

Chapter 9

Wikipedia Practices, Quick Facts, and Plagiarism in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Plagiarism has been a sensitive issue in higher education in Sweden, as many cases were reported during the last years. It depends partly on resources that are devoted to have efficient detection systems, but it is deeply related to how students are prepared for academic exercises. Many freshmen and sophomores are not familiar with academic requirements and can get used to plagiarizing instead of developing critical thinking. The first step in academic writing is to present guidelines to search relevant sources. The chapter is based on an experimentation on sources made at the University of Stockholm with students enrolled in a course in “Culture and Society in France.” By inviting students to work with second hand sources such as Wikipedia and evaluate their validity, it is possible to analyze their learning strategies. The result of the study shows a paradox: if students acknowledge that Wikipedia sources are inappropriate in an academic context, they confirm that they use these sources to have access to other references. A reflection on the quick access to sources is then necessary.

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INTRODUCTION

In June 2017, the government of Sweden proposed a digital strategy in order to make Sweden “the world leader in harnessing the opportunities of digital transformation” (Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation N2017.23). One of the objectives was to increase the digital skills in public sector and develop a digital culture. The universities are concerned by this evolution with a lot of digital services that support learning strategies. In fact, plagiarism has increased in Swedish universities in the recent years. For instance, in 2016, the universities had 103 more cases of suspension than in 2015¹. In 2017, the Swedish Higher Education Authority made a complete report on warnings and suspension cases in ten universities: 248 cases of suspension out of 373 (66%) and 48 warnings out of 117 (41%) were caused by plagiarism². The digitization of many sources may explain this increase (Flowerdew & Li, 2007, p. 163) but at the same time all universities in Sweden use efficient antiplagiarism systems such as *Urkund* or *Turnitin* which can easily detect possible cases of plagiarism (Vilhelmsson, 2010).

Plagiarism is defined as a way of stealing the other’s production and covers different cheating strategies such as non-attribution or patchwriting (Howard, 2000; Pecorari, 2016, p. 97), “textual borrowing, textual plagiarism, language re-use and transgressive/non-transgressive intertextuality” (Flowerdew & Li, 2007, p. 164). Most of the students are not always aware of the problem (Power, 2009). Other researchers proposed an accurate definition of what plagiarism is. “This is text that is taken and used without appropriate attribution to its original source. Using text without proper attribution with the intention to deceive is called prototypical plagiarism, whereas in cases where such an intention is irrelevant – textual plagiarism is also used as an umbrella term, covering both prototypical plagiarism and patchwriting” (Chankova, 2014, p. 2). The attention paid to prototypical plagiarism and patchwriting is not only due to ethical aspects but also to methodological precautions in academic writing. The chapter focuses on the hypothesis that the first step in academic writing should cover a discussion on how to find and quote relevant sources in order to produce an academic text. The research will not include oral cases of plagiarism where students read fragments of texts without mentioning the proper sources (Robillard, 2015, p. 202).

Critical thinking is more and more promoted in higher education as an idealistic attitude where students can build an analysis based on knowledge (Wisdom & Leavitt, 2015). The objective of the higher education system is to make the difference between belief, knowledge and ideology in order to create critical citizens (Bowell & Kemp, 2015, p. 267). This attitude implies to find out relevant learning strategies to develop this critical perspective to “minimize the risk of plagiarism or cheating, to ensure that at least part of the response to tasks is entirely the individual’s own

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