Where is the borderline between poor academic practice and plagiarism?

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Information about the use of this material:

European Network for Academic Integrity

In a student's submission 40% of its content is taken from other sources. Mark for the eight cases whether you think it is plagiarism. The content is used as follows:	Serious plagiarism	Plagiarism	Not plagiarism	I'm not sure
1	word for word into the student's work with no quotations, no references or in-text citations				
2	word for word into the student's work with no quotations, has references but no in-text citations				
3	word for word into the student's work with no quotations, but has references and in-text citations				
4	consisting of many short phrases throughout from many sources with no quotations, no references or in-text citations				
5	consisting of many short phrases throughout from many sources with quotations, it has references and in-text citations				
6	into the student's work with some words changed with no quotations, references or in-text citations				
7	into the student's work with some words changed with no quotations, has references but no in-text citations				
8	into the student's work with some words changed with no quotations, but has references and in-text citations				

Notes to educators

The exercise is intended to be used in the context of a learning unit on academic writing, referencing, academic integrity or introducing research skills.

The exercise starts with the basic information on line one. The students should read the eight specified cases and decide if they think this is a case of serious plagiarism, plagiarism, not plagiarism or if they are not sure. Thereafter the students should discuss their decision with the person sitting next to them. Subsequently the individual decisions can be collected on a flip chart or similar.

This is not a questionnaire to collect data for research. The exercise was designed to stimulate discussion within a seminar group about the borderline between different kinds of plagiarism and problematic working habits. We provide no standard solution and usually we find a wide variety of opinions, arguments, and assessment criteria within a group.

The material is also applicable in more advanced settings such as training for higher education instructors.

Recommendations for educators:

Before the exercise, the educators shall agree with students on definition of plagiarism, ENAI recommends following definition (or its paraphrase):

> *Plagiarism is presenting the work of others as if it were his/her own without proper acknowledgement.*

There is no general rule of what distinguish "serious plagiarism" and "plagiarism". The ENAI document O1-A-1 (Criteria for Evaluating the Severity of Plagiarism) may help you to understand the seriousness of a given case. It depends rather on particular case, also on your country or institution policies, nevertheless when the plagiarism crosses the line of legal regulations or when it can lead to legal consequences, then it should be labelled as serious for sure. You can set the borderline with your students to be lower, discussing the grey areas is the important part of the exercise.

It is highly recommended to check your institution policies/guidelines for academic misconduct as they might distinguish the level of breaches and define the borderline between serious plagiarism and plagiarism accordingly.

Tasks for students:

1) Please read the background information on line one and decide about the following eight cases by your own. Do you think it is a case of serious plagiarism, a case of plagiarism or not plagiarism at all?

2) Please discuss your choices with the person sitting next to you.

3) Discuss why it is important that we need to understand this topic.

4) Discuss what you think the consequences should be when students plagiarise.

Tasks for educators:

1) The teacher should poll the individual decisions by a show of hands and collect the numbers of answers on a flip chart etc. It is important to make the vote count visible in such a way that the group is able to see the variety of opinions.

2) The teacher should discuss the ambiguous cases with the class.

3) What arguments were put forward? At what point is the borderline crossed? Is it possible to reach an agreement within the group? What were the suggested consequences, if the agreement was a case of plagiarism or a serious case?