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# Plagiarism in 21st Century

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Dr Kaymarie Tyrell-Ferguson | [+ Follow](#)

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## INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES THAT CAN IMPACT PLAGIARISM: A CASE STUDY OF INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS' EXPERIENCES

Messaging





The invention of the Internet triggered a vast increase in online schools that resulted in significant growth in online learners. With this increase, the problem of online plagiarism also resulted. The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study was to identify common instructional design strategies that could be used to counter plagiarism in the online learning environment. The research study consisted of in-depth interviews, expert reviews, and focus group notes. The five participants were located in various states across the United States. All participants were all professional instructional designers holding doctoral degrees and working in higher education institutions across the US. A five-step framework for consideration resulted from the analysis of the interviews to assist instructional designers in designing plagiarism-free online courses. Recommendations for further research included replication of studies involving instructional designers with master degrees or instructional designers who are designers by assignment. This would improve the richness of the research result and possibly lead to the discovery of additional constructivist instructional strategies to counter plagiarism. The findings indicated that many of the instructional designers were also the classroom instructors and educators. Hence, further research is recommended to include instructors working in higher education by assignment since they too are involved in the designing of instruction for the online learning environment.

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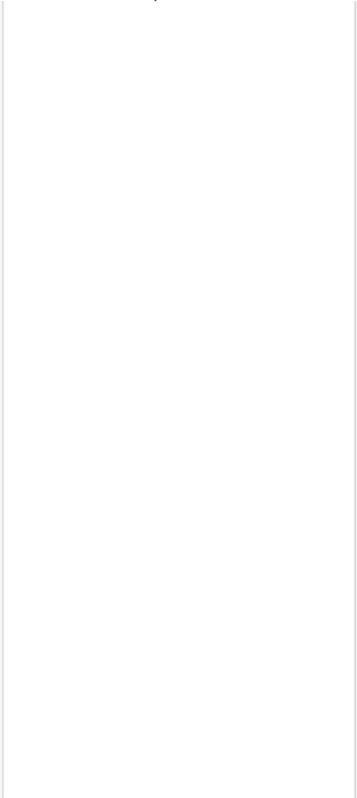




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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

A seventeen-year-old male high school senior sits at the computer desk, his mind racing, wondering, “What shall I write about the French Revolution?” A thought appears, “Why not Google it?” A search of the French Revolution returns a tremendous amount of information. With one click of the mouse, the student finds a complete essay about the French Revolution. With no knowledge of the proper citation, this student is about to commit plagiarism.

Academic and journalistic plagiarism used to be the dominant forms prior to the emergence of the Internet (Howard & Davies, 2009; Robinson, 2009). The widespread use of the Internet has resulted in online plagiarism (Blum, 2009). The literature defines online plagiarism as copying other people’s words or ideas from the Internet without giving credit (Stefani & Carroll, 2006). Concerns over academic plagiarism through use of the Internet raise a number of questions, primarily, to determine which students are most likely to plagiarize.

This study focuses on three types of plagiarizers, which, according to Renard (2000) are (a) the unintentional, (b) the sneaky, and (c) the blatant plagiarizer. Renard described the unintentional plagiarizer as one who has never learned about citing others’ work or giving credit. The sneaky plagiarizer knows what plagiarism is and how to avoid being caught by using a portion of copied text instead of copying an entire paper from the Internet. The blatant plagiarizer is a student who, “[waits] too long to complete a paper... or students who know in advance that they can find a suitable paper to download and turn in” (Renard, p. 38). This study aims to use qualitative methods to identify what constructivist instructional strategies such as, problem-based learning, scaffolding, collaboration, assessment, and cognitive apprenticeship (Richey, Tracy, & Klein, 2011), instructors who are also instructional designers, find useful in discouraging unintentional, sneaky, and blatant plagiarizers.

As electronic text has become more popular, its popularity has resulted in increased plagiarism among students. Harris (2007) stated that, “The availability of textual material in the electronic format has made plagiarism easier than ever” (¶ 1). Robinson (2009) agreed that the easy access to limitless written materials is driving plagiarism. Other authors (Blum, 2009; Harris, 2007; Howard & Davies, 2009; Ma, Wan, & Lu 2008; Sileo & Sileo, 2008) also agree with Harris’s and Robinson’s observations. There are additional factors that are contributing to the increase in plagiarism.

According to Olt (2007), instructors are unable to assess the true learning potential of students who commit plagiarism. This is a serious problem as a review of the literature shows that teachers use students’ writing to assess their learning potential. This means that teachers may be unaware that students turning in plagiarized papers as their



and universities are experiencing an increase in first year students with very poor writing skills. One university reported that almost 70% of high school seniors who take the writing entrance exam will have to be enrolled in remedial writing courses based on their scores (Laudato, 2008). Colleges and universities are facing a problem of having a shortage of staff in their writing centers to address the issue of poor writing skills, which if left uncorrected could possibly lead to plagiarism.

The issue of plagiarism is fast rising and some instructors feel powerless to address this growing problem. In a research study conducted by Rutgers University, researchers found that 80% of all college students admitted to plagiarizing at least once (Laudato, 2008). For the Center of Academic Integrity found that 80% of all students cheat (Laudato, 2008). In addition, 55% of instructors reported that they feel powerless to stop students if they ignore it (Laudato, 2008).

Instructors are responsible for the entire construction and maintenance of the writing center and as a result, plagiarism cannot be their first priority. Catching Internet plagiarism further burden them as it could take up a large majority of their time that could be spent on other activities. Furthermore, when evaluating student writing samples, some instructors do not wish to spend hours surfing the Internet looking for plagiarized papers given the short timeframe they have in which to review student's work (Lathrop & Foss, 2000; Olt, 2007).

The increased utilization of written assessments by instructors has become more prevalent, necessitating action to combat and discourage plagiarism. Simply, instructors rely heavily on written assessments to test their students on a daily basis. As a result, Olt (2007) expressed that the real danger of plagiarism is that the content of the written work assumed to be the student's, and assessed as such, originates with someone else. Consequently, instructors have a difficult time determining whether students' evaluations are a correct evaluation of their true writing potential.

One must realize that the problem will not disappear by ignoring it or by forbidding students to use the Internet for research, or by threats (Blum, 2009). Many colleges and universities are turning to plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin and SafeAssign. Some schools focus on cheating in general but Laudato (2008) insisted that the issue of plagiarism should be more about preventing it, and less about punishing those who are guilty.

Millions of students in both high schools and colleges across the United States are uneducated about the consequences of plagiarism and about how it can be avoided. Mullen (2001) explained that many students go through high school and even college, never really learning how to write a research paper properly because the subject was never taught. These uneducated students are quite evident in colleges today. One only needs to see the statistics of freshman students who fail the basic writing exams, and see the increase in students visiting the writing center seeking help.

Richey, et al. (2011) discussed the concept of using constructivist design theory when designing instruction. The constructivist design theory is explained as a theory



learning experiences (Richey, et al., 2011) identifies three basic principles of constructivist design theory 1) “Personal interpretation of experience, active relevant context, 3) exploration of multiple perspectives” (p. 135). The constructivist designer will focus on identifying learners' prerequisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These constructivist instructional designers choose instructional strategies based on their beliefs about how people learn and construct knowledge (Richey, et al., 2011). Possible constructivist instructional strategies such as, collaboration, formative assessment, cognitive apprenticeships, and problem-based learning (PBL), are implemented in the syllabus (Richey, et al., 2010) to discourage plagiarism. Instructional strategies are defined as “A sequence of planned activities designed to achieve a given learning goal” (Richey, et al., 2011, p. 190). Other authors defined instructional strategies as a plan for helping learners achieve performance objectives (Gagne & Wagner, 1992). The purpose of the strategy is to outline each instructional activity that relate to accomplishing the objectives. This objective is to decrease plagiarism in the classroom. Plagiarism is a growing problem in education and is a continuing concern for educators, despite the fact that there is little research done on the actual practice of plagiarism (Olt, 2007). The purpose of this study was to explore the possibility of using instructional strategies as a means of discouraging plagiarism. This was accomplished through a multi-case study to identify which instructional strategies instructional designers find successful in preventing plagiarism.

## Statement of the Problem

Today, the Internet has facilitated the increase of plagiarism (Howard & Davies, 2009; Ma, Wan, & Lu 2008; Sileo & Sileo, 2008). The National Center for Education Statistics shows that by 2016, 18 million students will be taking online courses (Basmat & Lewis, 2008). This means that more students will be enrolling in online courses and acquiring online degrees. This increase in online courses, according to Howard and Davis (2009), is increasing plagiarism. Instructors are finding it difficult to assess students' true learning potentials because of the increased usage of plagiarism (Olt, 2007). Olt (2007) correctly identified that many assessments and evaluations of students' learning abilities are collected via written formats. The creators of Turnitin plagiarism detection software report that they have seen significant increase in the number of schools soliciting their services; as a result, it would seem that the problem of plagiarism is still affecting universities (Turnitin, 2010).

There is a lack of research that describes the instructional strategies instructional designers use to prevent plagiarism in courses they design. This qualitative multi-case study identified what instructional strategies instructional designers who adhere to constructivist design theory believe can prevent plagiarism.

## Background of the Study

Plagiarism is a serious concern for Instructional Designers because of the increase in written assessment usage involved in student evaluation (Lathrop & Foss, 2000; Olt, 2007; Royce, 2003). Olt (2007) mentioned that not only does plagiarism affect the



...reenter into the instructional design process for the purpose of course map because chances are the data being recorded does not accurately represents learning outcome of our students (p. 18). If the constructivist design theory implemented in the online classroom, students would need to be involved in and Richey, et al. (2011) postulate, to accomplish active learning; instructors need to be able to identify instructional strategies that will help to understand learn. When this task is accomplished successfully, instructors should be able to avoid the threat of false positive learning in the classroom via written assessment.

Written assessment is the primary tool used in the online environment to evaluate success in various disciplines. Currently, most schools rely on plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin and Safe Assign to determine whether a submitted document has been copied from the Internet. The company that created the largest plagiarism software, Turnitin, reported that they process over 200,000 papers daily. Over a 10-year period, universities can record up to a 45% reduction in the rate of plagiarism (Turnitin, 2010). Plagiarism software like Turnitin does not actually detect plagiarism; instead, it simply finds matching phrases (Royce, 2003). Software of this kind should not be called plagiarism detection software, but rather “text-matching software” (Royce, 2003, p. 2). Royce believed that the solution for reducing the actual plagiarism practice was in the design of the course itself. For years, online education has been criticized and student assessment questioned because of plagiarism (Feenberg, 1999). Online education was criticized because some potential employers felt that the opportunity for cheating online was too great.

Despite the acceptance and popularity of online learning today, a review of literature shows that online schools are still experiencing problems with plagiarism (Laudato, 2008; Olt, 2007; Royce, 2003). This report is strengthened by the vast number of universities employing the services of plagiarism detection companies like Turnitin and Safe Assign. The National Center for Education Statistics predicts an increase of college enrollment of up to 9% by 2018. Although this may be desirable, many of these new enrollees will be terminated from completing their degree because plagiarism detection software has deemed their work a suspect of plagiarism. At least 10% of all work turned in by university students might need scrutiny because of plagiarism issues (Carroll, 2004). One of the remedies instituted by universities to deal with plagiarizers is to terminate student enrollment.

Additionally, increasing budget cuts have led many universities to start accepting large amount of fees paying overseas students. The result is an increase in plagiarism because of language and cultural barriers in both traditional and online classrooms (Susskind, 2006). Not only that, but budget cuts have led many universities to increase their class size resulting in increased pressure for instructors with more written assignments to grade and more students to monitor. Increased written assessments may result in overworked instructors who try to save time by skimming instead of reading written assessments for quality (Olt, 2009). Instructors might start focusing on quantity instead of the quality of the written work. These factors are identified by research as some causes that p





instructors expected them to complete in a short timeframe (Roberts, 2007).

At one online university, several students shared their complaints about the expected of them. After reviewing the course syllabus, it turned out that ins students to study five chapters, prepare for a quiz about the chapters, and th page Life Learning paper, all due within the same week. One student was so with the quantity of work to the point where that student withdrew from the communication, July 12, 2011). This is just one of the possible ways studen academic pressure. Mullen (2001) revealed that many students resort to pla they feel overwhelmed with the quantity of work expected of them. In actu students are not engaged in active learning as is promoted using the constru theory. Instructional strategies do not seem to play a useful role in this exam

Nightingale (1991) and Levin (2006) shared some of their findings as to wh commit unethical practices. Many of the responses revealed that students fe overwhelmed with work, while some students argued that the topic was nev so cheating was an easy way to complete the work. Based on the readings s appear that instructional design does affect or contribute in some form to pl practice. Students are overwhelmed by the syllabus and unable to complete the timeframe allotted to them and instructors are unable to complete their syllabus because of time constraints (Mullen, 2001; Nightingale, 1991). Of course, it can be said that students will still plagiarize even if the curriculum is reasonable, however, regardless; there remains a significant amount of students who do not want to plagiarize.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of conducting this study is to identify which constructivist instructional strategies experienced professionals who are instructional designers may find useful in deterring plagiarism. Deterring the incident of plagiarism will allow instructors to be able to validate students' written assessment with little fear of plagiarism practice. The goal is to minimize plagiarism using instructional strategies and thereby improve the quality of written assessment validation used to test students' learning outcomes.

## Research Questions

The questions this study addressed are:

1. What specific constructivist instructional strategies do instructional designers who design online courses in higher education institutions find useful based on their experience, in discouraging plagiarism?
2. How do these instructional designers integrate these strategies into their course design?

## Significance of the Study



states, "The availability of textual material in the electronic format has made it easier than ever" (¶ 1). Lathrop and Foss (2000) stated that cheating has become epidemic, especially with the increase in technology. Because written assessments are a key component in students' evaluation, it is necessary that students portray their true capabilities so that they can be evaluated accurately. The increased practice of cheating is seriously prohibiting the accurate measurement of students' true writing potential (Young, 2001; Olt, 2007). This in turn affects the instructional design feedback process for the purpose of course improvement. Some authors (Blum, 2009; Harris, 2009; Lathrop & Foss, 2000; Olt, 2007) believed that failure to address this issue could result in continued cheating and the evaluation of students in both online and traditional classrooms, as well as the frustration of instructors who continue to ignore the problem because they are not equipped to do so.

It is important for instructional designers and teachers who are designers by profession to create design content and assessments for students that encourage them to analyze and apply critical thinking skills instead of assignments that promote copying and pasting (Harris, 2009). Research shows that Constructivism theory, which encourages active learning in the classroom and promotes cognitive thinking, is a good framework on which to base instruction (Burner, 1996; Egan & Gibb, 1997; Richey, et al., 2011). Combating plagiarism is a critical task for instructional designers to address, and should not be left to the discretion of the instructor alone (Blum, 2009). Olt (2007) said instructors are too overwhelmed trying to complete their own coursework in the required timeframe to have to worry about policing students for plagiarism.

A review of literature shows that there are numerous suggestions regarding possible best practices for combating plagiarism. Authors such as Harris (2009), Lathrop and Foss (2000), Olt (2007), Young (2001), and Zatz (2009) share similar ideas as to how to combat plagiarism, while Burner (1996) and Egan and Gibb (1997) believed combating plagiarism should be centered on the constructivism theory. Turnitin on the other hand, believes that their software is the best answer to combating plagiarism. However, despite this abundance of suggestions, the issue of plagiarism continues to grow, and plagiarism is becoming more accepted by instructors in the classroom (Blum, 2009; Lathrop & Foss, 2000; Olt, 2007). Despite schools having plagiarism detection software, students are still tempted to plagiarize because of the ease of doing so (Harris, 2007).

Schools can lose accreditation status because of plagiarism. Too often problems are addressed after they occur. Instead of fixing, problems should be prevented. Plagiarism detection software is a fix for a growing problem; instructional strategies could lead to possible solution(s) to prevent the practice from occurring so freely (Badge & Scott 2009; Olt, 2009). Notwithstanding, the statistics posted on the websites of plagiarism software companies, the fact remains that detection software can only detect what is in their databases (Dahl, 2007). The digital age cheaters have found ways, says Blum (2009), to create perfectly plagiarized papers that go undetected by plagiarism software. Students are copying pieces from different articles, combining them into paragraphs that go undetected (Blum, 2009). This therefore means that combating plagiarism does not start in the classroom, nor



...struction for implementation in the classroom (Blum, 2009; Olt, 2007).

Olt (2007) and Lathrop and Foss (2000) have already revealed that instructors stop plagiarism by acting as “plagiarism police”. However, if strategies to combat plagiarism were directly designed into courses, it could make it easier for instructional designers to design plagiarism free instructions around these instructional strategies (Olt, 2007). This would take the pressure off instructors needing to act as plagiarism police and allow them to focus attention on ensuring meaningful learning takes place in their classroom (Olt, 2007). This justification for this study goes in line with the experts Richey and Klein.

Richey and Klein (2007) stated that research on instructional strategies associated with constructivism have focused on cognitive apprenticeship, problem-based learning, scaffolding, and collaboration. None of these studies, however, focused on strategies for deterring plagiarism. The proposed study aims to provide a description of how these instructional strategies are used by instructional designers to deter plagiarism.

## Definition of Terms

- **Academia:** For the purpose of this study, higher education institutions.
- **Blatant plagiarizers:** Students who procrastinate until the last minute and then plagiarize because they run out of time to complete their papers (Renard, 2000).
- **Case:** For the purpose of this study, an individual (Olt, 2009).
- **Cut-and-paste:** A term used in the literature that relates to copying text from electronic sources and placing it on the clipboard and then placing it in part or whole in a word processing document (Renard, 2000).
- **Instructional design:** A systematic and creative process regarding the execution or development of course material (Smith & Regan, 1999).
- **Digital cheater:** Students who commit plagiarism using the Internet (Blum, 2009).
- **Higher education:** For the purpose of this study, universities, and colleges (Dlevin & Gray, 2007).
- **Instructor by assignment:** A professional instructor who has been assigned the task of designing instruction by their employer despite having little or no training as an instructional designer (Merrill, 2007).
- **Instructional designers:** For the purpose of this study, any person(s) directly involved with the creation of academic instruction, which includes, in most cases, instructors. (Reigeluth, 1983).
- **Literacy theft:** Stealing by copying the words, or ideas of someone else, and passing it off as your own (Park, 2003).



Creating Instruction (CIT, 2007).

- **Plagiarism police:** Referred to by the literature as instructors who use detection software and other means to identify students who have committed plagiarism (Blum, 2009).
- **Sneaky plagiarizer:** A student who knows what plagiarism is and how to avoid it but chooses to plagiarize in hopes of getting away with it (Renard, 2000).
- **Unintentional plagiarizer:** A student who has never been taught what plagiarism is and how to give credit to the authors whose ideas you have used (Renard, 2000).

## Assumptions

The following assumptions were made about this study:

1. Participants will respond to the questions appropriately, honestly, and promptly.
2. Instructional designers have an earned terminal degree and have experience in instructional design for online learning.

## Limitations

This study has the following limitations:

1. The in-depth interview questions asked might not accurately answer the research questions as expected; to minimize this possibility, there was a field test conducted with two instructional design experts.
2. Bias may occur in this study because there might be preconceived ideas that the only way to stop plagiarism is to change the mindset of students, which may not be an easy task. However, the goal is to utilize instructional strategies to see if by changing the way that instruction is presented, it will change the mindset of students helping them not to plagiarize.

## Nature of the Study

The methodology for this study was a qualitative instrumental multi-case study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Case study methodology represents an empirical inquiry used when (a) "Attempting to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) you cannot influence the behavior of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context (Yin, 2003). Another author defined qualitative case study, as "A qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon or social unit" (Merriam, 1998, p. 21). Case studies



2009). Case studies are also utilized when the research is designed to provide information from the viewpoint from the participants (Tellis, 1997). Research Stake (1995), Simons (2009), and Yin (2003) have all successfully used case research. A key strength of the case study method involves the use of multiple techniques in the data gathering stage. The goal of this research is to use a case study to understand what constructivist instructional strategies instructors who are instructional designers find useful in deterring plagiarism. As stated by Reigeluth (1999), the purpose of this study is “Not to tell educators what is education, to inform them or guide them on “how to do education” (p. 634).

The constructivist instructional strategies discussed in this study were adapted from Stake et al. (2011). Professional online instructors who are also instructional designers were interviewed to identify which strategies they find useful in combating plagiarism. Five professional online instructional designers were interviewed to get their feedback on specific constructivist instructional strategies that they find useful in discouraging plagiarism. The actual study was divided into three phases, Phase 1 was the design phase, Phase 2 was the data collection phase, and Phase 3 was the analysis and summation phase. The design phase included the selection of cases to determine five to six participants for the study. The data collection phase included the in-depth interview questions, field test experts review of the interview questions, and the creation of a demographic pre-interview data collection form. For the purpose of this study, each case represented an individual. The data collection phase includes interviews of five or six participants selected for the multi-case study, and evaluation of collected data from participants. Also included in the data collection were field notes collected from each participant during the interview process using Microsoft OneNote. The field notes included notes about behaviors, external materials shared by participants, and features of the setting. The final phase involved analysis of the collected data, summation, and presentation of recommendation (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Formative Three-Phase Design

The data that is collected in this study was used to identify specific constructivist instructional strategies used by instructional designers to combat plagiarism in their course design. These instructional designers were selected from a pool of professional instructional designers with three or more years of design experience. These instructional designers were selected from a Yahoo group hosted by a popular online author who also specializes in online teaching as well as a LinkedIn educational technology and instructional design group. To join these groups, one has to receive permission from the moderator who assessed the instructor’s qualifications before granting permission. These participants all have received terminal degrees in instructional design or a related field with at least 18 course hours in instructional design and work for an American University or College. The instructional strategies identified by these professionals would be very beneficial to those involved in the study, as well as to fellow researchers in the instructional design sector.

## Analysis Method



reduction, data display, and conclusion (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data for patterns, matching themes, completeness, and usability during the data process. The NVivo software was used to identify codes predicted based on followed by new codes that were stated in the participants' own words, or e terminology (Creswell, 2008). For example, Miles and Huberman (1994) ac preliminary list of start codes be created first, after which new codes were a emerged from the data. Next, the data was sorted and sifted to reveal simila phrases, and identify relationship between variables, patterns, and common reduction continued until all fieldwork is completed (Miles & Huberman, 19 achieved, the final data was displayed in table format and presented in Chap

## Organization of the Remainder of the Study

This study is composed of five chapters. The remaining four chapters based on the steps in the research process. Chapter 2 comprises of instructio models and instructional theories. This includes models such as ASSURE, Kemp, and ICARE models and theories, such as Constructivism, Cognitivism, Behaviorism. Discussion included a detailed literature review regarding wh researchers are saying regarding the topic of plagiarism, as well as the strate suggestions others in the field have provided in helping to decrease plagiarism practice. Chapter 3 includes detail discussion relative to the methods used in collecting data for the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings collected from the research study. Chapter 5 includes discussion relative to what the findings from Chapter 4 mean for academia, and suggests recommendations for further research. It also includes the conclusion of the study.



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