

TEACHING THE TEACHERS: DO PRESERVICE TEACHERS CHEAT AND PLAGIARIZE?

Martine Peters¹, Sylvie Fontaine¹, Eric Frenette²

¹*Université du Québec en Outaouais, Canada*

²*Université Laval, Québec, Canada*

*This abstract is taken and adapted from a chapter submitted in 2021 by the three authors for the book *Academic Integrity in Canada*, directed by Sarah Eaton and Julia Christensen Hughes.*

According to many researchers, cheating and plagiarism is rampant in universities all over the world. However, there is little known about these phenomena when it comes to preservice teachers. This study focused more specifically on examining academic misconduct in preservice teachers, a topic that has not been explored very much in the province of Quebec, nor in Canada. The goal of this research

with this specific group of university students was to obtain an overall picture of the amount of reported propensity for plagiarism in written assignments and cheating on exams and the reasons behind it.

It is particularly important to study preservice teachers during their university training because they are going to be the model for future generations, influencing the primary and high school experiences, and what students come to consider as acceptable. Preservice teachers' values and habits when assessing assignments and proctoring exams will be passed down to their own students.

METHOD

We used a questionnaire developed to explore the propensity to cheat among preservice teachers in five universities in the province of Quebec, Canada. Students were asked what they perceived to be the best ways to cheat or plagiarize which can indicate

how they might do it or how they think others might cheat or plagiarize. A total of 573 students (486 females; 86 males; 1 other) completed the questionnaire.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A general profile of preservice teachers' declared preferred methods of cheating was established from the frequency of responses selected by all participants. Respondents indicated that they perceived cheaters as someone that spend little time studying (49.2%). They also believe that cheaters of today were cheaters in the past (46.9%).

When asked about the best ways to cheat on an exam, the preferred methods by preservice teachers are hiding notes. Frequent cheaters in high school hid their notes in the material but once at university, chose to hide their notes outside the classroom. There is also an element of preparedness to consider. This

brings up the question of intent to cheat which can be linked according to De Bruin and Rudnick (2007, p. 153) to "a lack of effort and a need for high excitement seeking".

Our results indicate that the three preferred methods of plagiarizing are to buy an assignment, to reuse one of their own assignments or to copy and paste from the Internet. This can be linked very clearly to the amount of effort, and time put into an assignment by the students. Buying a paper and reusing one do not necessitate much effort, or as Amigud and Lancaster (2019, p. 106) explain, the students feel that the assignment is not "worthy of

their efforts". On the other hand, copying and pasting from the Internet demands a web search and then some reformulating on the part of the student (Peters and Gervais, 2016) . Many researchers (Bretag et al., 2019; Lancaster, 2020; Medway et al., 2018) have shown in last few years the rise of essay mills and it seems that preservice teachers are not an exception though they seem to contract cheat less than other students (Lancaster, 2020).

Preservice teachers' characteristics explain some of the reasons why our participants mentioned they would cheat. One reason is linked to their need to succeed. Preservice teachers will cheat when they do not think they will pass the exam. In that situation, their sense of self-confidence might be low when they are used to excelling in school and they wish to continue to have good grades. Decker and Rimm-Kaufman (2008, p. 58) explain it very well in their study on preservice teachers' characteristics: "Pre-service teachers educating themselves in such competitive settings may be more likely to experience feelings of stress and inferiority while competing with so many other high performing individuals".

A contextual factor, working and studying at the same time might also explain why some preservice teachers make bad choices. Students who reported working more than 15 hours a week while studying were in fact more likely to cheat because they reported running out of time. Trying to hold down a job and study at the same time can cause fatigue, stress, lack of preparedness for classes, all factors that can lead to poor decisions and academic

dishonesty. Lack of time management skills was also a factor blamed for plagiarizing in Heckler and Forde's research (2015). The students in their study acknowledged that their own failings brought them to plagiarize.

Preservice teachers will cheat when they know the chances of getting caught are low. This is consistent with Christensen Hughes and McCabe's survey (2006, p. 16) who found that "the perceived low risk of being caught or penalized may lead students to conclude that a positive cost-benefit exists". It is possible that the preservice teachers in this study are aware of the low chances of getting caught and the relatively benign consequences, and this is why they are willing to take a risk. Our results also show that the cheating culture in universities has consequences for occasional cheaters who said that they were more likely to cheat if their peers were doing it.

One last reason why preservice teacher will cheat is perturbing. Our participants suggested that they would cheat because they have cheated in the past. This is perturbing because it indicates a pattern of bad behaviour in the preservice teachers. Has cheating become a habit for these students and will it continue to be a habit all through the program and into their professional life? Akbaşı et al. (2019) in their study also found that preservice teachers who had a higher academic dishonesty tendency score would more often cheat on exams or plagiarize on assignments.

CONCLUSION

It is imperative for our preservice teachers to follow their program of studies with integrity in order to show a high standard of integrity to their future students. Their role as future educators who will influence and model for the next generations has to be emphasized during their teacher education

program. The responsibilities and the ethic code of a teacher must be presented to the preservice teachers. They need to understand how studying with integrity is a habit to cultivate in themselves and their own students. Only then will we be able to establish an integrity culture in schools and higher education.

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