

# From the Editor-in-Chief

## **Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, the Onus Is on You**

*“But these are my original words and ideas...” “But I thought of this first...”*

*“I already wrote something similar, but this version is different...”*

*“But I didn’t think I was doing anything wrong...”*

There are no “buts” when it comes to intellectual fraud.

In a previous issue of *CJNL*, I raised some of the challenges faced by editors and writers. In particular, a problem that periodically arises in academia, publishing and public speaking is seemingly largely avoidable but is usually the direct result of ignorance or a blatant disregard for appropriate attribution of the written and spoken word. Although not a problem experienced by this journal, recent newspaper headlines and discussions with colleagues have suggested that reviewing the parameters of this particular offence is worthwhile.

“Borrowing” a paper from a peer and assuming credit for the work, submitting a manuscript that is a mosaic of others’ work and words, or failing to give credit to another’s written or spoken ideas is plagiarism. According to a website on the topic, all of the following acts constitute plagiarism:

- Turning in someone else’s work as your own
- Copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- Failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- Giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- Changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- Copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not (Plagiarism.org n.d.)

To restate, reframe or extend others’ ideas – or even one’s own – without explicit acknowledgement is just wrong. While the student plagiarist so exposed may receive a failing grade or even more severe disciplinary action, others may be assailed by the popular press, be censured, get fired and, as if that weren’t enough, also be characterized as dishonest, lacking integrity or – to put it simply – a cheat.

A few months ago, news headlines profiled a University of Toronto professor who was “censured for self-plagiarism” (Munro 2012). More scandalous was the discovery and subsequent resignation of the dean of the University of Alberta’s medical school for plagiarizing a convocation speech (Boesveld 2011). While it is difficult to imagine what these people were thinking, what writer or keynote speaker (need I mention editor) hasn’t experienced the challenge and stress of needing to be original, if not stimulating, and at the very least, to capture an audience’s attention?

Using narratives from previous research publications to situate findings in a new manuscript without appropriate attribution: unacceptable? Without question, according to guidelines published by the Panel on Responsible Conduct of Research (2011). Duplicative publications are in breach of the rules governing federally funded research. The guidelines are explicit in defining self-plagiarism or redundant publication:

The re-publication of one’s own previously published work or part thereof, or data, in the same or another language, without adequate acknowledgment of the source, or justification. (Panel on Responsible Conduct of Research 2011, section 3.1.1)

When the dean borrowed a convocation address given by a renowned physician to Stanford graduates in 2010, he pushed the boundaries of “borrowing” to an extreme by laying claim to personal anecdotes that were not his own. But it is notable that his theft of intellectual material might never have been discovered in pre-Internet times. The discovery of his offence was a result of graduates’ hearing some great messages, including a few concepts that they did not quite grasp, so they did a web search – and lo and behold, the emperor had no clothes!

In this age of Google, Turnitin and iThenticate, how can anyone even conceive of trying to deceive? But it is tempting – when striving to achieve top grades, tenure, promotion or prominence – to resort to the messages and ideas of those who have garnered success before, including ourselves. The Internet and search engines such as Google have made the world a smaller place, one in which our ideas (published or not) are readily available and those of others, living and dead, are also accessible to us. Some ideas we like, some we abhor and others we read wishing that we had had the courage or insight to have been the first to articulate a particularly unique perspective. Ultimately, someone nets the acclaim or criticism for original ideas or research, and the price to pay for stealing the work of others can be high.

One of the most startling stories of plagiarism I heard in recent months was that of a nursing professor who systematically passed off the work of others as his own over the course of more than a decade. Albeit much more difficult to detect in pre-Internet days, his practice was to create mosaics of text from the writings of others. In so doing,

he built a formidable publication and research track record leading to professional appointments, promotions and accolades. The capabilities of the Internet proved to be his undoing.

Educators, present company included, now have access to software tools such as Turnitin that can be used to expose cheaters. Some publishing houses have even more sophisticated applications like iThenticate, a plagiarism search engine of sorts with access to an even broader array of publications to identify even the most creative offender.

Functionally derived from Turnitin, “iThenticate helps editors, authors and researchers prevent misconduct by comparing manuscripts against its database of over 24 million web pages and 122 million content items, including 32 million published works from over 300 scholarly publisher participants” (iThenticate n.d.).

These tools provide reviewers with the capability to search manuscripts or papers for the incidence of phrases or sentences previously published or submitted for review. Does Longwoods use such a tool? Only one way to find out – if you dare.

Before you call me on the title of this editorial, the best attribution I could find is that it’s derived from a Victorian-era wedding tradition. Who coined the original I don’t know, but I did add something new.

## References

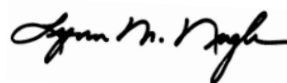
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