

A systemic necessity or an act of convenience

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Introduction

No doubt that academic cheating does exist. But, what makes the students go for academic cheating? Are there systemic factors involved or the students are simply morally wicked to involve in various forms of plagiarism?

Who is to be Blamed

In his New York Times article “ A Survival Skill”, Mark Bauerlein (2010) argues that cheating has become a digital cultural practice in the age of information sharing. However, for him, the problem with shared texts is that, here, “ knowledge isn’t absorbed and interpreted. It is retrieved and passed along- so speedily that students forget it an hour later” (Bauerlein, 2010). Still, one has to remember that academic cheating is not invented by the digital natives. Cheating existed even before the new Information and Communication Technologies came to exist. According to Pease (2010), “ there was similar level of plagiarism 15 years ago (around five to ten plagiarized ones in thousand papers), when students did their research in libraries and lifted material from books”. What has changed is the means of changing. What was once cheating chits did is at present being done by mobile text messages.

Even if we agree that the digital space is more conducive for plagiarism, there are still many other factors that compel a student to cheat. For instance, “ a larger percentage of students plagiarize because they do not understand the material, or they lack confidence in their writing. Many students plagiarize parts of their papers because they don’t understand how

to cite a source properly, or how to summarize an idea into their own words” (Pease, 2010). Most importantly, the very idea of intellectual property as a single person as the sole proprietor of a work has become redundant for the fact that the digital world is created and maintained through relentless sharing and collective patterns of work.

Academic cheating must be considered first as an ethical issue before anything else. If students are taught ethics, “[c]ollege can be a process of unlearning bad habits just as much as adding to one’s knowledge base. A philosophical grounding for goodness, honesty and integrity helps students to see the value of maintaining ethical standards or rising to them” (Daines, 2010). The whole system of education must be oriented towards inculcating the right values in students for them to pursue the right course of action.

Finally, one also has to explore what pushes students towards cheating than pursuing honest ways of doing academics. Arguably, it is found that “cheating tells us at least as much about educational environments as it does about students’ character or personality” (Kohn, 2010). The shortcomings of the existing educational system such as the alienation of teachers and students from each other, emphasis on grades and scores than actual learning, heavy work load, and severe competition among the students have substantially been contributing to the cementing of the cheating practice.

Conclusion

Certainly, the imperfections in the present education system lead students into cheating. However, the students too are complicit as it is a decision to cheat from their side. What is important is to make students familiar with an ethical code that could save them from engaging in academic cheating.

References

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