

# SPEAKING IN SOURCES: A PEDAGOGY OF RHETORICAL INTERTEXTUALITY

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## Abstract

In the US, most institutions of higher education now make a distinction between “intentional” and “unintentional” plagiarism, between cheating and problematic use of sources that do not appear to be acts of deception. Yet while the term “plagiarize” simply refers to the act of using the words or ideas of others as if they were one’s own, the inclusion of “deliberate,” “purloin,” “theft,” and even “kidnap” in definitions of that act render the concept of unconscious plagiarism at best an oxymoron. Composition scholars in the US have been arguing for four decades that we should separate cheating (an intentional act) from what Hull and Rose (1989) described as a “bizarre word salad” and Howard (1993) named “patchwriting,” yet we seem unable to escape from the term “plagiarism.” This is further demonstrated by the almost exclusive use of the term “plagiarism detection software” in the US to describe what in most other educational sectors is referred to as “text-matching software.” The retention of the blanket term “plagiarism” with its attendant baggage keeps our attention squarely on the ethical, and our pedagogy heavily focused on plagiarism prevention and misuse of sources as a breach of ethics.

Lessons on the ethical use of sources, are very often framed by the six values of academic integrity offered by the ICAI (honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage), values that extend beyond student writing to all

aspects of the social contract. But the students Hull and Rose (1989) and Howard (1993) describe did not lack these six values. They lacked the ability to paraphrase. Citation context coding by the Citation Project (Jamieson and Howard, 2013), speak-aloud research protocols collected by the LILAC Project (Walker and Brown, 2015), and speak-aloud source-based writing protocols (Canzonetta et al., 2019) all point to one thing: the creation of source-based writing is a lot more complicated than our intentional / unintentional binary suggests. Moreover, the challenge to make meaning is often in tension with the injunction to remain original.

Citation context coding of 1,911 citations in 174 papers collected from 16 US colleges and universities (Jamieson and Howard, 2013) reveals students switching back and forth between copying/patchwriting and paraphrasing/summarizing as they incorporated cited material into their papers. While some sections may appear at first glance to be an intent to deceive, the fact that in the same paragraph a student might execute effective paraphrase or summary and then slip into cited copying clearly suggests a lack of skill rather than ethics. The challenges students face as they work with sources is demonstrated in ongoing multi-site information literacy research using screen-capture and “Research-Along Protocols” (Walker and Brown, 2015) and source-based writing speak-aloud protocols

(Canzonetta et al., 2019). The latter two studies allow researchers to observe students as they select and incorporate source material and simultaneously explain their choices. Review of these materials reveals a more complex and also more generative *process* of textual production than the final paper -- the *product* -- may suggest. Yet it is on the basis of that product that we make ethical evaluations. If intentional misuse of sources reveals an ethical lack, this research clearly shows that the unintentional misuse of sources reveals a lack of information literacy and writing skills and a need to refocus our attention on the writing process.

Lessons on the process of effective engagement with sources need a different frame, one made up of a set of practices or “habits of mind” (Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2011) rather than a set of character traits. Such

practices, grounded in rhetoric, might run parallel to the list of ethical values but serve a very different purpose. Drawing on research, scholarship, and position statements from the field of composition and rhetoric, this paper makes the case for six practices of *rhetorical intertextuality*: curiosity, authority, critical engagement, connection, reflection, and conversation. These six process-based practices scaffold learning and build the expertise that empowers students to engage in a dialogue with ideas and sources. Samples of student writing and speak-aloud protocols demonstrate the six practices of rhetorical intertextuality and also the impact of their absence. Unlike ethical practices that must be nurtured, these are approaches to writing that can be taught, and thereby represent a more generative approach to teaching source-based writing and helping students avoid unintentional misuse of sources.

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