This book is timely, because in the age of the Internet, concern about patchwriting and cyber-plagiarism has become increasingly common. The term patchwriting refers to words and phrases by others, patched together in new sentences without acknowledgement, whereas cyber-plagiarism usually suggests large chunks or entire works downloaded from the Internet (Edmonds, 2006). Popular belief fuelled by the media is that ease of “copying and pasting” from the Web and the advent of online “paper mills” has led to a dramatic increase in plagiarism. Although the battle against plagiarism is nothing new, there is general acceptance that this problem has grown since widespread access to the Internet (McCabe & Stephens, 2006). However, evidence on the true extent of the problem remains inconclusive and empirical data does not necessarily support an epidemic of plagiarism (Scanlon, 2006).

Whether or not plagiarism is on the rise, a new kind of “game” exists, as there is little doubt that students and faculty are downloading unprecedented amounts of information in an electronic form. In attempting to redefine the rules of this new game by getting under the surface of plagiarism, the editor has compiled a diverse and impressive collection of works. Taken as a whole, the book illustrates that the problem of plagiarism is no longer as simple as students copying someone else’s work—either accidentally or knowingly. Historically this distinction between intent has been central to the standard definition of plagiarism (Jenson & De Castell, 2004). In the digital age, however, plagiarism has become a complex and multi-faceted concept and this book shows why concerns about the growth of intellectual dishonesty and copyright violations should it be taken seriously.

While on the surface the text shows the issue of plagiarism can be controlled—if not solved—by a number of sophisticated software solutions, there is more for faculty and university policy-makers to consider than adopting systems that police the problem. Arguably, this kind of response to the threat of plagiarism merely scrapes the surface and is more about compliance than a genuine commitment to ethics and intellectual integrity. As Scanlon (2006) points out, attempting to stamp out plagiarism by employing plagiarism-checkers does little or nothing to address the real issue. The root cause of the problem itself must be put under the spotlight. We need to ask the fundamental question: why do students plagiarise?

The fact is that students plagiarise for the variety of reasons. According to the Canadian Library Association, students plagiarize because they may not know how to correctly cite published works; they may not understand the difference between quoting and paraphrasing; they may consider material on the Internet as public knowledge; or “they may turn to plagiarism when under stress from deadlines and failing marks” (Oliphant, 2002; cited in Edmonds, 2006, para. 40). In considering all of these reasons, the book invites the reader to rethink traditional conceptions of plagiarism. It offers a scholarly response to the concern about plagiarism by challenging the reader to critically reflect on three basic questions:

1. What is plagiarism?
2. How do you prevent plagiarism?
3. How do you educate people about plagiarism?
Each of these questions is multi-layered, as illustrated by the variety of contributions and international perspectives of plagiarism contained in the book. Indeed, a real strength of the book is the way the editor has brought together authors from around the world including Australia, New Zealand, Europe, the United States, and the United Kingdom. In an increasingly globalized world, the book shows that plagiarism is truly an international problem. At a technical level, it has become easier to detect plagiarism through online services such as Turnitin, but the true extent and definition of the problem remains a thorny issue.

In light of the argument that students learn and are frequently encouraged by parents to take advantage of subtle forms of cheating from a young age (Thompson, 2006), the focus rightly needs to be on educative rather than punitive measures. Such an approach is often described as the “3Ps” strategy towards plagiarism—that is, pedagogy, promotion, and policing (Dodd, 2006). While the “3Ps” have popular appeal, the emerging educative approach that Devlin (2006) and several contributors to this book advocate is centred on a comprehensive four-part strategy:

- A collaborative effort to recognize and counter plagiarism.
- Thoroughly educating students about the expected conventions of authorship.
- Designing approaches to assessment that minimize the possibility for plagiarism.
- Adopting highly visible procedures for monitoring and detecting plagiarism (p.47).

The last point acknowledges that plagiarism is more likely to flourish in institutional settings with few consequences (Thompson, 2006). It follows that educational institutions cannot afford to adopt a laissez faire approach to the new game. However, a culture of compliance, or as Devlin (2006, p.47) describes, a “catch-'n'-punish” approach, is unlikely to address the real sources of the problem and it may even drive the serial plagiarist further underground.

Instead, a more holistic and multi-layered “4P” approach is promoted incorporating policy, preparation, prevention, and processes (Devlin, 2006). That said, it is noteworthy that this approach goes beyond a pure ethics-based strategy as it acknowledges that plagiarism by students (and staff) is not always deliberate. This point recognises that the role of education is crucial in order to fulfill Lathrop and Foss’ (2005) goal of guiding students from cheating and plagiarism to a culture of honesty and integrity. In my experience, students are far more likely to adopt academic conventions and practice ethical conduct when they respect and understand the reasons why this is important. However, education also needs to extend to academic staff as the book highlights the importance of setting original tasks that make plagiarism very difficult. The key point is that the responsibility for avoiding plagiarism must be shared by staff and students.

This book should appeal to a wide readership from a variety of higher education backgrounds. Having said that, this book is not the final word on patchwriting and cyber-plagiarism, and no doubt plagiarism will continue to be a thorny topic for many decades; for this reason the last word is left to Wilson Mizner (1876-1933), a playwright, raconteur, and entrepreneur: “If you steal from one author, it’s plagiarism; if you steal from many, it’s research” (Quotations Page).
REFERENCES


*Mark Brown*
*Massey University*