



Exploring and Deterring Plagiarism in Schools: a report for the Eduserv Foundation Information Literacy Programme

Summary

This report forms part of the conclusions for Netskills' pilot programme of workshops relating to information literacy in the schools sector, funded by the Eduserv Foundation. In November 2006, Netskills delivered four workshops about plagiarism, and two workshops on information skills for teachers. This report focuses on the plagiarism workshops, while a separate document concentrates on the information skills workshops.

1. The Workshops

1.1 Workshop Content and Development

Exploring and Deterring Plagiarism in Schools was based on Netskills' highly successful *Detecting and Deterring Plagiarism* workshop, developed in conjunction with the JISC Plagiarism Advisory Service, and delivered to over 600 higher and further education staff around the country over the past few years.

There were several drivers for developing a version of the workshop for the schools sector. Firstly, plagiarism has clearly become a high-profile issue for schools in recent years, with a number of prominent news articles¹ focusing in particular on the opportunities for plagiarism generated both by the internet and coursework. Secondly, the examining boards and organisations in the schools sector have recently consulted and reported on the problem, resulting in major changes to teaching and assessment methods being proposed this Summer.² Finally, an issue which has frequently emerged from Netskills' plagiarism workshop for university and college staff is that some academic staff feel that by the time students begin their college or university careers, some of them are already proficient plagiarists. Thus, exploring the issues and offering much more guidance at an earlier educational stage is crucial to the fight against plagiarism.

The materials from the original workshop were adapted and tailored for a target audience of teaching and support staff in the secondary school sector, informed by consultation with teaching contacts from around the UK. A literature search found a

¹ For example: **a.** 'Coursework copying internet fear', *BBC News* [Online 23rd November 2006] Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/4459544.stm> **b.** Leading Article – 'Fair Assessment', *The Guardian*, 2nd August 2006 and **c.** Calton, R. 'QCA crackdown on coursework cheats', *Times Educational Supplement*, 4th October 2006.

² See for example, **a.** Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, *A review of GCE and GCSE coursework arrangements*, 2006, and **b.** AQA, *The future of examination coursework: a position statement from AQA*, 2006.

great number of news articles about plagiarism in schools (interestingly, statistics were more easily available than for the university sector), and reports, comments and guidance from examining boards and organisations such as the QCA were also studied.

Workshop topics included; defining plagiarism, exploring the positive and negative impacts of the web on plagiarism, designing out opportunities for plagiarism, and policies to deal with the problem. The group discussion scenarios were rewritten to be relevant for schools, and the full workshop description is in Appendix 1.

1.2 Workshop Scheduling

Exploring and Deterring Plagiarism in Schools ran at four regional venues: Manchester, Newcastle upon Tyne, London and Edinburgh. Prior to scheduling the workshops, Netskills consulted teaching contacts around the UK to find out what would be the most suitable timing and length for the workshop. The feedback received was rather inconclusive – some teachers said they would prefer a daytime session and would be able to get cover, while others said it would be extremely difficult (and expensive) to get cover, and would prefer evening sessions. Netskills opted for early evening workshops running from 4p.m. until 8p.m., to enable staff to come straight from school, and with a buffet tea provided.

1.3 Workshop Publicity

Having taken advice from teaching contacts, various publicity methods were used, including:

- Dedicated section of Netskills' web site created to publicise the workshops.
- Letter and poster sent to every secondary school in each region (for example, for the Manchester workshop, all state and independent schools in ten different local authorities were contacted). Letters were addressed to the Head Teacher (named where possible) and also the Staff Development Officer.
- Emails sent to all schools likewise, with follow-ups.
- Announcements posted on relevant web sites, such as the London Grid for Learning, and library-related sites such as Slainte (Scottish Library Association). Netskills also wrote an article about the programme for the North East Schools Library Association Bulletin.
- Use of relevant email lists. Normally, this is Netskills' most effective way of publicising workshops to university and college staff, but it proved difficult to find many national or regional email lists specifically for teachers. Discussion with the workshop attendees revealed that the attendees were generally not members of any regional or national email lists, and only made use of email networks within their school. Email lists which were used included the JISC lists UK-SCHOOLS and PLAGIARISM.

2. Workshop Attendance and Audience

Overall, 25 people booked on the four workshops, with almost full attendance on each session. There was a strong interest in the topic, and those participating felt that with some adjustments to publicity methods and timing of sessions, more staff would be

persuaded to engage with any future programme. The 25 attendees were broken down by job role as follows:

Head teachers/deputies	3
Administrative staff	3
Library staff	7
Teachers - subject heads	5
Other teachers	7

The subject areas represented among teaching staff were English, Business Studies, ICT, History, Geography and Technology.

Most of the participants were from the state sector, with a wide range of school catchment areas represented, including some where many pupils had poor literacy skills and/or did not have English as a first language. It was informative to see how the general ability levels of pupils seemed to have an impact on their teachers' approach to plagiarism. While teachers in some schools expected pupils to understand and use correct referencing techniques from a young age, others felt the concepts involved in referencing and citations might be beyond many of their pupils. Furthermore, some teachers felt that their less able pupils were only able to write essays with the help of writing frames or scaffolding techniques, even though these methods have been criticised by exam boards, with the AQA claiming that in the worst cases it can lead to "*a kind of mass plagiarism*"³ and Edexcel referring to "*teaching by numbers*"⁴.

Teachers from schools with affluent catchment areas reported more concerns over excessive parental assistance with coursework. A couple of schools were aware that pupils had bought or sold coursework online, but this was not felt to be the major source of plagiarism – teachers were more concerned about pupils copying from each other, from web sites, and receiving excessive parental help, in that order. This is also reflected in the findings of Netskills' survey of information use by teachers, which is covered in more detail in a separate report.

3. Workshop Feedback

Netskills collected online feedback at the end of each workshop. Responses were very positive overall, demonstrating that the workshop had met an obvious need. A summary is below:

Overall average score:	4.47 (on a scale of 1 – poor to 5 – excellent)
Ratings for presentations:	4.40
Rating for hands-on sessions:	4.47

When asked what topics the participants would have liked to have heard more about, answers included:

- More time for hands-on exercises
- Exam boards' approaches to plagiarism (particularly Scottish examples)

³ AQA, *GCSE English Examiners' Report*, p.30, 2005.

⁴ Edexcel, *GCSE English Examiners' Report*, p.8, 2005.

- More case studies and good practice examples

General comments included:

- ➔ Most interesting. Made a seemingly uninteresting topic very palatable. Good presentation skills and pace kept lively.
- ➔ Very good course, informed as it stated it would. well balanced and informative
- ➔ Thoroughly enjoyable and very appropriate. Very pleasant tutor using appropriate listening and time management skills.
- ➔ I felt this was a helpful and interesting session, very professionally and interestingly presented.
- ➔ The course was very well run by a very proficient lecturer. We may well contact netskills again for an in- house CPD session.
- ➔ very interesting, shame there weren't more teachers here to discuss issues.
- ➔ I really enjoyed the course and found it really useful to get the links and definitions of plagiarism. Lots of good stuff to keep and refer to when needed.
- ➔ Very important for teachers to know so many possibilities exist

The trainer also asked participants for specific feedback and suggestions about publicity and timing of the workshops. Comments indicated that the 8 p.m. finish was too late, though the desire from some for an earlier finish time conflicted with the demand from others for a longer hands-on session. Others felt that integrating a session into individual schools' INSET days would probably be the most appropriate and practical way to reach teachers. Some participants said they would have preferred an afternoon session, though others said this would have prevented them from attending. Clearly, much depends on the particular school's approach to staff development. Finally, several participants commented that they would have preferred the workshop in the Summer term.

With regard to publicity, participants indicated that they found out about the workshop as follows:

Email	3
Postal mailing	7
Word of mouth	5
Netskills' web site	2
Other	2

Some added that it had been difficult to find out about the course – for example, most of the librarian attendees found out via the School Librarians' Network, rather than from their own schools. This seems to demonstrate that only a small number of schools circulated the leaflets and emails, and that while librarians have well-established online networks, much more effort is required to reach teachers. Letters addressed to individual heads of department would be more effective, but also more costly and time-consuming to implement. The library staff also recommended sending all information directly to them, as they usually acted as internal distributors of information. School governors could be another useful conduit.

4. Issues Emerging from the Workshops

The workshop was designed to be as interactive as possible, with participants encouraged to question and make points throughout. There were also a couple of group activities, one of which is included in Appendix 2.

As highlighted in section 3, the participants had different experiences, approaches, and opinions, but nonetheless, there was a general consensus on some key issues, which are highlighted below. Additional findings about plagiarism from Netskills' information skills survey are covered in the separate report on that strand of the project.

Strategic Issues

- Plagiarism is a serious issue, but schools do not seem sure how best to deal with it.
- There is uncertainty and lack of standardisation over *who* in a school should take overall responsibility – it appears to fall *faute-de-mieux* on those teachers who happen to take an interest in the subject.
- There seemed to be surprisingly low levels of awareness about plagiarism guidance produced by organisations such as the QCA and individual boards⁵.

Guidance for Pupils

- Responsibility for teaching pupils about referencing and plagiarism is unclear, and appears to depend on whether individual teachers see it as particularly important.
- School library staff are keen to have a more prominent role in teaching pupils about information use, including plagiarism, but are given increasingly less pupil contact time, due to the other demands of the curriculum.
- Pupils make use of the web to find information, but with an alarming lack of critical evaluation skills, and very sketchy understanding of online referencing (a number of teachers reported that pupils would simply write 'Google search' or 'web site' as a reference).
- Participants were very interested in the online tutorials included in the hands-on session, but felt these were mainly aimed at university students. There is a clear gap in the market for online tutorials about plagiarism aimed at school teachers and pupils.

Dealing with Plagiarism

- The severity with which plagiarism cases are treated depends on a number of factors, including age of the pupils, whether or not they had had clear guidance about plagiarism, and their overall ability, particularly with regard to writing essays.
- The most difficult and sensitive plagiarism issues are those in which parents/guardians are suspected of giving excessive help. It can be impossible to prove, and may lead to potentially awkward confrontations. Nonetheless,

⁵ For example, QCA, *Authenticating coursework: a teacher's guide*, and *Coursework: a guide for parents* [Online] <http://www.qca.org.uk/16188.html> [23rd November 2006] and SQA, *Your coursework: a guide for candidate*, 2006.

teachers are acutely aware that they must not 'sign off' coursework if they are not convinced it is the pupil's own work.

- Participants were interested in the detection software, but felt this would be more appropriate for the exam boards (Edexcel now uses Turnitin, for example), and too impractical/expensive for individual schools. Most teachers said they relied on common sense and intuition (for example, dramatic changes in the style and standard of work compared with normal) together with judicious use of Google to detect plagiarism.
- Where teachers had a strong suspicion that a pupil had plagiarised, they found that the pupil usually admitted to it when questioned further about the work.

There was much discussion about the recent QCA recommendations to reduce coursework done outside class, and place more emphasis on examinations and other controlled assessments. The participants were generally very concerned that this was an over-reaction, which ignored the many reasons for moving to coursework in the first place, and that requiring more coursework to be done in class would make it impossible for teachers to get through an already packed curriculum. Also, teachers were concerned that the less able pupils would suffer disproportionately. There were different views from the Scottish workshop, since the Scottish curriculum places much less emphasis on coursework.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The pilot programme was very well received, and although small-scale, has drawn out a number of interesting issues. More research and consultation would be required to determine the most effective strategic approaches to deal with plagiarism in schools on a national level, but some issues which would certainly seem to merit close attention include:

- Ensuring that teaching staff receive appropriate training and awareness.
- Ensuring that pupils are given clear guidance about plagiarism and referencing.
- Involving school library staff in teaching the appropriate skills.
- Improving the dissemination and take-up of guidance to schools from examining authorities.
- Developing online tutorials specifically aimed at school pupils.
- Developing regional and national networks to enable schools to share best practice and guidance. At present, what work there is seems to be going on in individual school departments in piecemeal fashion. A version of the JISC Plagiarism Advisory Service for schools would seem long overdue, for example.
- There may be a benefit in developing links between universities and schools to identify concerns, discuss expectation levels and share good ideas.

In short, the programme has shown that there is a clear interest and pressing need for training, awareness-raising and debate about plagiarism in the schools sector. Effective co-ordination, on regional or national levels, will be needed to establish the best ways to deliver this.

Lucy McKeever, Netskills, November 2006

Appendix 1 – Workshop Description

Exploring and Deterring Plagiarism in Schools

Opportunities for plagiarism in schools have escalated with the growth of the world wide web, with its vast range of content, easy opportunities for cut-and-paste, and growing market of commercial sites helping the potential plagiarist. Increased emphasis on coursework over exams has also led to growing concerns about internet plagiarism and excessive parental help, as highlighted in recent QCA reports about GCSE coursework. While sophisticated online services can help with the detection of web-based plagiarism, long-term deterrence lies with appropriate course design and administration, and clear guidance to pupils and parents alike about avoiding malpractice.

Topics:

- Definition and examples of plagiarism
- Plagiarism and the web - sources and detection
- Exploring anti-plagiarism tutorials and essay banks
- Designing out opportunities for plagiarism and collusion

Who is it for?

This free early evening workshop, funded by the Eduserv Foundation, is aimed at secondary school teaching and support staff who wish to find out about this complex and controversial subject and how to deal with it. The workshop lasts from 4 p.m. until 8 p.m. and includes a buffet tea.

Participants need no special technical skills, but for the hands-on sessions they will find it helpful to have had some experience of using a browser.

By the end of the workshop participants will have:

- Understood what is meant by plagiarism and how and why it may occur
- Viewed and discussed examples of plagiarism
- Seen how the web facilitates plagiarism
- Tried out online anti-plagiarism tutorials
- Used scenarios to explore pedagogic and administrative approaches to deterring plagiarism
- Shared experiences and views with other participants

Appendix 2 – Sample Group Activity from the Workshop

(note: the idea for this task is based on an exercise in Swales, J and Feak, C (1994), *Academic writing for Graduate Students*, University of Michigan. Also featured in Carroll, J, *A Handbook for Deterring Plagiarism in Higher Education*, Oxford Brookes University, 2002.)

In the list below, try and decide within your group which of these activities is plagiarism and which is not. What action would you take in each case?

1. A Year 8 pupil copies a paragraph verbatim from a book without any acknowledgement and hands it in as part of a school Religious Education assignment.
2. For a project about World War 2, a Year 10 pupil does a Google search, copies the text of a web site, but makes small changes – e.g. replacing a few words, changing the order around. He includes the source in a reference list at the end of the project.
3. A Year 10 pupil drafts an English Literature assignment and asks her mother (an English Literature university lecturer) to read through it. The parent corrects a number of spelling mistakes, improves the language in a few places and adds other observations about the book being studied. The pupil hands in the work.
4. A group of three pupils decide to work together on an (individual) GCSE Geography assignment about traffic surveys. One pupil collects the data, the other writes up the methodology, and the third one, who is good with computers, turns the data into graphs and pie charts. The pupils hand in very similar pieces of work.
5. A pupil designing some jewellery for her GSCE Design coursework is a big fan of Charles Rennie Mackintosh. She incorporates some of his designs into her earring and bracelet designs. She attaches a short essay explaining how she has been influenced by Mackintosh.
6. An A level Politics teacher dictates model answers to his class in advance of their exams, based on questions which have come up in recent years, and advises them to learn them off by heart.