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This is an electronic version of an article published in:

Gunnel Colnerud and Michael Rosander, Academic dishonesty, ethical norms and learning, 2009, ASSESSMENT and EVALUATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION, (34), 5, 505-517. ASSESSMENT and EVALUATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION is available online at informaworld™:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02602930802155263>

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Postprint available at: Linköping University Electronic Press

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:liu:diva-51485>

9.4. 2008

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY, ETHICAL NORMS AND LEARNINGGunnel Colnerud¹ and Michael Rosander

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Academic dishonesty is not a new phenomenon at all. However, it changes in character as methods and available technology develop and strategies for control and examination vary. The reported cases of academic dishonesty in Sweden have increased. According to data from the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (Högskoleverket, 2005), the number of disciplinary cases increased 62% from 2003 to 2004 and further 13% from 2004 to 2005 (Högskoleverket, 2006). A closer look at those figures shows that plagiarism and fabrication are the main causes of this spectacular result.

As regards the data on the increasing dishonesty among Swedish students it can be noted that there are still very few students involved in academic disciplinary cases, just above 0.1% in 2004. Furthermore, the techniques for copying texts from the Internet are becoming smarter, but so are also the techniques for disclosure. Similar to crime statistics, we know nothing

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about previous or contemporary, undisclosed breaches. Consequently, caution must be exercised when drawing conclusions about increasing dishonesty.

There are varying taxonomies of academic dishonesty (e.g. Pavela, 1978; Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002). There are three official Swedish main categories:

- Cheating – e.g. using cribs notes and unauthorised materials
- Unauthorised collaboration – e.g. working together on out-of-class individual assignments
- Plagiarism and fabrication – e.g. using parts, or the whole, of a text written by another person without acknowledgement; submitting the same paper or parts of it, for credit in more than one course, falsification of information

It is important to stress from the start that this article concerns conscious and deliberate acts of academic dishonesty. There is reason to discriminate between at least three different categories of academic dishonesty in terms of the degree of consciousness and intention when performing these acts (Colnerud, 2006). The three categories are *conscious deception*, *self-deception*, and *ignorant deception*.

Conscious deception

This kind of dishonesty is characterised by intentional misrepresentation. The student mediates false messages in order to make others believe what he himself does not believe in. The point is to give the impression that one has accomplished something, which one has not done. Lipson and Reindl (2003) called plagiarism of this kind criminal. It describes the act when students "knowingly and intentionally claim others' work as their own" (p. 8). This deception can also be carried out by means of e.g. citing or fabricating results in order to mislead the reader. A peculiar consequence is that students deny themselves a sense of triumph, as in the case when you do when you get a prize intended for someone else (Reddiford, 1998).

The conscious deception can also be aimed at helping a friend. Ashworth and Bannister (1997) found that students justify their own moral norms for helping friends when the official norms are unclear.

Self-deception

This kind of dishonesty is characterised by self-manipulation. The student considers him or herself to be the one who has produced the text. Self-deception is a peculiar, but probably widespread phenomenon. However, self-deception is not the same as when you cheat at cards. It is not possible to really cheat oneself when e.g. playing a game of patience. Self-deception goes deeper and affects both the subject and others.

Ignorant deception

This kind of deception is characterised by the student's ignorance. This ignorance can be of at least two kinds. The first one is characterised by the fact that the students have not understood the rules or the demands and requirements made on them. Rules can be unclear and students sometimes do not understand that they are meant seriously. A foreign student told me in an interview that she recognised all that was said to her about cheating and plagiarism when she arrived at the Swedish university where she was studying. After a while she realised a surprising difference to what she was used to. "In contrast to my university teachers, you really mean what you are saying!" she exclaimed. Furthermore, Hayes and Inrona (2005) claimed that plagiarism detection systems produce plagiarists. Asian learners have an internalised norm for imitating their teachers. However, they are constructed as "plagiarists" in the UK. This phenomenon can in part be regarded as the variant presented below.

The second kind of ignorance is characterised by a lack of familiarity with academic writing and with the implicit norms embedded in the quality criteria. Pickard (2006) remarked, "many students attending have entered the institution with less orthodox educational experiences and with qualifications other than 'A' levels" (p. 217). In addition to this possible

weak preparation for navigating in the blurred field of academic expectations, it is questionable whether students get “the appropriate information and skills within the context of scholarly/academic approach to learning”, which Macdonald and Carroll (2006, p. 235) would like to see. They stressed an alternative approach to “the catch and punish voices” (p. 236) and directed attention to both the students’ background and the responsibilities of the institutions and teachers in order to prevent plagiarism.

This article is concerned with the first category, the conscious and voluntary kind of academic deception, but is, however, fully aware of the two other categories. 325 students from four educational programs were asked to answer a questionnaire, where they were asked whether they considered 23 described situations as whether they consider them as cheating or not. The way the question was asked, “Is this cheating?”² presupposes that the actions described are performed on purpose. Thus, we asked for the students’ judgement of different actions. They defined what they viewed as cheating. We did not ask for their self-experiences of cheating or plagiarism. Neither did we ask them to estimate cheating among others. However, we ended the questionnaire by asking them to think about what

² In Swedish, it is common to use the word for cheating (“fusk”) for all kinds of academic dishonesty.

they might consider doing under certain circumstances, which also refers to deliberate actions.

A factor analysis of the 23 situations was a starting-point for the following qualitative analyses of the ethical norms possible to track in the answers. Thus the qualitative analysis is an example of integrated empirical ethics. *The aim of this article is to deduce which ethical norms and considerations are implicitly present in the students' answers when they are asked to define the degree to which the presented actions are acts of cheating.*

Previous research

Academic dishonesty can be studied from several perspectives. Within the research project of which this study is a part, other studies discuss the phenomenon of academic dishonesty as a conflict between youth culture and norms of the educational system (Högberg, 2006) or as a sign of different cultures in different educational programs (Hult, 2006). Previous and current international research gives examples of studying academic dishonesty as educational issues. Macdonald and Carroll (2006) regarded academic dishonesty as a case of educational responsibility. They focused on the measures (not) taken by the teachers in order to introduce the norms

of academic writing to the students in order to guide them in the often confusing field of permitted and not permitted strategies in writing. Also Pickard (2006) was interested in plagiarism as an educational problem. She has used a questionnaire asking staff and students about certain aspects, such as whether the students have been informed about plagiarism by their teachers. The different perspectives on academic dishonesty mostly involve ethical elements, however, the referred studies do not focus on them, as is the case in the present article. Academic dishonesty is undoubtedly a moral phenomenon.

Studies, which ask students about acts of academic dishonesty they have committed, have been performed prior to the current interest in plagiarism. Björklund and Wenestam (1999) used the same method and questionnaire as Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead (1995) in order to make comparisons between students in Finland and the UK. The method was self-reports of strategies used and reasons against cheating. The results revealed interesting differences in frequencies between the two countries. British students reported significantly higher frequencies in most kinds of cheating. The findings relevant to this study concern the reasons for cheating or not cheating, which were one part of the study. The reasons *for* cheating were the common ones: time pressure, laziness, improving grades. Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2002) found, when summarising 14 studies, that factors

motivating academic dishonesty included performance concerns, academic and non-academic external pressures, unfair professors and lack of effort. The reasons for academic dishonesty are self-evidently connected to study performance. However, there is a specific reason, which has to do with unauthorised collaboration aimed at helping a friend, also confirmed by Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead (1995), i.e. the reason for helping a friend typically appears in connection with coursework situations.

In a study aimed at comparing staff and student attitudes towards collusion and plagiarism, Barrett and Cox (2005) found little difference between the two groups. However, they found an interesting difference in both groups' attitude towards plagiarism and collusion. While plagiarism was described as the theft of another person's work and an unfair advantage, collusion was seen as less harmful. The reason found by the authors is that in collaborative behaviour and collusion, at least some learning is taking place.

Students' reasons against cheating

From an ethical point of view, it is interesting to also focus on the reasons *against* cheating. There are studies in social psychology showing that some students do not take the opportunity to cheat even when they are placed in a situation where they could do so without being discovered or punished, while others give way to temptation (Duval & Wicklund, 1972; Diener &

Wallbom, 1976). The explanation given by the “self-awareness theory” is that dissonance occurs when we do not behave as we thought we would. When the students become aware of the possible breach of their norms they find it incompatible with their view of themselves. It is a matter of identity, which includes them being the kind of person who does not cheat.

The Finnish students gave two general kinds of reasons not to be engaged in academic dishonesty (Björklund & Wenestam, 1999). One category of answers was that cheating would have been immoral/dishonest. Another was that it would have been pointless/unnecessary, that they had never thought of it and that the situation did not arise or was not applicable. Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2002) summarised four different studies and found both internal and external reasons for not engaging in academic dishonesty. The internal reasons related to students’ attitudes, beliefs, and value system. External factors related to some situational constraints on dishonesty such as the cost of and likelihood of getting caught. Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead (1995) also found both moral and pragmatic reasons for not cheating.

Ethical theories of relevance

Academic dishonesty is a phenomenon present in the daily life of education and, indeed, research. Like most actions in human activities, it does not relate to just one ethical theory. Ethics applied to social practice of any kind tend to be mixed. This study is no exception.

The relevant theoretical background gathers elements from predominantly three normative theories: consequentialist theory, deontological theory, and virtue theory.

Academic dishonesty is linguistically defined as morally wrong. Ethical theories suggest different reasons for judging an act as right or wrong. *Consequentialist* theory is committed to the principle of benefit maximization, from which it follows that an act is regarded as morally wrong if its consequences are bad and good if its consequences are good (see e.g. Collste, 1996; Strike & Soltis, 2004). Then we have to decide for whom it is supposed to be bad – for the person acting or for others? Applied to the phenomenon of academic dishonesty it is obvious that cheating has good consequences, at least temporarily, for the students who cheat or plagiarize. She or he probably gets a better result on the test or a higher degree in the examination than would have been the case without cheating.

What about the consequences to others? Björklund and Wenestam (1999) discussed the fact that students may view cheating as morally acceptable since it does not affect other students negatively if one of them is cheating. The others get their degrees anyway and furthermore they get better competence in the field than the cheating student. Others would say that cheating is unfair to those who study hard and make every possible effort. The bad consequences in relation to others would then be the fact that they work hard but do not get a higher reward than those who are cheating.

Then what about the case when cheating is a good thing for others? Hiding cribbed notes in the lavatory for a friend is not evidently morally wrong from a consequentialist perspective. The consequences are good, from which it follows that the act is morally right. However, even if the consequences are good in a short-term perspective, they can be bad in the longer term. The friend does not acquire the expected knowledge in the course and this can result in bad consequences later in life. Although the analyses of academic dishonesty based on the consequences are complicated matters, the consequentialist theory is still relevant when judging the ethical issues raised by plagiarism and cheating.

From a *deontological* standpoint, cheating is valued in relation to the moral duties we have as human members of a culture and a society. The ethics of

duties focuses on the actions without considering the consequences (e.g. Hedin, 1993). The duty to tell the truth and the duty to be honest are examples of duties relevant to the case of cheating. The act of plagiarism can be seen as a kind of lying by virtue of the fact that the true origin of the text is concealed. It is a lie to write your name on work you have not done yourself.

Telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth is still a valid principle in our society, not least because of its importance for the trust in relationships e.g. between teacher and student. An act of cheating is a breach of the duty to be honest. In addition, it is also a breach of the duty to do your best in relation to your task. In this case, the duty is to strive to fulfil the learning aims of the education program or the course you are attending. This duty might be seen as more context-bound than more lasting moral principles, but it still makes deontological theory relevant in more than one way.

According to *virtue ethics* we all possess dispositions to develop and cultivate the desired qualities, the virtues (Aristotle, c 350 BC/1982). These virtues are characterised by being an optimal balance between two extremes. One illustrative example is courage, which is the balance between being cowardly and foolhardy. Among the classical seven virtues, honesty

and fairness are particularly relevant to the phenomena of plagiarism and cheating. Being honest is contradictory to the act of giving a false impression of one's competence. Being fair is contradictory to the act of getting marks you do not deserve.

Virtue ethics is relevant to the issues raised by plagiarism and cheating not only because of the survival of the classical ideals but also because of the strong impact those ideals have on the identity of young people. The social psychology study referred to above showed that the students who did not cheat even if they got the chance, did not do so because they did not identify themselves as a person who would do such things. They attributed to themselves virtues, which are contrary to cheating.

Methods

The questionnaire used to collect data was constructed on basis of a previous study by Hult and Hult (2003) and covered 23 situations or scenarios. Some new items were added inspired by other studies. The students were asked to state their attitudes towards cheating and plagiarism. We did not ask for information about their behaviour, which would require other methods. The researchers distributed the questionnaire at the end of

lessons to students in four different programs, teacher education, engineering, economics and nursing (see Table 1).

Table 1
Numbers of informants – gender and programme

Programme	Female	Male	Total
Mechanical engineering programme	18	71	89
Teacher education programme	38	21	59
Economist programme	61	43	104
Health and care programme	63	10	73
Total	180	145	325

We felt that contact with the students would benefit the participation frequency. It also allowed for a brief verbal explanation of the aim of the study and the measures taken in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality and that participation was voluntary. This information was also attached in written form to the questionnaire.

The students were asked to answer the question: “Is this cheating?” by choosing one of five alternatives on a Likert-scale. The positions varied from “yes, definitely” to “no, definitely not”.

At the end of the questionnaire, we asked which acts of those listed they could think of doing by themselves if they thought the demands were too high or if they thought the course was boring or unimportant.

Some criticism of the questionnaire should be mentioned. The order of the items was not very thoroughly worked out. The four items at the beginning are the most obvious examples of cheating according to data. For example, 98% of the students answered "yes" (answers 1 or 2 on the 5-point Likert scale) on the first item. The next items also had a high frequency of yes answers. The order of the items may have affected the participants by setting the standard for what really is cheating. There are also other weak points such as unclear meaning of two items. However, the present analyses do not depend on them.

The statistical analysis presented below was performed with SPSS 15. Frequencies of answers to single items are used in addition to aggregated items based on a factor analysis. A factor analysis, although a quantitative method, involves qualitative aspects in terms of finding meaning beyond the mere numbers and factor loadings. As a starting-point for a qualitative analysis, the factor analyses directed attention to the phenomena hidden behind the factors. In fact, they point at possible meaning of data. The qualitative analysis is an example of integrated empirical ethics, since it is descriptive but also offers the possibility to draw some normative conclusions relevant to educational practice.

Results

The phenomenon of cheating is linguistically defined as a breach of a moral norm. Plagiarism is also a concept that makes one think of breaching moral norms, although not that serious and since it is not that well defined, one might not be aware of the breach. There are researchers who suggest that plagiarism is not cheating at all as it is not always a deliberate behaviour (e.g. Carroll, 2007). In this case, we refer to deliberate plagiarism.

There are some general conclusions to be drawn. The conformity in attitudes among the programmes as well as between women and men is striking. There are some variations in details, although not large enough to be relevant in the following analyses. This means that the whole cohort of students, representing the four educational programs, is treated as one group in this analysis.

One issue for the analysis is to investigate the differences in attitudes towards different kinds of cheating and plagiarism and to relate these differences to the character of the situations. The analytical questions were: What characterises the items regarded as cheating? What characterises the items not regarded as cheating?

Descriptive statistics for all 23 situations together with the actual situations are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
The 23 situations and means and standard deviations for each item

Items	Mean	SD
1. To purchase or download an essay, and hand it in with your name on it	1.08	0.53
2. To hand in someone else's essay with your name on it	1.10	0.54
3. To hand in, with a friend's permission, his/her essay with your name on it	1.21	0.66
4. To copy parts out of a book and hand in the text with your name on it	1.33	0.77
5. To copy a text and refer to it, but leave out quotation marks and thereby give the impression that the text is your own	2.15	1.02
6. To write in your own words information from a written text, without stating the reference	2.77	1.08
7. To look at old exams in order to prepare for an exam	4.87	0.55
8. To refer to a book or article without having read the original text	3.64	1.03
9. To leave out results which are not in line with your main results	2.82	1.16
10. To use someone else's idea without referring to him/her as the source of information	2.90	1.18
11. To cooperate with another student on an individual examination paper, which results in similar answers	3.12	1.25
12. To re-use your text from previous papers, without referring to yourself	3.98	1.10
13. To ask a friend to read and comment on your text before it is handed in	4.87	0.58
14. To leave a note with exam solutions in a restroom, in order to help a friend	1.11	0.55
15. To help a friend by doing his/her homework	1.76	1.13
16. To see someone cheat/plagiarise without intervening	3.45	1.28
17. To use parts of a text written by a friend, and add the same amount of text written by yourself, and hand it in with your name on it	2.24	1.08
18. To summarise course literature for each other instead of reading it all by yourselves	4.39	0.93
19. To make up references in an essay	1.52	0.86
20. To make up results in an essay	1.58	1.00
21. To do the bare minimum in a group project, and let the others do a lot more	2.47	1.27
22. To lie about your health to get an extended deadline	1.95	1.15
23. To do what many others do, even though you know it is wrong	2.42	1.20

The most obvious cheating/plagiarism situations according to the data are items 1, 2, 14, 3, 4, 19, and 20. For all seven situations, at least 80% of the students agreed with the item (answers 1 or 2 on the 5-point Likert scale).

The most obvious not cheating/not plagiarism situations are 7, 13, and 18.

For all three situations, at least 80% of the students disagreed with the item (answers 4 or 5 on the 5-point Likert scale).

Situations regarded as cheating

A factor analysis ($n = 325$) of the situations regarded as cheating resulted in five factors explaining 58.8% of the variance (Principle Components analysis, using eigen values greater than 1.0 for selection, and varimax rotation). Six items were removed due to low factor loadings and a further two were removed due to low internal consistency. See Table 3 for the factor structure.

The first factor was called “To hand in someone else’s text as my own”; the second “To give my work to someone else”; the third “To not refer correctly”; the fourth “To make up references and results”; and, finally, the fifth factor was called “To cooperate”. The internal consistency (Cronbach’s α) was not high enough for some of the factors, so henceforth only factors 1 and 4 will be used. The factors were, however, only used as one starting point for the qualitative examination of the ethical content of the factors and the different items.

A closer look at the obvious cheating situations shows that four out of seven are characterised by doing *no or little work by oneself*. When someone else

writes the entire examination, as it is in these situations, you have made no effort in relation to the course for which you are tested. For example, copying parts from a book involves less work, although not that much as in the most serious cases. These four items constituted a factor (factor 1). Extensive cheating by means of plagiarism means no or little work and effort, and the moral rejection is clear, which is confirmed by the answers concerning which acts they could imagine committing. Only up to one percent of the students could imagine committing these acts. We call this phenomenon *extensive cheating*.

Tabel 3

Factor loadings (loadings < .20 removed for clarity) and internal consistency

Item	1	2	3	4	5
2	.92				
1	.90				
3	.81				.23
4	.68		.41		.21
21		.75		.24	
22	.20	.68			.28
6			.76		
5	.23		.67		
12	-.27		.57		.23
8			.50	.41	
20	.23	.20		.72	
19	.26	.22		.62	.20
11					.75
15	.21	.31			.65
17			.26		.56
Alpha	.91	.65	.64	.79	.57

Fabrication of references or results constituted another factor (factor 4). These acts can be seen as short cuts in order to give the impression of higher competence and higher quality than is actually the case. Compared to the previous category, they involve at least some effort and are therefore seen as less serious, although still cheating. Fabrication was conceivable for 3-4% of the students. We call this phenomenon *limited cheating*. It would seem, as a consequence of this result, that talking about *degrees of cheating* and plagiarism is a possibly useful approach. There are undoubtedly differences between leaving out a reference and buying an essay on the Internet.

The third situation in ranking order (To leave a note with exam solutions in a restroom in order to help a friend) differs from the others in its ethical content, which was evident in the factor analysis where it did not fit into any of the factors. To help a friend by leaving cribbed notes in the bathroom is definitely not an act of laziness or a wish to avoid effort. It has other qualities. When taking a risk in order to save a friend from e.g. failing a course you violate a rule in order to fulfil an overarching duty – the rule of benevolence. Notwithstanding, the act of leaving cribbed notes is undoubtedly regarded as cheating and it is also the ultimate traditional example of cheating. This phenomenon is called *cheating for others*.

The relationship to other students is brought to the fore in two more situations, which the students rank as cheating. These are characterised by making work easier for yourself but not for others. They concern the act of shirking work, leaving it to friends, and lying in order to gain an advantage. Although all cheating can be seen as unfair, this phenomenon of clearly gaining an advantage at the expense of others differs and is called *unfair cheating*.

Situation definitely not regarded as cheating

Looking more closely at the situations most clearly regarded as *not cheating*, it is evident that they are characterised by *work and some effort*. Looking at old exams in order to prepare for an examination involves some work and effort. Getting comments on a text requires some work and effort in order to consider the comments you get and, of course, to produce the text in the first place. Summarising literature for each other instead of reading the whole book is not done without some work and effort. This is called *improving measures*. There are education programs, where these acts are considered academic dishonesty. We, however, let the students define them, why we do not call them cheating.

Other situations not regarded as cheating

Acts like reusing a previously examined paper in another course or referring to sources you have not read are not regarded as cheating by the students, although not as clearly as the previous category. The paper is indeed produced by the student and presupposes both effort and learning, although it is not meant to be a merit in more than one case.

Discussion

It is possible to observe an implicit logic in the students' attitudes towards the degree of academic dishonesty. The lower degrees of effort made and work done by the student, the lower the degree of learning that can be expected. The lower the degree of learning, the higher the degree of academic dishonesty. If a student breaches an academic norm but still learns parts or most of the expected knowledge, it is more acceptable according to the students' answers than if he or she has done no work and consequently has learned nothing.

This conclusion is validated by the students' attitudes towards acts such as letting a friend or a parent read an examination paper in order to get

comments, which may improve the text. Preparing for an examination by reading previous examinations is a similar case. These acts can be expected to increase the actual competence of the student and are regarded as no or little cheating.

If academic dishonesty does promote learning, it can be morally justified by three main arguments. The first is that if you have learned, you have done your duty. The second is that if you have learned, your grade is fairly achieved. The third is that if you have learned, you might have achieved the expected competence.

From an ethical point of view, the two critical aspects, effort and learning, can be discussed from the three ethical perspectives mentioned above: consequentialist, deontological, and virtue ethics.

Ethical arguments against extensive cheating

First of all, a basic moral duty is to tell the truth and *extensive cheating* rests on a lie. Secondly, extensive cheating, with its lack of effort and work, is an example of not doing ones duty. If you accept studying in a certain educational programme, you agree to a kind of contract, defined by the curriculum and the courses and the forms of examinations decided by the

university. What you do when you do not achieve your papers by yourself is to break that contract. You do not fulfil your side of the contract.

The *consequence* of extensive cheating and not making any effort is that you do not learn and get the relevant knowledge from the course or the education program. This is a loss for the student and also for his or her future professional practice.

According to virtue ethics, we are expected to develop the moral qualities for which we have predispositions, the virtues. The students in the study by Björklund and Wenestam (1999) argued that cheating would be immoral and dishonest. The results of their study indicate that the classical virtues are still valid and important as ideals also to young people (see also Whitley & Spiegel, 2002; Diener & Wallbom, 1976).

The result in this study shows that extensive cheating involves no or little work and effort from which it follows that there is a lack of learning. This is incompatible with the virtues of honesty, fairness, and self-improvement.

The acts valued as not cheating, the *improving measures*, validate this argument. The measures taken, with the possible exception of summarizing books to each other, do actually improve the result. The improvement is,

however, achieved with the help of non-official sources. The contract in terms of learning outcome is fulfilled, although not by approved means.

The consequences of the *improving measures* are evidently seen as morally acceptable. If you take the measures mentioned, you learn most of the planned content. The virtue of self-improvement can be supported by the improving measures, although honesty can be questioned. And it can definitely be seen as unfair since not everyone has a friend or a parent who gives feedback on a piece of work.

The dark horse

There is one situation that does not seem to follow the logic used here and that is the act of cheating for others. The students reject this act firmly, but the problem is that we do not know if the answers refer to the person who leaves the cribbed note or the one using it.

There are moral arguments against the act of leaving cribbed notes for a friend. We will focus first on helping somebody to cheat, which is done without any favours in return. Helping a friend is definitely a good thing to do, according to all three normative theories. In this case, the student takes a risk for another person, which could be regarded as a virtue. However, the consequences may also be less learning, which means that you contribute to a bad thing. And the friend's results on the test are unfairly achieved.

Secondly, looking more closely at the student who uses the cribbed notes, he or she reduces the amount of effort and work and the learning outcome is decreased, similar to the other examples of extensive cheating. The same arguments as in the case of extensive cheating can be used: you breach your duty to tell the truth, you break the contract with the education program and you lack knowledge and competence.

Conclusion

Students seem to judge academic dishonesty from the work and effort made and the learning outcome, which results in a differentiation, you might say degrees, of academic dishonesty. However, explicitly unfair behaviour is rejected even if learning follows it. The implicit moral norms behind their judgements seem to be influenced by a mixture of arguments from at least three ethical theories.

It is not possible to uncover the internal relationship between different ethical norms based on the findings in this study. This means that we are not able to say anything about the weight of different arguments in relation to each other, which would be an interesting subject for further study.

For educational purposes the results of this study can contribute to the understanding of the complexity of students' attitudes towards different ways of cheating and plagiarism. It might be a good idea to ask students to participate in reference groups in order to find successful ways of preventing at least some of the different kinds of academic dishonesty that exist.

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