

# Sloppy Referencing and Plagiarism in Students' Theses

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Significance of mental well-being in the life course of Finnish Adults.

Kohortit muodost. kontekstuaal. muutokset

ICT that place the generations into different position in education and working life. The oldest cohort was born in 1936-1944 and their childhood was at the time of war and the first school years. The baby-boomers born after the war (1945-1954) experienced the crowded schools, the next generation, born in 1955-1964 experienced the first educational opportunities as well as tightening competitions at the gates of grammar schools. The generation born in 1965-75 are the first ones to go to comprehensive school without any special educational routes. The youngest generation in our data has had wide educational opportunities, the ICT technologies have had a significant impact on the fate of this generation.

Uusi  
Tutkimus  
Internet  
Suomen  
Koulutus

**“This is like a taboo, we are not allowed to talk about how common plagiarism is in the university, there is no space for rational discussion about plagiarism”**

(Moore, 2008)

Significance of initial schooling in the life course of Finnish Adults.

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Erja Moore 12.6.2013

# Starting point 1: Writing

- In higher education students write in order to learn and to prove their knowledge
- Essential feature: academic writing
- Masters (2005, p. 282): *“In academic writing, the need to quote and reference accurately is a given. To ensure accuracy, reference systems are designed in great detail (...)”*

# Starting point 2: Finnish Higher Education

- Dual system of HE
- Universities (14) and Polytechnics (25)  
(=Universities of Applied Sciences)

In 2012:

- 169 000 students in universities
- 139 900 students in UASs

(Statistics Finland, 2012)

# Definitions

- *Plagiarism is “to present someone else’s research plan, manuscript, article or text, or parts thereof, as one’s own”* (National Advisory Board on Research Ethics, 2002, p. 21).
- Similar definitions given on institutional level in writing instructions

## Number of plagiarism cases in HE:

- Sweden reported 517 plagiarism cases in HE in 2011. Finland reported two.

(Högskoleverket, 2012; Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, 2012)

# Suspicion of plagiarism

- If suspicions are raised, authorities use "Emperor's New Clothes" strategy
- Whistleblowers face problems
- > the culture of silence and silencing

(Moore, 2008; 2013)

# Thesis in Finnish HE

- Bachelor level, 15 cr; Master level, 30 cr
- Electronic publishing: UASs > Theseus. Universities have their own publication forums
- No research about writing skills
- No evaluation of the level of theses
- Kämäräinen (2012) focused on sources used in UAS theses: *"It is obvious that the reference lists of the theses in data had not been checked and this can only mean that not even the teachers read them."*

# Data and method

- Aim: to clarify the referencing practices
  - Sample: 48 theses in the area of health and 43 theses in the area of business studies (published in [Theseus](#))
  - Analytic tool formed inductively: accuracy and consistency of referencing
- > Classification of referencing into four categories



# Accuracy and consistency of referencing (n=91)

	Accurate and consistent	Some inconsistency	Constant inconsistency	Failed referencing/ Plagiarism
Bachelor of Health Care (n=24)	16	5	3	0
Master of Health Care (n=24)	8	2	8	6
Bachelor of Business Administration (n=23)	18	-	3	2
Master of Business Administration (n=20)	8	6	3	3
Total number of cases (n=91)	50	13	17	11
Total (100%)	55%	14%	19%	12%

# Sloppy referencing

- undetailed citation
- confusing referencing
- quotations without quotation marks
- primary source is not identified

# Misquoting

## Example of text in thesis:

“Irritability, fatigue and stress may prevent the parent to notice the child's needs or tighten the relationship between them. Even good educational principles do not necessarily help, if the parent loses his/her head due to stress and exhaustion. (Almeida, Wethington and Macdonald 2001.)”

## In references:

Almeida, D., Wethington, E. & Macdonald, D. 2001. Daily variation in parental engagement and negative mood: implications for emotionally supportive and conflictual interactions. Journal of marriage and the family (63), 471 -460.

- Mistakes (marked in red): *Macdonald* should be McDonald, *parental* should be paternal, page numbers are backwards and wrong – should be 417-429.
- And, this content cannot be found in the article written by Almeida et al.

# Plagiarism

- Eleven theses contained (almost) word-to-word plagiarism, this was not expected to be present in data.
- Google was used for text comparisons and to determine plagiarism.
- In all cases the student had also copied the references from the original author.

Suspicious rose when:

- Old references were used
- The reference list inconsistent (several reference styles used)
- There were grammar mistakes in text
- Page numbers were missing from references

# Plagiarism, example

Thesis in Theseus:

”Kulttuuri ei ole ainoastaan organisaation ominaisuus, vaan myös jäsenten tapa rakentaa ympäröivää maailmaa.

Organisaation rituaalit, seremoniat, tarinat, myytit ja tunnuslauseet antavat viitteitä siitä, miten organisaation todellisuus on rakentunut. (Morgan 1986, 131-133.)”

Palmu 2000:

<https://jyx.jyu.fi/dspace/bitstream/handle/123456789/12975/lpalmu.pdf>

”Kulttuuri ei ole ainoastaan ominaisuus, joka organisaatiolla on, vaan sen jäsenten tapa rakentaa ympärillään olevaa maailmaa.

Organisaation rituaalit, seremoniat, symbolit, tarinat, myytit ja tunnuslauseet antavat viitteitä siitä, kuinka organisaation todellisuus on rakentunut. (Morgan 1986, 131-133.)”

# Conclusions

The study shows evidence that partly plagiarized theses are accepted and published.

> plagiarism seems accepted and not sanctioned

This evidence is in sharp contrast with the educational discourse about high quality in higher education.

# Conclusions

In Finland we do not have a shared understanding of what plagiarism is (Moore, 2010; 2013; an example in appendix).

Finland has become a peculiar country among other countries that publicly try to tackle the problem of plagiarism.

# References

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# Appendix

For example this is not plagiarism in Finland:

Author A:

## Background

This presentation introduces the development of a collective framework for a theme-based thesis process that implements RAMK's new learning vision, KOTA (Keys to the Future by Learning from Experience), built upon the principles of problem-based learning (PBL) and pedagogy.

Authors X and Y:

## Background

This presentation introduces the development of a collective framework for a theme-based thesis process that implements RAMK's new learning vision, KOTA (Keys to the Future by Learning from Experience), built upon the principles of problem-based learning (PBL) and pedagogy.