the simple defence of “I didn’t know/understand” appears to be quite effective, at least for the first offence. Few institutions have cast-iron evidence gathering or audit trails in place, being based on the ‘balance of probabilities’ rather than the more litigious ‘beyond all reasonable doubt’. This leads to a lack of evidence of intent that does not detract from the view that inadvertent plagiarism is still considered to be bad practice, even if it may not be an academic offence. Ironically, unfair practice panels, by being tough on the lecturer when inadvertent plagiarism is reported, are not benefitting the student, but are more likely to be driven by ‘academic survival’ through student retention at institutions.<sup>1</sup> This is a damaging precedent for both students and staff, even in genuine cases of ignorance. The emphasis upon blaming academics for “not doing their jobs” maintains the status quo: allowing students a petty and illicit semi-rebellion (copying and getting away with it); delivering the wrong message (plead ignorance and you will be exonerated at the expense of the lecturer); or encouraging lecturers to avoid such situations (“There’s no point reporting it...”).

### ***3.2 The Second C - Copying***

Copying is interesting in its omission as there can be many ways in which students can use material, be it from books, journals or the web: to be inspired by the concepts and structure of an article; to inform best practice; mimicry is the way that many academics learn to write publishable papers. To reread the work of another is a reasonable expectation from undergraduates. Here again we also have a dilemma in defining what is copying and what is just inspiration. Copying is not limited to verbatim lifting of text, as patch writing, paraphrasing and ‘homage’ (common in Art or Musical outputs) are variably considered at different levels of ‘procurement’. Experience from delivering plagiarism awareness workshops has highlighted the emphasis of subject specialism on the need to cite and the desire to show originality. At one end, one Engineering lecturer asked “Why do Engineering students need to know how to reference?”<sup>2</sup>, while a colleague in Law commented, “The last thing a brief wants is something original. We work with precedents.” Clearly, each discipline will need to draw the line appropriately, but they all share the view that at some point attribution will become necessary.

### ***3.3 The Third C – Content (or Colleagues)***

This C is intended to cover collusion as well as material from sources, but it should be remembered that the person who provided the original usually has to go through the academic offence process unless the copier confesses.<sup>3</sup> Although something of a ‘fudge’, the implication is that this C represents the source(s) of information. So, how can it be excluded while maintaining

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<sup>1</sup> Retention is a major factor, but avoiding the reputation for either having problems with plagiarism or being tough on infringements are also factors, which is why honor codes are explicitly represented in many US institutions, despite the fact that plagiarism detection is used for potential applicants if not for current students. In the UK, media coverage of past plagiarism ‘hot spots’ such as Sunderland University resulted not in reinforced importance of maintaining quality, but rather a perceived lack of quality, which has led many educational institutions to want such academic misconduct to be handled quietly.

<sup>2</sup> This is a true story, and the response was made when an entire final year Engineering class was pulled up for lifting large chunks for a report. The Law lecturer had a point, but the precedent still needs to be declared even if the actual wording could be identical.

<sup>3</sup> Again, this is based on several personal experiences. Where two students have submitted identical work, there are many cases where it is possible to determine who the originator was, but they will still have to go through the process and prove that they were unwitting or naive victims. In some cases, where neither party could prove who had originated the work, rather than King Solomon dividing the grade between the two students, there have been cases where it was impossible to pursue academic misconduct charges.

the other three Cs? Primarily, through self-plagiarism, but it is not uncommon for university regulations to ignore self-plagiarism, or only to pay lip service to it.

Possibly, with the advent of electronic detection software the incidence of copying previous work will become more of an issue in future.<sup>4</sup> Currently, the failure of the third C is principally that of copyright, and publishers consider it a very different matter. However, a student's educational experience, prior to academia, has primarily involved copying: it is Nature's way to learn from the moment we are born. We copy our mother's face when she smiles. We dutifully copy the letter 'b' and try not to write 'd' by mistake. We copy teacher's notes from the blackboard. Pretty much everything we learn involves some degree of copying. Even when we consider the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky 1978 p.86) or "scaffolding" (Bruner 1966), a mental 'painting by numbers' must be acknowledged to achieve competence at a task. It is only when the issue of summative assessment arises that 'ownership' of ideas becomes significant. Lecturers are measured by their production of ideas, and so that ownership is jealously guarded. And thus is the root of all evils, plagiarism, is introduced. When we consider the effect that the Internet has had upon Education, the traditional view is that it has merely fanned the flames.

*"For students, especially, the Internet may sap the very need to create. It's all there already, [his emphasis] or so it seems; all the knowledge on a given subject, and all the competing viewpoints, in a machine you can carry around like a book. What's there to add – and why dig a well instead of turning on the tap?" (Merton 2001 p246)*

### **3.4 The Final C - Credit**

It is final C, i.e. doing it all for Credit, which is critical to the authors' definition of true plagiarism. Given the common view of the Internet as some form of "global photocopier" (Reddy 2000) the idea of attributing ownership of easily accessed material will, necessarily, become much more mainstream in future. However, this requires us to expand the scope of what "for credit" means; the potential for monetary gain necessitates the economic interpretation of 'credit' also be considered, which is not the traditional focus of discussions of plagiarism. Where career politicians, authors and journalists, as well as senior academics, are increasingly being judged on the basis of present and past work, the previously 'academic crime' of copying without citation is becoming more common in the Media. Such stories have the power to cause embarrassment, and loss of face, if not position. One result of this increasing scope of plagiarism is for the 'establishment' to 'close ranks' with great vigour, while publicly deriding/pursuing lower level perpetrators. A clear case of double standards, and one regularly reported in the Media.

### **4 The Social Model of Plagiarism**

The old adage that knowledge equals power should, if true, imply that experience at university is an empowering and transformative process. The main theme of this paper is to consider the idea of 'oppression' in Higher Education; something that has been recognised (Martin 1986), but little studied in the last few decades. This leads to issues of the control of power, and unfair practice in assessment, before culminating in describing plagiarism as an act of misguided, in some cases unconscious, rebellion. However, it is useful to know where we are trying to get to, before considering how we are to get there. So, it would be sensible to consider where the phrase 'social model' comes from, namely the Social Model of Disability; an alternative interpretation of the way in which Society views and deals with people with disabilities. It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe the Social Model of Disability in depth. The reader is referred to Shakespeare & Erickson (2000), who summarise it as the dichotomy between the Medical Model view that impairment is what makes someone disabled and the Social Model, which argues that Society

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<sup>4</sup> As mentioned previously some of the text of this paper is from work that has not been submitted for, or survived peer-review. However, the authors still felt it to be important to make this explicit, due to concerns that 'too high a score' would damage the chance for acceptance; the abstract stage of the review process for this conference saw both reviewers query the "poor Turnitin score".

discriminates against people with impairments, thus disabling them. It is proposed that the current institutional response to plagiarism as an ‘academic offence’ is akin to a ‘medical model’ of Education, in that it is seen as the result of a ‘flaw’ in the student rather than created through the (restricted) opportunities and inequalities they have experienced. The challenge in addressing such a social model of plagiarism is not merely to individual lecturers, but the entire system of education and the society that requires and commissions it.

#### ***4.1 The Power to Define the Question***

Luke (1975) describes the ultimate power in education as the ability to “define the question”. Currently, it is apparent that employers and lecturers control the power to decide what is included in curricula, and how and when it is assessed. While critics have battered Freire’s “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” – notably bell hooks (1996), who subsequently became one of his staunchest supporters – his early writings have an enthusiasm that political opponents have done little to dampen.<sup>5</sup> Freire (1993) argued that students have been seen as “empty vessels to be filled with knowledge”, which he defined as the ‘banking model’ of education. Rather than students playing a submissive role, Freire argued for ‘conscientizacao’, defined as “learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire 1993, p19).

#### ***4.2 Students != Customers***

One feature that Freire may not have predicted is the economic constraints now being placed upon higher education, where many degrees are vocationally focused and economically oriented, with the student viewed as a ‘paying customer’, expecting a piece of paper to verify skills that never need demonstrating. The problem, according to Freire, is that any education system (including students and staff) will work towards maintaining the status quo, unless it has been specifically designed to avoid this. “The oppressed are afraid to embrace freedom; the oppressors are afraid of losing the ‘freedom’ to oppress.” (Freire 1993 p28) Freire argues that freedom cannot be given to someone, but must be constantly fought for by that person. This involves risk from those in power and others fearing reprisals from that risk, and Freire’s ‘banking’ interpretation of existing educational practice serves to keep reality from being revealed or transformed. “The oppressors use their ‘humanitarianism’ to preserve a profitable situation. Thus they react almost instinctively against any experiment in education which stimulates the critical faculty...” (p54) Arguably then, such situations are to be cherished even (and especially) if this involves criticism of the individual lecturer who has provoked such a response. Thus, education needs to be constructed “*with, not for*” (p30) students. The authors argue that students also need to take on board the fact that they are ‘active participants’ in learning and not merely purchasers in a transaction.<sup>6</sup>

#### ***4.3 Plagiarist as knowledge terrorist or freedom fighter***

Such a shift in thinking might enable plagiarism to be viewed as ‘misguided revolution’ because the student perceives some oppression/injustice: lecturer doesn’t care; assessment is irrelevant; deadline too close; work load too heavy; or personal and financial pressures. Arguably, the student should not be blamed for such a response, if it is their attempt (within the existing system) to avoid further oppression or indeed, a chance for the oppressors to perceive their oppression. The authors maintain that legitimate response requires action and reflection. Only when students

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<sup>5</sup> “Pedagogy of Plagiarism” was considered as a potential title for this paper, but it was rejected because it might be implied that it was a wholehearted acceptance of the phenomenon. However, the act of plagiarism should be considered an opportunity for the educational system to reflect upon what failure has brought students to this act.

<sup>6</sup> Otherwise, this view of education as something that happens ‘to’ students is like joining a Gym, paying the fee, and by that act alone expecting to become fit. The mere act of joining a gym is not sufficient and, in fact, can lull people into the view that they are “doing something about the health and fitness” when, in fact, they are not achieving any useful or meaningful contribution to the problem.

perceive the vulnerability of the lecturer can they begin to counter fatalistic, passive acceptance. Activism alone is easily countered by the educational system, and if the lecturer attempts awareness raising or preventative practice that is imposed on the student, it will further dehumanise; e.g. software that prevents a student from placing text in an essay without a reference, providing an audit trail of 'evidence' is a classic oppressive and disempowering act.

Students and staff can be effectively isolated and therefore eliminated as agents of change by being treated as 'special cases' or 'an individual merit/circumstances' with the underlying and insidious implication being that everyone else is the same homogenous, well behaved group. When students have no avenue to act responsibly, or feel that those actions will be ignored/frustrated, it is likely that they would suffer greater stress, due to a perceived impotence. The alternative of seeking to identify with those who are believed to be free to act often displaces the disequilibrium; this secondary conformity is bearable because it gives the illusion of participation. One example would be that of student representatives, who are symbolic, institutionally approved leaders with little actual influence.

#### ***4.4 Who are the Accused and Who are the Victims?***

Those who make allegations of plagiarism may not be seeking, at that time, to take part in the oppression, but rather to show that they believe in attribution and their expectation of student behaviour. Students who reach academic misconduct panels are rarely, if ever, held up as examples for others, but rather they are utilised as sub-oppressors of their teaching colleagues, with their only defence being primarily to cast doubt on the lecturer's professionalism ("No one ever said..." etc). In both cases it is the individuals (both lecturer and student) who are put under the microscope, not the system. Following such experiences either, or both, may feel they have been "punished too harshly" and cease to engage in the process. This benefits no one, least of all students, as it leads to a kind of educational corruption that taints future learning. Lecturers moving from this traditional approach are vital, but, in the words of Freire (1993 p44):

*"A real humanist can be identified more by his trust in the people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favour without that trust." (p42) "In their alienation, the oppressed want at any cost to resemble the oppressors, to imitate them, to follow them. This phenomenon is especially prevalent in the middle class..."*

Talking about the problems of recruiting staff for teaching Womens Studies, Hannah (1986) comments:

*"The difficulty here is that many of those who have credentials acceptable to the establishment may be too well trained in orthodox modes of analysis to be able to meet the requirements of transdisciplinary thinking and innovative teaching to do the new studies justice, while those who are sufficiently radical are unlikely to have achieved the credentials normally required to teach at university level."*

#### ***4.5 The Competency Paradox***

Where there is the perception of a lack of control or competence, it is characteristic for people to feel inferior – unable to do 'anything' until they know 'everything' – which it might be built upon their lack of academic maturity. It is possible that this self-deprecation and lack of confidence may be responsible for stress when students are asked for original contributions. It is the authors experience that students' prior knowledge and experience is undervalued and ignored by both parties; the exception being mature students or those following continuing professional development (CPD), who have their own 'communities of practice'. However, these groups might just as equally feel inferior to younger students, who appear more competent in the general

educational process; one good example is the need for IT skills in most degree courses.<sup>7</sup> To extrapolate this need for ‘new IT literacies’ it is worth considering whether referencing and citation are elements of a ‘new’ literacy, requiring the ability to demonstrate the provenance of knowledge as much as its gathering.

#### ***4.6 Like a Fish needs an Umbrella***

The purpose here is to encourage the examination of Academia and the society in which it sits. Why is this necessary? It is often said that the fish do not consider the water.<sup>8</sup> When academics discuss the likelihood of social effects on International students, for example, in terms of cultural differences – revering the words of the Elders, against proper citation because not to assume the lecturer would not recognise the reference, or identifying cultures where it is “best said in the original words, so how could I improve upon it”, etc – academics do not often realise that their own culture is also like water for fish, often ignored because, to them, it is transparent. However, it is important to identify the Culture of the Western Academy as existing in context, rather than being implicitly seen as “the right way to do things” by default. A lack of questioning or exploration of the nature of anything, including Academia, has the unfortunate side effect of maintaining existing power imbalances:

*“When we see the constraints that limit our choices we are aware of power relations; When we see only choices we live in and reproduce power... The potential of ideological analysis is that it decenters the powerful assumptions that determine our questions.”*

Lannamann (1991. p. 198)

Attitudes over issues like plagiarism are, sadly, considered closely with cultural cohorts; international students and those attending ‘lesser’ universities are expected to be more prone to academic misconduct.<sup>9</sup> The alternative emphasis on examination and essay might arguably be a reflection of “How it is DONE!” Educators ‘survived’ it, so it must be right; similar arguments have been put forward for physical punishment, or learning by rote, etc. This has also been used as justification for citation and referencing, implying recognition of the practice as alien or irrelevant in “The Real World”, or outside of the Western view of education.

#### ***4.7 Community process not competition***

In assessing Higher Education, it is likely that emphasis is largely placed on individual work with a discouragement of collaboration, communication and recognition of the social impact of the process of learning, which might be more relevant to life after education. This can encourage comparison by students in contrast to their cohort, and a belief that they are in competition with each other for grades rather than contributing to a learning culture. Where students have prior experience that could benefit the whole group by being encouraged to support the class, the opposite occurs, with students either getting an easy ride because they know it already, or other students feeling that they are failing because they are not as good. Again, assessment of end result, rather than the process of learning, plays a part in alienating both sides: the experienced student can feel disengaged, the novice may feel that they are struggling and will never catch up. This challenges a review of the underlying choices in assessment design and collaboration in developing assessments.

#### ***4.8 “Oh noes...the Internet!”***

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<sup>7</sup> One of the authors, when first required to produce a computer-created essay, nearly withdrew from the course because of a perceived inability to use this ‘new’ technology.

<sup>8</sup> There is an old joke about where fish go when it rains, because they often do move under bridges to shelter, but not (presumably) from getting wet.

<sup>9</sup> One of the author’s own early experience was to observe a few staff at ‘better’ universities assuming that plagiarism would not be a problem at their institution (Reddy 2000).

The nostalgic view of academia, with its origins in the West as springing from colleges of theology, has dissolved with the drive to expand coming from governmental pressure to pass more and more students through its hallowed halls. Financial constraints have also changed the demographic of students, although it is not equal across class boundaries. These pressures on Academia have occurred on two levels: the industrialist push for greater productivity by ‘value adding’ to students who have less academic backgrounds; and the consumerist emphasis on the student as customer, with all the inherent rights that this implies for quality of service, etc. However, there is arguably a greater disruptive force that has swept across all of Academia in the last 30 years. That unstoppable force is the Internet.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully describe the impact that this technological means of communication has wrought upon Education at all levels. However, it can be agreed that the Internet is a “disruptive technology” in the extreme, providing students and staff with a great deal of information very quickly. Old forms of assessment are increasingly becoming antiquated. Designing out the plagiarism in assessment requires us to fully embrace this ‘invasion’. Never more so than now must we “become as a Roman”. This is problematic for lecturers, who are used to rows of dusty abstracts and weeks of waiting for inter-library loans, and fail to realise that we now exist in a knowledge economy where access to information is virtually instantaneous, without any of the former effort required in acquiring data.

### ***5 The Social Model revisited***

The previous section challenged us to look at academic practice not as the default “way it should be done, because it has always been done that way,” but as the cultural artefact that has as much arbitrary nature as driving on the right side of the road does.<sup>10</sup> Previously, the authors attempted a more transparent definition of plagiarism (the Four Cs) to act as a skeleton for viewing plagiarism as a political act. In that light, a Social Model of Plagiarism has been proposed that attempts to argue that the ‘offence’ of plagiarism is imposed (possibly correctly, but still arbitrarily) upon the simple act of copying. Rather than saying “Don’t copy, or else!” we should perhaps be including students, not as customers but as equal (if peripheral) participants in looking at what opportunities there are in the ‘or else’ part of the learning process. However, the question is how to include students in all aspects of education. The first step is to acknowledge the battle between obsessive control and the fatalism of staff and students accepting and adapting to the status quo.

Academic culture appears to see a degree as an ‘academic apprenticeship’; to quote Shakespeare “joy’s spirit is in the doing.” This might not be true for majority of students, who might see university as means to future employment. However, a vocational focus might be just as oppressive as other educational restrictions, because it implies the purpose of HE is merely to ready students for the workplace. While most academics would agree that we should not throw citation out with the bath water, we do need to ask the question of how to justify inclusion of referencing skills in the implicit curriculum, and to evaluate its place, purpose and value in the fields that students will end up in. We need to make referencing practical, accessible and above all relevant to future graduate careers. Why *do* Engineers need to know how to write essays?

#### ***5.1 Grab your swords and pitchforks***

Education’s goal should not be to eliminate risk by clutching at defined areas of safe knowledge to which people have learned to adapt, but to investigate those definitions as a starting point from which to leap. The current student worldview must be respected, rather than students having to

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<sup>10</sup> I always manage to discuss these issues in relation to the experience of driving. In this case, rather than seeing referencing as the ‘obviously right thing to do’ we need to remember that it is just one way; culturally determined by the legacy of Western thought, but no more valid than choosing what side of the road to drive. So long as everyone agrees, there isn’t a problem.

“seize the day” with the handles conveniently provided by lecturers alone. How is this reconciled with the need for change? This evokes what the authors dub the Programmed Paradox: How to develop an inclusive curriculum reflecting the responsibilities of students to be involved in their own educational actions, when they might refuse? Does the concerned lecturer engage in hidden curricula, where students are not informed what the agenda is? This is often the ‘extra-curricular’ approach where school children do ‘fun’ activities with the ulterior motive of teaching particular skills without their informed consent. The existing situation with all its contradictions should be presented as a challenge/obstacle to students’ hopes and aspirations, doubts and fears.

Dialogue must exist to negotiate an educational programme, even if these overtures are rejected. This is really hard to reconcile for educators who want to improve the results of education. Many of us have fallen foul of the programmed paradox, by trying to impose reform and thereby increase the stress on students by not conforming to their previous experiences in HE. The Holy Grail is ‘commitment’ as it is inherently chronological, involving reflection on the past and action in the future, rather than reaction to current circumstances. Here is wrapped up in where we were, and where we are going to be.

If assessment is an adaptive act of evolutionary education then it is ‘hoop-jumping’ with the true purpose obscured, as it is purely reactive without proper cognition. It is making/doing without knowing why, which eventually leads to alienation/dissatisfaction and a distortion that can result in justification for plagiarism. A social model of plagiarism, and education in general, would advocate that assessment should be an assertive act of self-transformation. However, we often know more clearly what we don’t want (fear) than what we do want (desire), but rarely do we know what we need (require).

## ***6 Conclusions***

A description of the Social Model of Plagiarism has been provided, along with a politically motivated definition of plagiarism, the Four Cs. While it might be contentious, the need to identify society’s role in plagiarism, and the connections between the roles of offender; investigator and judge persists. A correlation has been drawn between the subjective disability and, more accurately, inability to perform some arbitrary educational act. This places the social responsibility firmly on the shoulders of educationalists. However, the role for overcoming such educational gaps is not only for lecturers alone, but is one that only students themselves can truly adopt. The current community of practice in Academia is, by its nature, oppressive and self-sustaining; survivors of the educational process are instigated into a status quo, or are rejected by it. This paper has tried to justify the need for all those involved in the educational process, to overcome the lecturer-oriented oligarchy that resists and impedes educational progress, by undermining change from within. Only with the participation and support of students, and staff engaged in active equal dialogue with students, can these changes have any validity.

The proposed Social Model of Plagiarism attempts to portray “academic offences – their definition, identification and occurrence – as products of the power relationships and educational climate in Further and Higher Education today.” (Reddy & Jones 2004). The inherent power structure of current adult education must be overcome in order to remove the social and cultural causes of ‘institutional plagiarism.’ Therefore, participatory curriculum development, assessment and problem-posing education are necessary, with lecturers and students taking what Freire (1993) identifies as “teacher-student and student-teacher roles”. Only then can plagiarism be seen in its historical setting as an unproductive and misguided rebellion against an educational system that should have known better decades ago. Universities and lecturers do not have the power to liberate the education system. This must come from the students and those who show solidarity with them, by recognising the practical necessity of education and their fight for it. Oppression is

not solved by becoming oppressors, but freeing both oppressors and oppressed together. Not overcoming, but becoming.

### **Acknowledgements**

An earlier evolution of this paper appeared in JISC PPPP2004, which had some elements in common, but was more practically oriented and a good deal shorter.

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