Troubling Plagiarism

University students’ understandings of plagiarism

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Judgment on plagiarism: it’s for academics to judge

Plagiarism blamed on different culture

Germany’s Plague of Plagiarism

A plague of plagiarists

45 found cheating at Uni

"University needs to acknowledge plagiarism issue"

The Ontology of Plagiarism

Copycats? Blame the teachers

Student knew the rules, plagiarism hearing told

Chinese cheats rot NZ universities with fakes

Alumnus spurns PhD over plagiarism row

General | 27 September 2012
Abstract

In this thesis, I report on a doctoral study that examined undergraduate university students’ understandings of plagiarism. The thesis addresses a gap in the existing plagiarism research since much of the literature on students’ understandings of plagiarism to date has focused on institutional or staff reports. Although there is a growing body of research reporting on students’ perspectives of plagiarism, there is a paucity of in-depth qualitative studies in this area. The theoretical framework for this study was informed by social constructionist, poststructuralist, and academic literacies perspectives. These informed my research methodology, including my close attention to students’ articulated understandings of plagiarism in relation to broader institutional discourses. Methodologically, the study involved interviews with 21 students drawn from first year lectures at the University of Otago, Aotearoa New Zealand. The students represented a variety of age ranges and levels of university study. The interviews focused on the students’ understandings of plagiarism, as well as their views on learning, assessment, and what constitutes a university education. I used discourse analysis to ‘read’ the students’ responses alongside the plagiarism discourses that appeared in University policy.

The thesis findings identify four main discourses that emerged in the students’ comments about plagiarism: ethico-legal discourses, where students used language reflecting a view of plagiarism as a moral or legal issue; fairness discourses, where students positioned plagiarism policy and practices as either fair
or not fair; confusion discourses, where students expressed confusion about plagiarism policy and/or practices; and learning discourses, where students spoke about plagiarism as either inhibiting learning or indicating that students had not learned. These discourses were reflective of University policy that positioned plagiarism as a form of dishonesty irrespective of whether or not it was intentional. When asked to reflect on learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education, most of the students drew heavily on employment discourses where they described universities as places in which to prepare for future employment. From an employment viewpoint, plagiarism policy and practices seemed irrelevant to most students.

The findings of this research challenge the way in which plagiarism is framed at the University of Otago. Currently, plagiarism is conceptualised as a textual feature within the finished product of a student’s assignment, and both intentional and unintentional plagiarism are treated as academic dishonesty. I argue that in order to support students’ learning, unintentional plagiarism should be positioned within academic writing. Furthermore, students’ writing should be viewed as a process rather than as a product, and students should be scaffolded in their development as academic writers. I further argue that, because of the dominant ethico-legal discourses surrounding the term ‘plagiarism’, we instead use the term ‘matching text’. This would remove the implication of dishonesty, and allow for an educative response to incidences of unintentional plagiarism.
Troubling plagiarism

Acknowledgements

As a social constructionist writing a thesis that challenges concepts of authorship, I find the notion of a single author inconceivable. Despite the fact that it is my name alone that appears on the title page of this thesis, in addition to the references listed at the end of this volume and other literature that has shaped my thinking, there are many people who either knowingly or unknowingly co-authored this research. I acknowledge their contributions here.

Firstly, I am grateful to the participants in this research. You willingly shared your views and experiences, and unhesitatingly allowed me to use your words in the writing of this thesis. Without you, there would be no thesis. I hope that I have represented you to the extent you deserve.

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Contributions

I thank the following people for allowing me to include their written feedback as a watermark on the chapter title pages in this thesis:

Chapter Two: Rachel Spronken-Smith
Chapter Three: Vivienne Anderson
Chapter Four: Rachel Spronken-Smith
Chapter Five: Vivienne Anderson
Chapter Six: Megan Anakin
Publications from this research


# Table of contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... iii  
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... v  

Contributions..................................................................................................................... vii  
Publications from this research ........................................................................................ viii  
Table of contents ............................................................................................................. ix  
List of figures ...................................................................................................................... xii  
List of tables ....................................................................................................................... xiii  

## Chapter One ................................................................................................................. 1  
Introducing the study ........................................................................................................ 1  
Origin of the research ....................................................................................................... 2  
Background context .......................................................................................................... 5  
The research objectives ..................................................................................................... 7  
Definition of terms .......................................................................................................... 9  
Plagiarism ....................................................................................................................... 9  
Citation and referencing................................................................................................. 10  
Discourse ....................................................................................................................... 11  
The research setting ........................................................................................................ 12  
Overview of the thesis .................................................................................................... 16  
Summary ....................................................................................................................... 18  

## Chapter Two ............................................................................................................... 20  
Tracing the plagiarism literature: From panic to panacea ............................................... 20  
Introduction ................................................................................................................... 21  
Moralising plagiarism ..................................................................................................... 26  
Prevalence and predictors of plagiarism ......................................................................... 27  
Plagiarism as cheating .................................................................................................... 33  
Detecting and punishing plagiarism ............................................................................... 35  
Regulating plagiarism ..................................................................................................... 37  
Defining plagiarism ....................................................................................................... 38  
Plagiarism policies and the role of ‘intent’ ..................................................................... 42  
Paraphrasing, summarising and referencing .................................................................. 47  
Problematising plagiarism .............................................................................................. 50  
From ‘plagiarism’ to ‘plagiaries’ .................................................................................... 51  
Changing concepts of ‘knowledge’ and ‘authorship’ ..................................................... 55  
Students as developing academic writers ...................................................................... 59  
Summary ....................................................................................................................... 62  

## Chapter Three ............................................................................................................. 65  
Theoretical framework .................................................................................................... 65  
Introduction ................................................................................................................... 66  
A social constructionist lens ............................................................................................ 67  
Discourse, knowledge, and power .................................................................................. 70  
Academic literacies theory ............................................................................................... 75
Troubling plagiarism

Contributions of this research ........................................................................................................ 211
Reconceptualising plagiarism ........................................................................................................ 213
  When plagiarism is not plagiarism ......................................................................................... 214
  Learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education ........................................ 215
  Emphasising learning ............................................................................................................... 217
  Separating poor citation from plagiarism ............................................................................. 220
  An alternative to ‘plagiarism’ ................................................................................................. 223
  Viewing writing as a ‘process’ ................................................................................................. 224
Conclusion ................................................................................................................................... 228
Directions for future research ................................................................................................... 230

References .................................................................................................................................... 232

Appendices ................................................................................................................................ 251
  Appendix A: Information Sheet for Participants ................................................................. 252
  Appendix B: Consent form for participants ....................................................................... 255
  Appendix C: Demographic information survey ................................................................. 256
  Appendix D: Interview questions ......................................................................................... 258
List of figures

Figure 1: A conceptualiation of the three main sources of plagiarism literature and the focus of each source................................................................. 24

Figure 2: A billboard advertising the University of Otago........................................ 178

Figure 3: A conceptualisation of how assessments frame students’ writing ...... 226
List of tables

Table 1: A demographic comparison of my research participants (n=21) and the wider University population ......................................................... 88

Table 2: The research participants ................................................................................................................. 90
Chapter One

Introducing the study

Introduction.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that

(1) Is an increasing issue in HE.

Plagiarism - an introduction:

"Plagiarism is a complex issue attracting substantial attention inside and outside HE." Blah Blah Blah.

Background (Why this research? Why me?)

Definition of Terms

- Plagiarism - Uni of Otago
- Citation & Referencing - Au Yeung & Cauder.
- Discourse & Language Program - Herbert & Morgan

Research Context

- University of Otago
- Broader HE landscape in NZ
  - Neoliberalism etc.
  - Purpose of HE
  - Liyanage & Andrade 2012

Structure of Thesis

- Chapter by Chapter

→ Title page pictures (explain)
In this thesis I explore university students’ understandings of plagiarism. This chapter provides the background to, and an explanation of, the research. I commence by describing how the project came about. I then outline the context of plagiarism in higher education and explain why this research is important. Following this I present the objectives of the research. Next, I explain some of the key terms I have used throughout the thesis. I then describe the New Zealand higher education context, and introduce the University of Otago, where this research was undertaken. I conclude this chapter with an outline of how the thesis is structured.

**Origin of the research**

Six years ago I commenced a new job as a receptionist at the Student Learning Centre at the University of Otago. It had been almost 20 years since I had worked in the education sector or been a student (I originally trained as a primary school teacher). I found myself in a world where my colleagues spoke in language I did not completely understand. Most often I understood the words being used, but I did not understand the nuances and meanings created by the way my colleagues strung words together to create sentences. It was some months before I was able to intelligently make sense of conversations to the extent that I could actively participate in the knowledge production that occurred in everyday interactions between my colleagues.
At the Student Learning Centre I was the first point of contact for students wanting assistance or advice. Some students came in because they were failing and in need of learning strategies to help them pass, and other students came in because they wished to achieve to a higher level. In my role, I learned very quickly what academic issues students commonly struggled with, found difficult, or became anxious about. It seemed to me that the university climate had changed since I was an undergraduate student. The students I came into contact with appeared to be under a lot of pressure, and were struggling with academic skills such as referencing and coping with the extent of academic reading required. I had no recollection of being required to read so much, or of referencing conventions being so prescribed and confusing when I was an undergraduate student.

A year after I started working at the Student Learning Centre I decided to take up part-time postgraduate study. Early into my postgraduate course I began to realise why students were anxious about plagiarism. My course book warned me against plagiarising and set out the range of sanctions I would be subject to if I did plagiarise. My course book also informed me that plagiarism can happen unintentionally, but unintentional plagiarism is still plagiarism. When I submitted my first assignment I was required to sign a declaration that the assignment was my own original work and contained no plagiarism. I had no doubt that signing this declaration would in no way reduce the likelihood that I had inadvertently strayed too close to a source text, and I equally had no doubt that if I had plagiarised, this declaration would not necessarily be viewed as proof of my lack of intent. I began to share the referencing and plagiarism anxieties and stresses of
the undergraduate students I was employed to work with. As I became concerned about writing my first assignment, I was working with students who were concerned about writing their first assignments. As I was struggling with referencing and citation, I was working with students who were struggling with referencing. I was concerned that I might inadvertently plagiarise, and I was working with students who were worried that they may have plagiarised in their assignments, or who had been accused of plagiarism.

The following year I was offered a contract as a learning advisor at the Student Learning Centre, alongside my role as receptionist. Being keen to develop my skills and knowledge as a learning advisor, I began to read key literature in the field of academic literacies. In 2011, when I was required to write a dissertation, I chose to write about how higher education students develop academic literacy competency. Alongside my dissertation I was taking a paper on qualitative research methods. As part of this paper I had to conduct a small research project comprising of a literature review and a single interview. I decided to focus on a student’s understanding of plagiarism. Through carrying out this small research project, I realised that there was a lack of research into students’ understandings of plagiarism. In addition, the single student I interviewed in 2011 provided some interesting and thought provoking insights into how an undergraduate student understood plagiarism policy and practices. After completing the paper, I presented my research at the Association of Teaching and Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand annual conference. The feedback I received from the presentation, together with my desire to enhance undergraduate students’ experiences at university, led me to pursue this research.
Background context

Plagiarism is a complex issue that has attracted much attention in higher education. The volume of academic literature exploring the topic of plagiarism has particularly increased in the last two or three decades. Historically, student plagiarism in universities has been presented as a simple problem: students ‘cheat’ by handing in work they have not completed themselves. Accordingly, institutional policies have customarily focused on detecting and punishing plagiarisers. More recently, however, the ‘detect and punish’ approach to student plagiarism has been questioned as straightforward notions such as how knowledge is constructed, and authorial identity, are increasingly challenged. Consequently, in the academic literature, there appears to be a division between those who view plagiarism as a simple matter of dishonesty, and those who view it as a more complex issue involving a multitude of contextual factors related to knowledge construction, academic identities, and authorship. Central to this debate is the ambiguity surrounding what plagiarism actually is. As I discuss in Chapter Two, the question of what behaviours and/or textual features can be considered as plagiarism is contested in the academic literature and in formal and informal debates within higher education. In particular, one of the more contentious issues within plagiarism debates is whether plagiarism can happen unintentionally, or whether it only involves intentional behaviour.

Higher education institutions are charged with the task of ensuring graduates have achieved particular outcomes from their degree experiences.
Consequently, institutions need to assess students’ learning of both subject content and academic skills. Deliberate cheating by students interferes with this process. If a student presents for assessment work that they have not themselves completed, then the student’s own knowledge and skill level is not being assessed and the student may have gained an unfair advantage. However, plagiarism is recognisable only in its appearance as a feature of text, and determining whether an example of plagiarism is deliberate cheating, or is the consequence of the student’s insufficient citation skills or sloppy practices, is difficult at best. Despite this, institutions require a policy on plagiarism in order to respond to incidences of cheating, and policies necessarily include a definition of plagiarism (Grigg, 2010). Institutional definitions of plagiarism need to address the question of what is plagiarism, and whether or not intent is a factor in determining whether plagiarism has occurred. In addition, institutional definitions of plagiarism need to signal that cheating is unacceptable practice, whilst simultaneously indicating that plagiarism without intent to cheat may be responded to in an educative way.

However, there is a general lack of consensus regarding whether intent to deceive is a determining factor in determining if plagiarism has occurred and, if it is a factor, how intent can be determined. Opinions vary between institutions, and between individuals within institutions.

While there is a growing body of literature exploring how academics and policy makers conceive of plagiarism (e.g., Flint, Clegg, & Macdonald, 2006; Gourlay & Deane, 2012), less research has examined students’ understandings of plagiarism. This is problematic since it is students who are expected to adhere to the definitions of plagiarism on which institutional policies are based. Much of the
research that does consider students’ understandings of plagiarism has relied on surveys or written questionnaires to gather information. Consequently, within the literature on plagiarism in higher education, there is a paucity of in-depth qualitative research exploring students’ reports of their understandings and experiences (Radunovich, Baugh, & Turner, 2009). The current research therefore makes an important contribution to plagiarism literature because it explores students’ perspectives and provides insights into how plagiarism might be framed in order to benefit students’ learning.

The research objectives

In this thesis I explore higher education students’ understandings of plagiarism. Specifically, I seek to answer the following questions:

- What are higher education students’ understandings and experiences of plagiarism policy and practices?
- What discourses inform or shape plagiarism policies and students’ understandings of plagiarism?

In order to answer the research questions above, in this thesis I also consider:

- Is there a connection between students’ beliefs about learning and assessment tasks and their understandings of plagiarism?
- Is there a connection between students’ beliefs about the purpose of a university education and their understandings of plagiarism?

I approach this research from a social constructionist perspective, which acknowledges that we each construct our own reality; therefore there are multiple possible truths (Burr, 2003). In line with this perspective, I am particularly
interested in the ways in which students, and policy documents at the University of Otago, construct plagiarism through language. In other words, I am interested in plagiarism not as a concrete practice that is easily definable, but as a ‘slippery’ set of practices that are understood and constructed differently by different people and in different contexts. I explain this further in subsequent chapters. Foucault’s concepts of discourse and subjectivity are helpful for thinking about both the ways in which plagiarism is constructed by students and educational institutions, and the implications of these constructions. Academic literacies theory is also useful for drawing connections between constructions of plagiarism, teaching, and learning. I explain my theoretical framework in depth in Chapter Three.

The study involves interviews with 21 undergraduate students at the University of Otago regarding their views on plagiarism. In addition, I examine the University’s plagiarism related documents. I also consider the students’ views on learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education. My exploration of the students’ understandings of their academic context is in line with an academic literacies approach to student learning, which recognises that students are expected to operate within the rules and regulations of the institution at which they are studying, whether or not these are made explicit (see Chapter Three). I am interested to investigate the students’ understandings of plagiarism in relation to their views on learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education, and the University plagiarism policy documents. In order to explore the students’ understandings, I ‘read’ the interview data using a discourse analytic approach, which I explain in more detail in Chapter Four. Gullifer and Tyson
(2010) argue that we need to understand students’ constructions of plagiarism in order to change their attitudes and behaviours. However, the present study aims to understand students’ constructions of plagiarism in order to examine how plagiarism might be (re)framed to best support university students’ learning, and in particular, their academic writing.

**Definition of terms**

There are a number of key terms that I need to explain from the outset. As a social constructionist, I acknowledge the difficulty in defining terms that describe phenomena that are social constructs; however, it is important to provide an explanation of how I have used the terms ‘plagiarism’, ‘citation’, ‘referencing’, and ‘discourse’ throughout this thesis.

**Plagiarism**

As I explain in more detail in Chapter Two, in this thesis I understand plagiarism to be a construct. In other words, there is no tangible object that can be pointed to and labelled ‘plagiarism’; rather, it is open to interpretation. Consequently, there is not, and there cannot be, a universal definition for plagiarism. However, it is necessary to explain how I have used the term ‘plagiarism’ in this research. Throughout the thesis, I have used the term ‘plagiarism’ according to how it is defined in the University of Otago plagiarism policy. I have done so because this is the definition that both I as a student and a staff member, and the students I
interviewed for this research, are expected to adhere to in our academic writing.

At the University of Otago,

Plagiarism is defined as:

• Copying or paraphrasing another person's work and presenting it as your own.

• Being party to someone else's plagiarism by letting them copy your work or helping them to copy the work of someone else without acknowledgement.

• Using your own work in another situation, such as for the assessment of a different paper or program, without indicating the source.

Plagiarism can be unintentional or intentional. Even if it is unintentional, it is still considered to be plagiarism (University of Otago, 2011c).

Thus, in this definition, plagiarism includes both intentional and unintentional practices, as well as self-plagiarism and being party to someone else’s plagiarism.

**Citation and referencing**

The concepts of citation and referencing are central to the construction of plagiarism in the academic setting. Although the two terms are commonly used interchangeably, throughout the thesis I have separated ‘referencing’ from ‘citation’ in order to make explicit two different concepts. In the thesis, I use ‘citation’ to describe “the analysis of and selection from sources, and subsequent integration and synthesis of knowledge and ideas into a coherent whole” (Angélil-Carter, 2000, p. 4). Citation is the practice of drawing on texts in the writing of
new texts. I use the term ‘referencing’ to indicate the technical or mechanical aspects of signalling the author and title of a source text, either within a piece of writing, or in order to complete a bibliography. In other words, I use ‘referencing’ to denote how citation is indicated in a text.

**Discourse**

Throughout the thesis I have used the term ‘discourse’ in a specific way. As stated above, I see plagiarism as a social construct; as constructed through language and social interactions. Consequently, understandings of plagiarism need to be considered in relation to the idea of ‘constructedness’, which raises questions of power. In broad terms, ‘discourse’ refers to the words and phrases that people use in conversation or texts, and the images or ideas this language draws on or invokes (Gee, 2005). The discourses that people draw on in their conversations and interactions shed light on how they view the objects or concepts about which they are speaking or writing. However, the discourses that people draw on also indicate what knowledge is available to them (or what they can and cannot think) within the constraints of the society or institution in which they are interacting. In this way, discourse also constructs knowledge. My use of the term ‘discourse’ throughout the thesis, therefore, signals my view of knowledge as constructed, and language use as revealing and creating relations of power. I discuss my use of discourse and subjectivity further in Chapter Three, and explain my discourse analytic approach to the interviews in Chapter Four. I move now to a description

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1 I refer to “writing” here, simply because in higher education students are most often assessed on the basis of written assignments. However, the term “citation” also refers to drawing on texts or existing knowledge in verbal communication.
of the higher education context in which this research was conducted. I then outline the structure of the thesis.

The research setting

This research was conducted at the University of Otago, a research-intensive university in the South Island of New Zealand. Higher education has expanded rapidly in New Zealand over the last three decades. As has been noted in other parts of the world, New Zealand universities were originally purportedly built on the fundamental precept of “generating and disseminating reliable and authentic knowledge” (Liyanage & Andrade, 2012, p. 202). In the 1980s, however, neoliberal economic reforms led to widening participation in New Zealand higher education, and in 1989 the New Zealand Education Act stated the right of all domestic students to enrol at university provided they achieved to a prescribed standard in high school or were aged 20 or older (Healey & Gunby, 2012). This access policy was backed by the provision of government loans for all students studying at university.

Government funding to New Zealand universities gradually decreased in the 1990s, which resulted in a steady rise in students’ tuition fees (Roberts, 1999). Consequently, universities became more commercialised and market driven as they were forced to compete for students and for funding (Harland, Tidswell, Everett, Hale, & Pickering, 2010; Liyanage & Andrade, 2012; Roberts, 1999). Adding to this commercialisation, in 2003, government funding to New Zealand
universities changed from being based solely on student enrolments to being dependent on enrolments and research productivity (Harland et al., 2010). New Zealand has high rates of participation in tertiary education\(^2\) (Ministry of Education, 2010), and has one of the highest rates of participation at university in the world (Healey & Gunby, 2012; Liyanage & Andrade, 2012). In New Zealand, education policy focuses on broadening participation for Māori\(^3\) and Pasifika\(^4\), and other underrepresented groups, as well as school leavers (Ministry of Education, 2010). In addition, market forces and commercialisation have led to greater numbers of high fee-paying international students (Liyanage & Andrade, 2012). Student bodies are therefore more heterogeneous than they were prior to the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s (Liyanage & Andrade, 2012). As a consequence of commercialisation and broadening participation, the purpose of universities has begun to be increasingly questioned (Harland et al., 2010; Liyanage & Andrade, 2012; Roberts, 1999).

Following the increase in enrolments at New Zealand universities resulting from the reforms in the 1980s, in the late 2000s the government introduced a funding ceiling (Healey & Gunby, 2012), and government funding to universities was based on predicted enrolments. In order to remain economically sustainable, universities therefore had to accurately forecast enrolments. Consequently, in 2012, following a national trend, the University of Otago

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\(^2\) Tertiary education in New Zealand includes all post-secondary education providers such as institutes of technology, polytechnics, wānangas (tertiary education institutions that operate within a Māori tradition), and universities.

\(^3\) Māori are the indigenous people of New Zealand (Baker, 1945).

\(^4\) Pasifika is a collective term used to refer to people who identify as ethnically originating from the islands of the Pacific (Nakhid, 2006).
introduced an enrolment cap. This meant that students who may previously have had open access to study were required to apply for entry to the University (Liyanage & Andrade, 2012). Most of the student participants in the current research entered the University as this change took effect.

In 2012 when this research commenced, the University of Otago had an enrolment of over 21,000 students from both New Zealand and overseas (University of Otago, 2012). As mentioned above, the University actively markets to overseas students, and in 2012 approximately 12% of the student body were classified as international students (students who are not New Zealand residents) (University of Otago, 2012). Academic and research-only staff totalled 1,576 (full time equivalent) in 2012, alongside 2,100 general (non-academic) staff (University of Otago, 2012). The University of Otago consists of a main campus with four satellite campuses dotted around New Zealand, from Invercargill at the southern end of the country, to Auckland in the north. The participants for this research were all drawn from, and the research conducted on, the University’s main campus, which is situated in Dunedin in the South Island of New Zealand. On its Dunedin campus, the University offers degree courses in a diverse range of disciplines from Humanities, Sciences, Commerce, and Health Sciences. The structure for most undergraduate degrees at the University of Otago is modular, and students often have autonomy in how they structure their own degree (Harland, McLean, Wass, Miller, & Sim, 2014). Alongside their major subject,

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5 There are some exceptions to the modular degree structure. For example, the Health Science and Bachelor of Teaching degrees usually follow a set programme.
students can choose to study subjects from the range of disciplines offered at the University.

The University provides a number of free support services to students, including a gymnasium and other recreation services, a health centre, a career development centre, a disability support centre, and, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, a student learning centre (University of Otago, 2012). The Student Learning Centre provides academic support for students in the form of generic skills workshops, peer assisted study sessions, and one-to-one consultations with a learning advisor. In addition, on request, staff from the Student Learning Centre will consult with academic staff across the University regarding how they can best support students within the curriculum.

The University’s Teaching and Learning Plan (University of Otago, 2013, p. 2) states that graduates “will possess a deep, coherent and extensive knowledge of at least one discipline, coupled with knowledge of the fundamental contribution of research to this discipline.” On graduating, students are also expected to have developed the following attributes: a global perspective, an interdisciplinary perspective, the ability to engage in lifelong learning, a commitment to scholarship, the ability to communicate effectively, the ability to think critically, cultural understanding, knowledge of and ability to apply ethical standards, environmental literacy, information literacy, research skills, self motivation, and the ability to work in a team (University of Otago, 2013).
Overview of the thesis

The remainder of this thesis is organised as follows. In the following chapter I review the literature on plagiarism in higher education. I identify three dominant ways in which plagiarism is framed in the academic literature; namely, plagiarism as a moral issue, plagiarism as a policy issue, and plagiarism as a writing issue. I explore what the literature tells us about plagiarism in higher education from each of these perspectives, with an emphasis on how students are positioned within each viewpoint.

In Chapter Three I discuss the theoretical framework for this research. Specifically, I explain how social constructionism, poststructuralist notions of discourse and subjectivity, and academic literacies theory have informed how I carried out this study.

Chapter Four provides an overview of the research methodology. First, I outline the research design. I then describe my approach to qualitative research. Next, I introduce the student participants, and detail the way in which I approached the qualitative interview process and used a discursive analytic approach to analyse the interview data. I then explain some ethical considerations that were necessary in undertaking this project.

In Chapters Five to Seven I present the findings of this study. In Chapter Five I give a broad overview of the interviews and provide a general account of
the students’ understandings of plagiarism. I discuss how the students broadly defined plagiarism, and how prevalent they think plagiarism is at the University of Otago. I then explore the students’ views on who they think might plagiarise, and why students might plagiarise. I briefly discuss what the students shared about unintentional plagiarism, the links between plagiarism, knowledge, and learning, and their conversations about plagiarism policy.

In Chapter Six I discuss the discourses that the students drew on in our interview conversations about plagiarism. I also examine the discourses in the University of Otago plagiarism policy, and I explore how these discourses link with those that were present in the students’ accounts. I focus on four main discourses present in the students’ interviews: ethico-legal discourses, fairness discourses, confusion discourses, and learning discourses.

The focus of Chapter Seven is the discourses the students drew on when considering learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education. I detail how these discourses connect with the discourses that the students drew on in their conversations about plagiarism (as discussed in Chapter Six). I identify three dominant discourses the students drew on in their discussions about learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education: market discourses, employment discourses, and learning discourses. I explain how the students positioned themselves within each of these discourses and relate these positionings to the students’ expressed views on plagiarism.
Finally, in Chapter Eight, I reiterate the study’s key findings and consider some of the limitations of this study. I discuss some of the implications of my findings for plagiarism policy and practices in higher education. In light of my findings, I suggest a way of re-framing plagiarism in order to encourage student learning and better align plagiarism policy and practice. I conclude this thesis with recommendations for future research.

Each chapter of this thesis begins with a title page that I have watermarked with a page of my own writing in process, sometimes in note form, sometimes annotated with my own editing, and sometimes annotated by others’ editing suggestions. Throughout the thesis I challenge the idea of viewing students’ writing as a finished product. By including my in-progress writing as watermarks on each chapter title page I draw attention to the idea of writing as a process, and as a messy, non-linear business. The watermarks also highlight that I did not write this thesis in complete isolation. In addition to drawing on numerous academic texts, I received feedback and guidance from many wise people, not least my supervisors, yet this is not immediately obvious in the finished thesis. It is, however, evident in the title pages to each chapter.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced this research into university students’ understandings of plagiarism. I explained how this research project came about, described the background context, and provided an explanation of why this research is
important. Next, I provided an explanation of some of the key terms in the thesis. I followed this with an outline of the research setting, including an explanation of the broader New Zealand higher education climate. Finally, I provided an outline of how the thesis is organised. I turn now to a consideration of the existing literature on plagiarism in higher education.
2. Plagiarism something to be regulated. Much of this literature focuses on plagiarism policies and regulations. This theme recognises that plagiarism can be either intentional or unintentional and the student's intent determines the response. The literature in this theme continues to focus on prevalence, identifying who plagiarises, and surveillance. However, in discussing responses to plagiarism, an educative response to unintentional plagiarism is considered alongside punishment for intentional plagiarism.

3. Plagiarism as part of learning to write from source texts. This literature recognises plagiarism as plagiaries or multiple and complex practices requiring multiple responses. The literature continues to focus on who plagiarises and why, however, it focuses on a range of educative responses to unintentional plagiarism that are usually confused with deliberate plagiarism.

Chapter Two

Tracing the plagiarism literature: From panic to panacea

In addition to these three main strands of research informing these perspectives, there are three main strands of research informing these perspectives. The first strand of literature is what I term the "broad higher education" literature. This literature, predominantly from the UK and Australasia, focuses on plagiarism as a 'problem' in higher education that needs to be addressed. Much of the broader higher education literature focuses on plagiarism as morally wrong, or as a procedural issue, situating plagiarism as a problem that can be fixed as long as students follow the rules. More recently, the broad higher education literature shows a distinct shift from framing plagiarism as a moral issue towards exploring plagiarism as multiple practices. As such, all three framings or understandings of plagiarism are evident in the broad higher education literature. A second strand of literature dealing with the topic of plagiarism is the literature focusing on 'academic integrity'. The academic integrity literature positions plagiarism as part of the broader issues of integrity...
Introduction

As outlined in Chapter One, my research explores university students’ understandings of plagiarism policy and practice. In order to set the scene for this study, in this chapter I present an overview of the extensive literature on plagiarism in higher education. My specific focus in this literature review is the ways in which plagiarism has been understood or presented by theorists and researchers. The understandings of plagiarism presented in the literature are often taken-for-granted by theorists, researchers, and teachers in higher education, and have consequently become realities that inform policy and practice.

There is a large and growing volume of academic literature on plagiarism, indicating that plagiarism is a topic of great concern in higher education. In most areas of research, logical progressions or trends within the literature can be traced chronologically. This is not the case with the plagiarism literature. Within plagiarism research, different themes reflecting different trends have existed alongside each other for the last few decades. One explanation for this may be that the plagiarism literature comes from a number of different disciplines or areas, including policy, psychology/behaviour sciences, writing centres, practice (including Composition Studies in the United States of America, and English for Academic Purposes in the United Kingdom and Australasia), research on students from a non-English-speaking background (NESB), and linguistics. However, there are some obvious trends regarding which disciplines this literature has
emerged from, how plagiarism is framed within each of these disciplines, and which of these disciplinary focuses has dominated at various times.

There are three main framings of plagiarism in the literature:

1. *Plagiarism as a moral issue.* This literature focuses on plagiarism as a deliberate and dishonest behaviour, and explores prevalence, who plagiarises, surveillance, and punishment.

2. *Plagiarism as a policy issue.* Much of this literature focuses on plagiarism policies and regulations, and positions plagiarism as something to be regulated. This literature suggests that plagiarism can be either intentional or unintentional and the student’s intent should determine the response. This literature continues to focus on prevalence, the question of who plagiarises, and surveillance. However, in discussing responses to plagiarism, an educative response to unintentional plagiarism is considered alongside punishment for intentional plagiarism.

3. *Plagiarism as a writing issue.* This literature recognises plagiarism as ‘plagiaries’ or multiple and complex practices requiring multiple responses. The literature continues to explore who plagiarises and why, however, the focus is on recognising and responding to unintentional plagiarism as a normal part of students’ development as academic writers. Intentional plagiarism is most often cast as cheating and is not usually addressed in this literature.

In addition to the three main understandings of plagiarism evident in the literature, there are three main strands of research informing these perspectives.
The first strand of literature is what I term the broader higher education literature. This literature, predominantly from the United Kingdom (U.K.) and Australasia, focuses on teaching and learning in higher education and frames plagiarism as a ‘problem’ that needs to be addressed. Much of the broader higher education literature focuses on plagiarism as morally wrong, or as a procedural issue, situating plagiarism as a problem that can be fixed as long as students follow the rules or learn particular skills. More recently, the broader higher education literature shows a distinct shift from framing plagiarism as a moral issue towards exploring plagiarism as multiple practices. As such, all three framings or understandings of plagiarism are evident in the broader higher education literature.

A second strand of literature dealing with the topic of plagiarism is the literature focusing on academic integrity. The academic integrity literature positions plagiarism as part of a broader concern with integrity and institutional policy. This literature focuses on students’ values and institutional procedures. Although the focus is on a regulatory understanding of plagiarism, the academic integrity literature draws on a moral view as it most often considers plagiarism alongside other cheating behaviours. However, more recently, academic integrity literature has begun to acknowledge that some plagiarism is distinct from cheating; rather, it is part of learning to write in academia.

A final strand of literature is rooted in the discipline of ‘Composition Studies’ in the United States of America (U.S.A.), ‘English for Academic Purposes’ in the U.K. and Australasia, research into the writing practices of NESB
students, and literature emerging from writing or learning centres. This strand of the literature situates plagiarism prevention as part of the educative process of teaching academic writing to students in their first year of higher education. Although the main focus of this literature is students’ writing, in some cases it continues to reveal traces of a moral or regulatory view of plagiarism.

The three ways of framing plagiarism in the literature, and their relationship to each other, are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 illustrates that plagiarism is framed in the academic literature on a spectrum from intentional plagiarism (where plagiarism is presented as a moral issue), through to unintentional plagiarism (where plagiarism is presented as a writing issue). The literature framing plagiarism as a policy issue sits between the two extremes. The academic integrity literature deals predominantly with intentional plagiarism, and the writing literature deals predominantly with unintentional plagiarism. However, there is some crossover. The higher education literature encompasses research on all three of these framings of plagiarism. While
there is no clear-cut progression of ideas in the literature on plagiarism, generally speaking, over the last few decades research on plagiarism has moved from being dominated by a pre-1990s view of plagiarism as ‘dishonesty’, and therefore a moral issue, towards a view of plagiarism as ‘plagiaries’ where plagiarism is framed as multiple factors linked to notions of authorship and students as developing academic writers.

My initial search for literature focused on uncovering research into students’ understandings of plagiarism. Finding only a handful of studies in this area, I broadened my search to include any literature on plagiarism in higher education from Australasia, where the current research was undertaken. As I read the literature and became aware of the different perspectives explained above, I began to include plagiarism research from the U.K. and the U.S.A., enabling me to further explore each perspective. In my review of the academic literature, I draw on this range of research to present an overview of the three dominant ways in which plagiarism is framed: plagiarism as a moral issue, plagiarism as a policy issue, and plagiarism as a writing issue. I explain the particular representation or understanding of plagiarism that each of these framings represents, and examine the key issues that researchers discuss within each theme. My aim is to explore what the literature can tell us about plagiarism in higher education, with a focus on the aspects of plagiarism that are highlighted by particular framings.
Moralising plagiarism

Historically, plagiarism has been framed in predominantly moral or ethical terms (Mallon, 2001; Sutherland-Smith, 2005) and up until the end of the twentieth century, a moral view of plagiarism dominated the plagiarism literature. Examples of such literature include work by Kolich (1983), Thomas (2004), and Larkham and Manns (2002). A moral perspective is identifiable by language that links plagiarism to the law (theft, transgression, copyright) or to a lack of morals (dishonest, unethical behaviour). A moral framing reveals an understanding of plagiarism as a purely intentional act that is dishonest, bad, or wrong, and suggests that plagiarism is a result of the poor morals of the plagiariser. A moral view reflects an assumption that a clear and shared definition of plagiarism exists; therefore from a moral perspective, identifying plagiarism is unproblematic (Kapossi & Dell, 2012). Research that frames plagiarism mainly as a moral issue focuses on reporting the prevalence of plagiarism, reporting who plagiarises, and exploring detection methods and disciplinary measures for plagiarism. Because a moral framing situates plagiarism as purely intentional, responses to plagiarism are limited to punishment. A moral view positions students as solely responsible for making the ethical decision to not plagiarise. Over the last two decades the dominant moral perspective of plagiarism evident in the literature has faded as research has begun to focus more on unintentional plagiarism. Despite this change of focus, a moral view continues to underlie some of the research exploring educative responses to plagiarism.
A moral framing of plagiarism is also often evident in the language used to report on plagiarism in public (especially media) discourse. Plagiarism is often framed in emotive language that uses “vivid, evocative metaphors” (Kaposi & Dell, 2012, p. 816). For example, students’ plagiarism has been labelled a “scourge” (Hutchings, 2014, p. 312), and “a moral maze” (Park, 2004, p. 293), that leads to expulsion, or “the academic death penalty” (Howard, 1995, p. 788). The media in particular have traditionally drawn on emotive language in accounts of plagiarism in schools and universities, reflecting an attitude of moral panic (Bertram Gallant, 2008; Clegg & Flint, 2006) in their portrayal of plagiarism as cheating and unacceptable dishonesty. This is clearly displayed in titles of newspaper and magazine reports, for example, Germany’s Plague of Plagiarism (Anson, 2008); Chinese Cheats Rort NZ Universities With Fakes (Awdry & Sarre, 2013); and Copycats? Blame The Teachers (Alam, 2004). Titles in the academic literature also draw on moral discourses, for example, Plagiarism: The worm of reason (Kolich, 1983); Plagiarism – An act of stealing (Vogelsang, 1997); and The thieves of academe: Plagiarism in the university system (Hawley, 1984). Such language situates plagiarism as wrong and immoral, and aligns plagiarism with theft and fraud, evoking a negative and judgemental emotional response in the reader.

Prevalence and predictors of plagiarism

Within the literature displaying a moral view of plagiarism, there is an emphasis on determining how many students are plagiarising, who these students are, and why they are plagiarising. Plagiarism is reported as increasing in prevalence in higher education institutions (e.g., Brimble & Stevenson-Clarke, 2005; Larkham &
Manns, 2002; Macdonald & Carroll, 2006). However, the literature disagrees about the actual prevalence of plagiarism in higher education. One study in the U.K. reported that more than 60% of undergraduate students admitted to some kind of cheating behaviour, including plagiarising and copying work from another student (Franklyn-Stokes & Newstead, 1995). Another study reported research identifying widely varying rates of plagiarism, from 2% of students in one study, to 20% in another (Johnson & Clerehan, 2005). Other studies have reported frequencies of plagiarism from 3% to 55% (Badge & Scott, 2009), or claimed that between 63% and 78% of students admit to having cheated or plagiarised (Park, 2003). Surveys asking students and academic staff about their knowledge of the prevalence of plagiarism agree that staff underestimate the incidence of plagiarism and academic misconduct in general, whereas students seem to have a more accurate view of its prevalence (e.g., Ashworth, Bannister, & Thorne, 1997; Brimble & Stevenson-Clarke, 2005; Perry, 2010).

At surface value, collecting data on reported cases of plagiarism may seem a reasonably conclusive way to determine prevalence; however, there are a number of factors that limit the accuracy of any such data. Firstly, whether or not behaviour is considered plagiarism is reliant on one’s definition of plagiarism and understanding of what behaviours this definition covers. Because definitions and understandings of plagiarism differ between researchers, and between respondents in the research, each research project may be reporting on a slightly different set of behaviours or differing understandings of what these behaviours entail. I explore the concept of differing definitions of plagiarism in more depth later in this chapter. Furthermore, data for these projects is dependent on human
reporting – either staff reports of plagiarism they have detected, or students’ reports of their own plagiarism (or both) (e.g., Clegg & Flint, 2006; Kaposi & Dell, 2012; Park, 2003); however, staff and students can only report on plagiarism they are aware of. It is likely that some incidences of plagiarism go unnoticed by staff, and are therefore not reported. In addition, students reporting on their own behaviour are only likely to report deliberate plagiarism, as unintentional plagiarism is presumably also unknowing plagiarism. This is illustrated by Roig’s (1997) research, which reports that most of the students in his study were at risk of plagiarising inadvertently, however only 36% of them admitted to having plagiarised in their written assignments. A final difficulty with collecting self-reporting data from students is that they are being asked to be honest about their dishonest practices, and some students may not give an honest response in these circumstances (Löfström & Kupila, 2012). Despite these limitations, gathering students’ self-report data regarding plagiarism is commonly viewed as a legitimate method of determining the prevalence of plagiarism (Bin-Habtoor & Zaher, 2012; Selwyn, 2008).

The reported increase in students’ plagiarism has been attributed to a number of different factors. One explanation suggested is the perceived decline in students’ academic abilities, as open entry policies over the last two decades have led to a more diverse range of students entering universities (e.g., Berger, 2004; Bertram Gallant, 2008; Dawson & Overfield, 2006). The development of the Internet and its use as a resource for learning and research is believed to be another factor contributing to increased plagiarism (e.g., Park, 2003; Scanlon & Neuman, 2002; Selwyn, 2008). The development of the Internet enables students
to readily access a vast amount of information (Dawson & Overfield, 2006; Sutherland-Smith, 2008) that they can easily cut and paste into an assignment, or alternatively, students can download existing assignments (Chandrasoma, Thompson, & Pennycook, 2004; Scanlon & Neuman, 2002; Sterngold, 2004). Because students are accustomed to downloading music and information free of charge from the Internet, they have possibly come to believe that Internet-sourced resources that do not require payment also do not require attribution (Blum, 2009; Park, 2004; Sutherland-Smith, 2008). Other students might pay an online ‘paper-mill’ to provide a custom written assignment.6 The widespread use of social media is also blamed for the increase in plagiarism, as attribution of sources is not common practice on such sites (Blum, 2009). Another explanation for the increase in plagiarism could be the move away from assessing students predominantly by examination, towards more widespread coursework assessment of written assignments (Dawson & Overfield, 2006).

Another commonly posited explanation for the increase in plagiarism is the perception that students view universities as credentialing institutions rather than educational institutions (e.g., Blum, 2009; McCabe & Trevino, 1996; Zebroski, 1999). Consequently, some students may feel justified in doing ‘whatever it takes’ to pass their courses or achieve distinction. Cheating and plagiarism may therefore become a strategy towards success (Badge & Scott, 2009; Brimble & Stevenson-Clarke, 2005). The moral panic surrounding plagiarism may itself have led to an increase in the amount of reported cheating. An increase in

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research into plagiarism over the last few decades may have increased staff awareness of plagiarism and their use of plagiarism detection methods, thus leading to more incidences of plagiarism being detected (Zwagerman, 2008) or recorded (Clegg & Flint, 2006). Furthermore, it is only relatively recently that researchers have begun to gather data on the prevalence of plagiarism, so there is little, if any, historical data available with which to compare (Clegg & Flint, 2006). It is, therefore, difficult to ascertain if plagiarism has actually increased in prevalence, despite the dominant belief that it has.

Literature presenting a moral perspective often focuses on determining who plagiarises. Groups at a higher risk include: undergraduate students (e.g., Franklyn-Stokes & Newstead, 1995; Johnson & Clerehan, 2005; Perry, 2010; Power, 2009); students who achieve, or perceive they achieve, below average (e.g., Badge & Scott, 2009; Culwin, 2006; Franklyn-Stokes & Newstead, 1995); and NESB students (e.g., Chatterjee, 2007; Leask, 2006; Marshall & Garry, 2005). Asian international students in particular are often viewed as more likely to plagiarise due to their supposed lack of critical thinking skills and perceived reliance on rote learning approaches (Leask, 2006).

Undergraduate students are considered more likely to plagiarise because of their lack of academic skills (Bond et al., 2013; Johnson & Clerehan, 2005), and lack of knowledge around the reasons why plagiarism is considered a serious offence (Franklyn-Stokes & Newstead, 1995). Postgraduate students are perceived as less likely to plagiarise due to their maturity, increased motivation, and higher level of engagement with study (Johnson & Clerehan, 2005). Researchers have
also suggested that students are less likely to plagiarise as they move closer to graduation (Franklyn-Stokes & Newstead, 1995; Johnson & Clerihan, 2005). Possible reasons for this are that students have a higher investment in their education the closer they are to graduation, that they have learned what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it, and that their thinking has become more academic and aligned with the discipline within which they are studying (Johnson & Clerihan, 2005). This view is congruent with research indicating that more able students are less likely to plagiarise due to their greater awareness of the conventions of academic writing and their competence in the skills necessary to avoid plagiarism (Franklyn-Stokes & Newstead, 1995). Deliberate plagiarism is most often reported to be the consequence of several different risk factors. One of these is pressure, for example difficult assignments and perceived lack of time (e.g., Brimble & Stevenson-Clarke, 2005; Devlin & Gray, 2007; Youmans, 2011).

The belief that plagiarisers will not get caught also seems to be a factor in students’ decisions to plagiarise (e.g., Brimble & Stevenson-Clarke, 2005; Youmans, 2011). Additionally, students appear to plagiarise from a desire to attain high grades (e.g., Badge & Scott, 2009; Zwagerman, 2008) when, instead of studying hard, they cheat. Zwagerman (2008) suggests that students may believe that they have to choose between morality and grades.

Some research suggests that many students do not see themselves as ‘scholars’ but, instead, see themselves as training for a particular occupation (Zebroski, 1999). It is possible that students may deliberately cheat or plagiarise because they do not see the importance of adhering to scholarly conventions, including conventions around academic writing (Blum, 2009; McCabe & Trevino,
1996). Another reason why students plagiarise may be a perception that they need to present original ideas in their assignments but feel unable to do so (Briggs, 2003).

The reasons that staff give for students’ plagiarism, and students’ explanations, often differ (Foltynek, Rybicka, & Demoliou, 2014). A possible explanation for this is that students may be attempting to mislead staff about the reasons why they plagiarise, indicating a reluctance to reveal their reasons for plagiarising (Brimble & Stevenson-Clarke, 2005). What researchers do not explore, however, is that students simply may not recognise their actions as plagiarism or dishonesty, and therefore they might struggle to explain why they plagiarised. Furthermore, some students report that the concept of plagiarism is not important to them (Power, 2009) and their focus is on values such as friendship and learning, which might override their adherence to academic values (Ashworth et al., 1997). From a moral framing, explanations for students’ plagiarism position students as lacking in morals. It is consequently the responsibility of students to ensure that they make ethical choices and behave honestly to avoid plagiarising, thus leaving students who plagiarise unintentionally at a loss to explain their actions.

**Plagiarism as cheating**

Research presenting a moral view of plagiarism also positions it in terms of dishonesty (e.g., Fielden & Joyce, 2008; Gullifer & Tyson, 2010; Pittam, Elander, Lusher, Fox, & Payne, 2009), or misconduct (Perry, 2010; Youmans, 2011), and
descriptions of plagiarism that illustrate this view include “the act of using another's work without appropriate acknowledgment” (Devlin & Gray, 2007, p. 182), “written cheating” (McCabe, 2003, cited in Johnson & Clerehan, 2005, p. 38), and “the theft of words or ideas beyond what would normally be regarded as general knowledge” (Park, 2003, p. 472). A moral framing is evident in descriptions of plagiarism using legal terms such as ‘kleptomania’ (Lieberman, 1995), ‘breaches of copyright’ (Sutherland-Smith, 2005; Warn, 2006), and ‘forgery’ and ‘fakery’ (Groom, 2000). Some researchers draw on medical language and explain plagiarism as a form of malpractice (Park, 2003); others draw on the language of sexuality and rape (Howard, 2000), or deviance (Howard, 2000; Park, 2003; Selwyn, 2008).

Viewing plagiarism from a moral perspective categorises it as dishonesty, thereby grouping plagiarism with a broad range of academic cheating behaviours, including taking illicit material into an exam, copying from another student in an exam, listing false references or references that have not been accessed in an assignment, and requesting special consideration on the basis of fabricated personal circumstances (Brimble & Stevenson-Clarke, 2005; Devlin & Gray, 2007; Park, 2003; Perry, 2010). Often the words ‘cheating’ and ‘plagiarism’ are used interchangeably (e.g., Zwagerman, 2008), and the word ‘cheating’ is used to include behaviours that are commonly perceived as plagiarism, but could be either intentional or unintentional (e.g., Brimble & Stevenson-Clarke, 2005). Like plagiarism, ‘cheating’ is a nuanced term that is open to interpretation (East, 2010b); however, cheating is invariably perceived to be a deliberate and dishonest act. Therefore using the word ‘cheating’ in relation to plagiarism implies that
plagiarism is also necessarily deliberate and dishonest. Situating plagiarism as purely dishonest removes responsibility for pedagogical intervention (Howard, 1995; Kaposi & Dell, 2012; Zwagerman, 2008), places the responsibility for avoiding plagiarism on students, and reflects a belief that all students have the skills, knowledge and morality to avoid plagiarising (Briggs, 2003). From a moral perspective, we can only see the outcome (the plagiarism) as wrong (Briggs, 2003; Valentine, 2006), and the response as punishment (Valentine, 2006).

Detecting and punishing plagiarism

Framing plagiarism as morally wrong indicates that plagiarism has a negative effect. Literature focusing on the effects of students’ plagiarism emphasises the negative consequences to the university or to staff, rather than the consequence to individual students. Plagiarism is often seen as “damaging in terms of the public perception of the standards of academic excellence” (Sutherland-Smith, 2008, p. 59). This view is exacerbated by media reports that plagiarism is an indication of decreasing academic standards (Sutherland-Smith, 2008). Consequently, universities “are reluctant to highlight the existence of scholarly indiscretions within their institutions” for fear of it impacting on their reputation (Devlin, 2006, p. 45; also see Foltyn et al., 2014). Alongside this issue of damage to institutional reputations, staff report that dealing with students’ plagiarism causes them anxiety and takes up valuable teaching time (Sutherland-Smith, 2005; Zwagerman, 2008). In addition, staff often view students’ plagiarism as a personal betrayal (Zwagerman, 2008), perhaps resulting in a desire to detect and punish plagiarisers.
The technology that has led to the development of the Internet has also enabled the more efficient detection of plagiarism through the development of text matching software (TMS) (Marshall & Garry, 2005; McKeever, 2006; Purdy, 2005). TMS has come to be commonly labelled ‘plagiarism detection’ software (e.g., McKeever, 2006; Mulcahy & Goodacre, 2004; Purdy, 2009), despite the fact that it does not detect plagiarism; rather, it identifies text that matches text in another electronic source (Bond et al., 2013; Koshy, 2008; Walker, 2010). TMS has three main functions: identifying matching text; plagiarism deterrence; and education about avoiding plagiarism (Bond et al., 2013; Green, Lindemann, Marshall, & Wilkinson, 2005). However, the software is most commonly used for detection and deterrence (Bond et al., 2013; Crisp, 2007; Ledwith & Risquez, 2008; Löfström & Kupila, 2012; McCarthy & Rogerson, 2009; McKeever, 2006).

The literature is divided regarding whether TMS is an effective means of deterring or detecting plagiarism. Some studies report on the effectiveness of TMS (e.g., Marshall & Garry, 2005), whereas others label it as unreliable (e.g., Chaudhuri, 2008; Purdy, 2005), or as unnecessary surveillance (Zwagerman, 2008). Research suggests that TMS is an effective means of deterring students from plagiarising (Badge, Cann, & Scott, 2007; Martin, 2005). However, the use of TMS as a deterrent has been criticised as a threat (Chaudhuri, 2008; Sutherland-Smith, 2008), or a “lie-detector test” (Zwagerman, 2008, p. 690), promoting obedience over academic integrity.

Viewing plagiarism from a moralist perspective emphasises that plagiarism is a dishonest act, usually intentional, and is the responsibility of the student to
avoid. Notably, literature framing plagiarism from a moral perspective ignores the effect of plagiarism on the student who is accused. Unsurprisingly, students report fear of plagiarising unintentionally and being subject to the same sanctions as deliberate plagiarisers (e.g., Ashworth et al., 1997; Gullifer & Tyson, 2010). The concept of unintentional plagiarism is not conceivable when a moral view frames understandings of plagiarism. Because it does not allow consideration of ‘honest’ plagiarism, a moral perspective inhibits responding to plagiarism in an educative manner (Briggs, 2003; Valentine, 2006; Zwagerman, 2008). A second theme in the literature, plagiarism as a problem to be regulated, does recognise ‘honest’ or unintentional plagiarism alongside ‘dishonest’ intentional plagiarism. I explore this literature next.

Regulating plagiarism

A move away from a predominantly moral response to plagiarism is signalled by the emergence of a body of research investigating the idea that plagiarism can happen without intent to deceive (e.g., Park, 2004; Zwagerman, 2008). This literature focuses on policies to regulate plagiarism, alongside an emphasis on ensuring that students learn correct referencing skills. From a regulatory perspective, there is an emphasis on providing a definition of plagiarism that can be adhered to (e.g., Carroll, 2002; Howard, 1993), developing policy to regulate and respond to plagiarism (Grigg, 2010), and ensuring that students have access to information on the rules of citation and referencing. These rules and regulations are perceived to be the panacea for the plagiarism problem. The literature
focusing on regulating plagiarism is characterised by the language of rules, policies, and academic tradition. Plagiarism is positioned as a clear breach of institutional rules. The rules are assumed to be both homogenous and universal, and students are assumed to be able to easily learn and apply them (Kaposi & Dell, 2012). A regulatory framing of plagiarism allows for the possibility of unintentional transgressions of rules and regulations, particularly with regard to referencing. However, from a regulatory perspective, the rules have still been broken, indicating traces of a moral framing of plagiarism. Consequently, the response to plagiarism, whether punitive or educative, is still positioned as punishment (Kaposi & Dell, 2012). The perceived seriousness of, and therefore the severity of the response to, an incident of plagiarism is dependent on determining whether or not the student intended to plagiarise.

**Defining plagiarism**

As mentioned above, within the literature focusing on regulating plagiarism, there is an increased emphasis on defining plagiarism (e.g., Howard, 1995; Larkham & Manns, 2002). Traditionally the literature has presented plagiarism as a definable term, assuming that all those who use it do so within a common understanding of what plagiarism is. However, this is not the case, and a multitude of definitions and interpretations of plagiarism exist. Most higher education institutions provide a definition that explains how plagiarism is intended to be interpreted within the particular institution, and definitions differ widely between institutions (Borg, 2009; Grigg, 2010). In her doctoral thesis, Pecorari (2002, cited in Sutherland-Smith, 2008) studied a range of definitions provided in plagiarism policies in the
U.K., the U.S.A., and Australia. She identified a formula common to most institutional plagiarism definitions. Plagiarism is commonly defined as:

\[(\text{an object}) + (\text{which has been taken}) + (\text{from a particular source}) + (\text{by an agent}) + (\text{without acknowledgment})\]

(cited in Sutherland-Smith, 2008, pp. 70-71).

Similarly, in an examination of Australian policies on plagiarism, Grigg (2010), using Pecorari’s framework, identified a similar pattern. Pecorari and Grigg both acknowledged that the ‘object’ that has been taken can be either words or ideas (also see Stearns, 1999), but it is more difficult to determine plagiarism of ideas (Randall, 2001). Grigg (2010) also noted that policy definitions of plagiarism in most Australian universities addressed the notion of intent, although usually through implication rather than explicit mention.

Despite differences in institutional definitions of plagiarism, researchers agree that institutions need to provide a definition in order to support policy in both making a stand against deliberate cheating behaviours, and outlining the consequences of, and responses to, plagiarising (e.g., Grigg, 2010; Gullifer & Tyson, 2010). However, despite institutional definitions, not everyone affiliated with a particular institution shares the same understanding of plagiarism. Definitions of plagiarism also vary between departments or disciplines within institutions, and between staff working within the same discipline (e.g., Borg, 2009; Flint et al., 2006; Gourlay & Deane, 2012; Perry, 2010; Wilkinson, 2009).

Research indicates that students’ definitions of plagiarism are usually different from those of staff (e.g., Foltynek et al., 2014; Park, 2003; Radunovich et
A consequence of these differing definitions is a general confusion about what plagiarism is and what particular behaviours it defines (e.g., Baynham, 2000; Marshall & Garry, 2005; Perry, 2010; Yeo, 2007). This confusion is highlighted when the concept of common knowledge is considered. It is generally accepted that common knowledge does not need to be referenced or acknowledged in academic texts; however, what constitutes common knowledge is discipline-specific and, therefore, open to interpretation (East, 2010a; Park, 2003). Students are often able to define plagiarism; however, many have difficulty applying their definition or identifying plagiarism in their own or others written work (e.g., Dawson & Overfield, 2006; Power, 2009). In particular, many students appear to have difficulty determining the boundaries between group work and individual work (Ashworth et al., 1997; Dawson & Overfield, 2006).

Some researchers (e.g., Sutton, Taylor, & Johnston, 2012) have acknowledged the confusion resulting from the lack of a clear and globally acknowledged definition of plagiarism. These researchers highlight how the concept of plagiarism is open to interpretation (e.g., Bond et al., 2013; Sutherland-Smith, 2008; Sutton et al., 2012), “obfuscates more than it clarifies” (Chandrasoma et al., 2004, p. 172), or is “inherently indefinable” (Howard, 2000, p. 473). Such a view acknowledges that plagiarism is a cultural construct rather than a tangible object, and “all definitions of plagiarism will therefore always be contested” (Howard, 1999, p. 18). Researchers often fail to make explicit their own interpretation of the word plagiarism, thus leading to confusion about what the research is actually about. Without explanation it is unclear if the word...
‘plagiarism’ is being used to refer to behaviours with deliberate intent to deceive regarding authorship, or to unintentional behaviours such as insufficient referencing. Many authors use the term to mean either intentional or unintentional behaviours, and others use it to mean both. Some researchers are deliberately vague. For example, Clegg and Flint (2006, p. 375) acknowledge the multiple possible constructions of plagiarism by referring to “the multiple practices that can be thought to constitute plagiarism.” Often, readers must determine the intentionality of the behaviour(s) based on their personal understanding of plagiarism. For example, Fountain and Fitzgerald (2008) write about plagiarism in terms of students’ difficulties learning citation, authorship and textual practices, then switch to discussing plagiarism as academic integrity, where the underlying assumption seems to be that plagiarism is dishonest and the student has chosen to plagiarise. Similarly, Awdry and Sarre (2013) do not explain their use of the word plagiarism. We infer that they mean unintentional behaviours, but the authors’ understanding of plagiarism remains unclear.

Writing about the myriad of interpretations of what is or is not plagiarism, and the impossibility of a consensual definition of plagiarism, Howard (1999, p. 20) points out that:

It is indeed an irony that a concept so apparently fundamental to the teaching of composition, a concept about which teachers become so animated and for which students have been reprimanded and even ejected from the academy, should remain an undefined, and perhaps even undefinable term.

As a consequence of the lack of clarity surrounding the concept of plagiarism, it is probable that within their academic studies students are being exposed to several
different, perhaps conflicting, definitions of plagiarism. This is a likely cause for confusion.

*Plagiarism policies and the role of ‘intent’*

There is a distinct volume of literature exploring university plagiarism policies (e.g., Bretag et al, 2011; Culwin & Lancaster, 2001; Grigg, 2010; Howard, 1995; Sutherland-Smith, 2010). This literature explores issues such as who should be held responsible for avoiding plagiarism, and how policies can be framed to ensure they are both clear and fair (Grigg, 2010). The quantity of such literature suggests a view that clear policy is a panacea to the plagiarism problem (e.g., Bretag et al., 2011). Policy is seen as “a central avenue for defining acceptable behaviour” (Grigg, 2010, p. i; also see Sutherland-Smith, 2010), and most higher education institutions have distinct policies on plagiarism. These usually outline the behaviours that are considered to be plagiarism at that particular institution, as well as the consequences of such behaviours (Grigg, 2010). Plagiarism is usually included in policies on dishonesty, thus positioning plagiarism as a subset of broader cheating behaviours (Howard, 1999). Most university policies base their range of responses on the seriousness of the plagiarism, and often the seriousness is determined by whether or not the student intended to cheat or deceive (Grigg, 2010; also see Martin & Van Haeringen, 2011; Sutherland-Smith, 2008). Intent, however, is difficult to determine (Sutherland-Smith, 2008), and is often judged on textual features rather than on students’ explanations. For example, purchasing or downloading an essay would most likely be deemed intentional plagiarism, and poor paraphrasing is more likely to be perceived as unintentional plagiarism.
Howard, 1999). Many plagiarism policies fail to provide explicit criteria to fully determine what the institution deems ‘intent to deceive’. Consequently, there is often little distinction between responses to, and the treatment of, intentional and unintentional plagiarism (Bond et al., 2013; Grigg, 2010).

Sutherland-Smith (2008) points out that determining intent rests on a jury of teachers and policy administrators. This view is consistent with her finding that university plagiarism policies commonly use the language of criminal law (Sutherland-Smith, 2010). In particular she notes that such language is used when referring to the person who has plagiarised. In her analysis of plagiarism policies from 18 universities across the U.K., U.S.A. and Australia, Sutherland-Smith found that 16 policies used the word ‘offender’, and the remaining two institutions referred to an ‘accused’. Most policies referred to the responses to students’ plagiarism as ‘penalties’, with 17 out of the 18 policies analysed using this term. The remaining university used the term ‘sanctions’. ‘Accused’ and ‘penalties’ are terms commonly associated with responses to criminal behaviour. Sutherland-Smith challenges this language, pointing out that such language positions students as “wrongdoers” in the first instance (Sutherland-Smith, 2010, p. 8). However, Sutherland-Smith herself draws on crime discourses when she likens determining students’ intent to plagiarise to determining whether a killing is murder or manslaughter.

In an analysis of Australian university plagiarism policies, Grigg (2010) found that most policies positioned plagiarism (including unintentional plagiarism) as dishonest practice. Similarly, Sutherland-Smith (2010, p. 7) found
that universities “consistently located plagiarism in disciplinary or academic misconduct regulations of university policy provisions.” Grigg (2010, p. 6) argues that, “policy describes plagiarism in terms of theft, cheating and fraud, with the description of fraud caused by negligence or recklessness encompassing unintentional plagiarism. Full responsibility for avoiding plagiarism is thus placed completely on students.” Grigg found that in policy, intentional plagiarism was always attributed to student choice, whereas unintentional plagiarism was attributed to either lack of knowledge, or to poor academic practice. Another examination of Australian policies revealed that “academic misconduct and policy tends to focus on outlining procedures to be followed should plagiarism be suspected and penalties to be applied should it be detected or ‘proven’” (Devlin, 2006, p. 46). The study noted that very few policies contained reference to educative responses to students’ plagiarism. The inherent problem with policies governing plagiarism is that “they attempt to make visible that which does not exist: the line between what is textually ‘mine’ and that which is ‘theirs’” (Howard, 1999, p. 20). This view highlights the impossibility of developing policy to regulate what is, as I have established above, an indefinable concept.

A common view in the literature is that where a policy is in place with a clear definition of plagiarism, any incidences of plagiarism must therefore be deliberate, as there is an assumption that all students will read these policy documents and conform to them (Sutherland-Smith, 2008). In an Australian study, Gullifer and Tyson (2013) surveyed 3,405 university students regarding their understandings of institutional plagiarism policy, and found that only 50% of respondents had read the policy; however, students who had not read the policy
exhibited a greater understanding of plagiarism than those who had. In contrast, McCabe, Trevino and Butterfield (2002) report that students who expressed understanding of their institutional plagiarism policy were more likely to report adherence to regulations than students who did not understand policy. Similarly, Gullifer and Tyson (2010) found that students’ lack of knowledge of institutional plagiarism policy was associated with an increased likelihood that they might plagiarise. In another exploration of policies relating to integrity, Rose and Fischer (1995, p. 368) conclude that “what a policy says may be less important than how a policy is perceived,” echoing Grigg’s (2010) view above that an important function of policy is to present an institutional stance.

Within some of the literature on policies and prevention, there remains an emphasis on detecting plagiarism (e.g., Culwin & Lancaster, 2001; Larkham & Manns, 2002). Thus, a moral view is still evident, despite the recognition that some of the detected plagiarism is unintentional. Culwin and Lancaster (2001, p. 39) explain:

If a submission has been found to contain evidence suggesting plagiarism a decision has to be made whether to exonerate or penalise the student who submitted it. The students have a right to present circumstances that mitigate the cheating and possibly to appeal against any penalty.

Notably, the above statement draws on language more commonly found in the courtroom. Framing plagiarism (both intentional and unintentional) as dishonesty gives a clear message that safeguarding the university’s reputation is an important function of plagiarism policies (Grigg, 2010). Grigg argues that this is unhelpful and that in order to enhance teaching and learning, framing plagiarism as an
offence should be de-emphasised. However, some research reports that the media continues to call for tougher penalties for plagiarisers (e.g., Mallon, 2001; Sutherland-Smith, 2010).

An analysis of the research on plagiarism policy reveals that one problem with developing plagiarism policy is determining clear guidelines to regulate plagiarism, whilst acknowledging the “grey zones” of plagiarism (Grigg, 2010, p. 4). One response to this difficulty has been to relabel plagiarism and dishonest practice policies as academic integrity policies. Doing so places the emphasis on integrity rather than dishonesty, thus encouraging acceptable practice rather than focusing on the disciplining of unacceptable practice. Although the primary intention is still to stop students cheating, academic integrity is promoted as a core institutional value rather than a set of rules to be followed (e.g., Bertram Gallant, 2008; Bertram Gallant & Drinan, 2006; McCabe & Pavela, 2004). Bertram Gallant (2008, pp. 5-6) explains:

In the quest to stop students from cheating, organizations trend toward two dominant strategies – rule compliance and integrity. In the rule compliance strategy, the focus is on the articulation of rules for responsible conduct and enforcement of those rules, primarily through disciplining misconduct. The aim of the integrity strategy is to develop in students the character necessary to resist misconduct and the fortitude to choose actions that align with institutional rules even at a detriment to self-interests.

However, like plagiarism, academic integrity is a concept open to multiple interpretations and, as with the literature on plagiarism, the academic integrity literature is broad and presents a variety of perspectives (Macfarlane, Zhang, & Pun, 2014). Notably, the term ‘integrity’ continues to indicate a moral framing.
In the U.S.A., some of the literature on academic integrity centres around the honour code system (McCabe & Pavela, 2004; McCabe & Trevino, 1993), a system in which students are encouraged to take responsibility for protecting the academic integrity of the institution (McCabe & Pavela, 2004), including monitoring their peers’ behaviour in terms of integrity (Bertram Gallant, 2008). Within most honour code systems, “students are given responsibility for the detection of violators and for the judicial aspects of the system, such as determining guilt and assigning penalties” (McCabe & Trevino, 1993, p. 525). Under an honour code system, plagiarism is grouped together with other cheating behaviours, thus reflecting a moral view of plagiarism as purely dishonest. There is debate in the literature regarding whether honour code systems effectively reduce academic misconduct (e.g., Bertram Gallant, 2008; McCabe & Pavela, 2004; McCabe & Trevino, 1993). As many honour code systems rely on students regulating the behaviours of their peers, a major criticism of honour code systems is the resultant conflict between students’ loyalties to their institution, and their loyalties to their peers (Ashworth et al., 1997; Bertram Gallant, 2008).

**Paraphrasing, summarising and referencing**

Research focusing on regulations or policy for plagiarism also explores the concept of effective paraphrasing and summarising (e.g., Howard, 1995; Roig, 2001). Kaposi and Dell (2012, p. 822) label as “developmental” discourses this emphasis on students’ development of skills such as referencing and learning discipline-specific language, and the integration of these (technical) skills into the curriculum. Reflecting a developmental view of referencing and citation,
Hutchings (2014, p. 313) points out that most students “know that there is a mechanism in place for attributing ideas to their originators and that attached to this is the ‘offence’ of plagiarism.” The “mechanism” Hutchings refers to is referencing. Students often conflate plagiarism and referencing (e.g., Angélil-Carter, 2000; Hutchings, 2014), and associate avoiding plagiarism with the conventions of referencing rather than indicating an understanding of citation as a means to present an evidence-based argument.

Students reportedly express a lack of knowledge about referencing and citation conventions (e.g., Gourlay & Deane, 2012; Hutchings, 2014; Park, 2003) or display insufficient referencing skills in their written work (e.g., Bond et al., 2013). They also express concern about their lack of knowledge and skill in referencing (e.g., Gourlay & Deane, 2012; Hutchings, 2014), and report that the rules and conventions of referencing are confusing and difficult to learn (e.g., Hutchings, 2014). Furthermore, students highlight that different lecturers require different referencing styles or have different expectations regarding what should be referenced and how (Borg, 2009; Hutchings, 2014). Students also report they are not given enough information on how to reference correctly to avoid plagiarising (Breen & Maassen, 2005; Hutchings, 2014).

A regulatory framing of plagiarism places “the burden of understanding plagiarism and attribution conventions on students” (Sutherland-Smith, 2010, p. 9); however, staff may be asking students to display skills that they themselves have not fully grasped. In a study of college professors’ paraphrasing behaviours, Roig (2001) found that approximately 50% of participants failed to identify
plagiarism in what the researcher deemed to be plagiarised material. In addition, a significant number of the professors paraphrased material in a way that the researcher believed could be interpreted as plagiarism.

Framing plagiarism as either deliberate cheating, or as the lack of knowledge of, or skill in, applying referencing and citation conventions, is reflective of a deficit view of students (Howard, 1995; Howard & Robillard, 2008). Students are positioned as either lacking in morals or lacking in knowledge, and the responsibility for avoiding plagiarism is placed directly on students. Drawing on a deficit view of students, Gullifer and Tyson (2010) point out that students who plagiarise are denying themselves the opportunity to learn and that, as a consequence of plagiarising, writing becomes increasingly difficult as they progress through their degree. From a deficit view, the teacher is a “gatekeeper who determines and adjudicates students’ adherence to ethical standards and textual procedures” (Howard, 2008, p. 93). Fountain and Fitzgerald (2008, p. 116) echo the idea of teachers as gatekeepers, and argue that “academic communities should do more than stand as gatekeepers.” They explain that “if one doesn’t understand how to walk through the gate, conceive of the importance, and possess the skills to do so, then he or she will not care how he or she gets in, making the gatekeeper’s task all the more difficult” (Fountain & Fitzgerald, 2008, p. 117). Arguably, teachers need to be teaching why citation is important, not just how to cite and reference. Howard (1995) suggests that policies should be reviewed to allow for students’ development as academic writers. In particular, she argues for plagiarism policies that take into account the process of learning to write in specific disciplines. This view illustrates a move away from a regulatory
view of plagiarism towards framing plagiarism as part of the multiple and complex practices of learning to write at university.

**Problematising plagiarism**

Recently, the focus of the plagiarism literature has moved away from simple distinctions between intentional and unintentional plagiarism, and begun to explore plagiarism as a more complex issue situated within students’ development as academic writers. Much of this literature originates from practice and is based on research in learning or writing centres, Composition Studies in the U.S.A., Writing for Academic Purposes, and research on teaching students from a non-English speaking background (NESB). This literature is seldom referenced in mainstream higher education research on plagiarism. In my initial literature search for this research, I missed this literature, as it was not cited in the articles I accessed. When I did discover this work, however, I found that since the mid-1980s a body of researchers have been framing plagiarism as part of the broader issue of teaching students to become academic writers. This contrasts to the mainstream higher education plagiarism literature, which has been dominated by moral and regulatory views, and in which a focus on plagiarism as linked to learning to write has only become visible over the last decade.

The literature positioning plagiarism as part of learning to write in higher education is characterised by discussions about the oblique nature of the term ‘plagiarism’ and the behaviours and textual features it encompasses (Clegg & Flint,
Chapter Two: Tracing the plagiarism literature: From panic to panacea

2006; Kaposi & Dell, 2012). This literature calls for a re-framing of plagiarism either through re-naming it, or through re-conceptualising it. Within this view of plagiarism, students’ writing is perceived as a social practice rather than a technical skill (e.g., Angélil-Carter, 2000; Ivanic, 1998; Kaposi & Dell, 2012). Most often, this literature ignores deliberate plagiarism, as cheating is no longer a central concern. This literature focuses almost exclusively on the concept of unintentional plagiarism, moves away from a focus on what the student is being, and focuses instead on what the student is doing (Ivanic, 1998).

From ‘plagiarism’ to ‘plagiaries’

The move away from considering plagiarism within simple polarities such as ‘intentional’ or ‘unintentional’, and ‘good’ or ‘bad’ was signalled by the emergence of literature acknowledging that plagiarism, in particular unintentional plagiarism, is a textual feature rather than a behaviour. This literature acknowledges that plagiarism avoidance cannot be learned through following a set of rules and being punished when the rules are violated. In the writing literature, plagiarism has been labelled “an undertheorized field” (Howard, 1999, p. xviii), and researchers argue that, rather than being a natural category, plagiarism is a constructed phenomenon (e.g., Angélil-Carter, 2000; Howard, 1999; Sutherland-Smith, 2008; Sutton et al., 2012). Research that understands plagiarism in this way moves away from a discussion of plagiarism as a singular concept that can happen either intentionally or unintentionally, and focuses instead on ‘plagiaries’. The term ‘plagiaries’ highlights the plurality of plagiarism, and acknowledges the multitude of textual features that could be considered plagiarism (Ellery, 2008; Halasek, 2011;
Pecorari, 2008; Pennycook, 1996). From this perspective, plagiarism is not a unitary or dual phenomenon, as assumed by literature reflecting a moral or regulatory view. It is multiple phenomena, and these phenomena are “difficult to reduce to unambiguous language” (Clegg & Flint, 2006, p. 385). Because plagiarism is multiple practices, we need to “assume multiple causal factors and also multiple remedies” (Clegg & Flint, 2006, p. 385). Acknowledging the multiplicity of plagiarism, researchers have attempted to re-label the categories of behaviour that can be considered plagiarism. For example, Howard (1995) argues that plagiarism can be categorised as cheating, non-attribution, or ‘patchwriting’ where students quilt together sentences and phrases from source texts. I return to the concept of patchwriting later in this section. Similarly, Löftström and Kupila (2012) argue that plagiarism can be categorised as intentional, unintentional, or contextual. Contextual plagiarism relates to factors such as students’ management of their time and workload. Löftström and Kupila’s inclusion of contextual plagiarism, which they argue can be either intentional or unintentional, illustrates a blurring of the boundaries between the two (McGowan, 2005b; Sutherland-Smith, 2008), and a move away from concern over intent.

Some researchers claim that the concept of unintentional plagiarism should be abandoned altogether (Chandrasoma et al., 2004; Howard, 2000), arguing that if it is not intentional, then it is not plagiarism. Other research has attempted to redefine unintentional plagiarism by re-naming or re-framing it. Alternative names include “textual plagiarism” (Pecorari, 2003, p. 318), “coauthorship” (Carrick, 2008, p. 62), “repeated language” (Pecorari, 2008, p. 64), “transgressive intertextuality” (Abasi & Akbari, 2008, p. 267; Chandrasoma et al.,
2004, p. 171), and “apparent plagiarism” (Currie, 1998, p. 3). In her examination of self-plagiarism practices in academics’ writing, Robinson (2014, p. 265) suggests completely abandoning the term ‘plagiarism’ in favour of “fortunate publication” and “unfortunate publication”. Robinson defines fortunate publication as work that adds to the field of knowledge and displays scholarship.

In discussing plagiarism (including self-plagiarism) in this way, Robinson is focusing on identifying appropriate writing practices in general, rather than (lack of) plagiarism in particular. Rose and Fischer (1995) reframe academic integrity as ‘authorship’, thereby removing moral judgement whilst indicating a large range of practices, some of which are acceptable and some of which are not. They state that there are “three types of authorship problems… plagiarism, giving unwarranted credit, and failing to give credit” (p. 369).

Some of the literature on plagiaries argues that to reduce plagiarism, teachers should remove the emphasis from plagiarism as something to be avoided, and instead focus on students’ development of academic skills such as drawing on sources (e.g., Chandrasoma et al., 2004; Gullifer & Tyson, 2010), paraphrasing (e.g., Gullifer & Tyson, 2010), and critical thinking (e.g., Vardi, 2012). Gullifer and Tyson (2010, p. 464) explain that “good academic writing is contingent on developing sound skills in both research and writing, critically reading and comprehending appropriate sources, careful note-taking, paraphrasing, judicious use of quotations and giving credit to authors for their ideas and writing.” Vardi (2012), who advocates teaching students citation and referencing skills as part of teaching critical thinking, echoes this view. She argues that within a critical thinking framework, citation and referencing are tools
towards critically evaluating research and developing an informed argument. Vardi argues that if students learn referencing skills in this manner they will be less likely to plagiarise. Reconceptualising plagiarism as a noun rather than as a verb has also been suggested as a way to reduce unintentional plagiarism (Robillard, 2008). In order to achieve this, Robillard encouraged her first year writing course students to view plagiarism as a form of authorship. Instead of learning how to avoid plagiarising (verb), students learned about plagiarism (noun), including what an accusation of plagiarism does – the effect of the discourses of plagiarism on the text, the author, and the accuser(s) – or in other words, “the cultural politics of plagiarism” (p. 37). Robillard’s aim was to encourage her students to view plagiarism as a cultural and political phenomenon, rather than a moral issue.

Emerging conceptions of plagiarism, which focus on various educative strategies such as promoting critical thinking and understanding academic writing practices, continue to focus on avoiding plagiarism or stopping cheating (Anson, 2008). As such, they continue to position plagiarism as a moral or regulatory issue, rather than focusing on students’ learning. Focusing on integrity rather than on plagiarism or cheating may be one way of resolving this (Bertram Gallant, 2008), but terms such as ‘integrity’ still position students who plagiarise as immoral, since they are perceived to lack integrity if they inadvertently plagiarise (Bond et al., 2013). Research that focuses on students learning to become academic writers avoids this moral positioning. However, a focus on unintentional plagiarism as a normal part of development as an academic writer ignores the concept of intentional plagiarism or cheating. As such, although research continues to use the term ‘plagiarism’, the emphasis is placed on students as authors, and the writing
practices they employ as they learn to become academic writers. This literature has emerged from and draws on social constructionist views of knowledge and authorship.

_Changing concepts of ‘knowledge’ and ‘authorship’_

The shift to a view of plagiarism as plagiaries is informed by a shift in understanding of the nature of knowledge, and concepts of authorship. Traditionally, the concept of knowledge has been conflated with notions of ownership and copyright (e.g., Mallon, 2001; Pennycook, 1996; Posner, 2007; Sutherland-Smith, 2008). Postmodern views of knowledge, in particular the concept that knowledge is socially constructed (Burr, 2003; Pennycook, 1996), challenge the traditional view of knowledge as attributable to a single source, and consequently challenge the notion of sole author (Currie, 1998; Fountain & Fitzgerald, 2008; Howard, 1999). Sutherland-Smith (2008, p. 77) explains:

> It is not typical that a person shuts herself away from the world, its political, cultural, social, environmental and economic forces, and remains in a solitary and sterile world to create her ‘masterpiece’ which is written in final form with no input from any other source – human or technological… The very language in which the writer has been immersed and also shared with others will influence the written product.

From the perspective outlined in this passage, writing is framed as a social process.
The development of technology, in particular the Internet, has added weight to arguments challenging the concept of sole authorship. Online wikis, where individual authors are not acknowledged, are an increasingly popular source of information. Wikis and the widespread use of hypertext, where unnamed authors collaborate in the virtual space to produce text, illustrate a shifting view of authorship. Echoing these practices, students may see collaborative text production as legitimate, whereas universities often view collaboration on individual assignments as unauthorised practice (e.g., Bertram Gallant, 2008; Blum, 2009; East, 2010a). As the concept of plagiarism is reliant on the assumption that students are expected to be the sole author of their texts, a challenge to the notion of sole authorship is a challenge to the notion of plagiarism (Stearns, 1999; Sutherland-Smith, 2008; Swearingen, 1999).

Literature on plagiarism has reflected changing notions of authorship, framing plagiarism as an issue of students’ struggles with authority or identity in their academic writing (Abasi, 2008; Angélil-Carter, 2000; Ivanić, 1998; Lea, 1998; Thompson, 2008). In academic writing, authorial identity is determined by the way in which students draw on and combine the discourses to which they are exposed (Ivanić, 1998). Analysis of students’ academic writing has revealed that students draw on many different subject positions in their writing (Angélil-Carter, 2000; Ivanić, 1998). These subject positions are the consequence of students’ previous experiences, including their cultural, political, religious, work, and educational experiences. Consequently, students may present a range of authorial positions in their writing as they view their topic from a variety of different perspectives (also see Sutherland-Smith, 2008), thus presenting a number of
different identities. Many students struggle to balance their multiple subject positions with the role of a novice writer who is required to draw on the authority of source texts (Angénil-Carter, 2000; Ivanić, 1998). In particular, students struggle to write with ‘authority’ as they view themselves “as people without knowledge, and hence without authority” (Ivanić, 1998, p. 88; also see Grant, 1997).

Furthermore, although students are expected to mimic the conventions of academic research articles in their writing, essay writing is in fact a different genre (Angénil-Carter, 2000). An academic essay has both a different audience and a different function to research articles. Consequently, students are expected to learn the genre of academic writing from outside of the genre in which they are writing.

Abasi and Akbari (2008) argue that university students are positioned as reproducers of text, rather than as producers of knowledge. They argue that students are expected to be academics in training, and to participate in a discourse community. However, through the framing and delivery of assignment requirements (for example, referring to the paper as an assignment, stipulating the number of sources to be drawn on etc.), they are treated as novices with no authority. Research reveals that some teachers commonly use students’ referencing as a surveillance technique to check if students have accessed the required sources (Abasi, 2008), even though referencing is not used for this means in academic publications.

Understanding the culture of academia can be seen as a key factor in avoiding plagiarism (Chandrasoma, 2004; Abasi, 2008). However, academia is not
a homogenous culture, as different disciplines have different disciplinary practices (Baynham, 1999; Lea & Street, 1998). Consequently, a body of plagiarism research has focused on the need to acculturate students into the academic environment. All new students commence their studies as ‘cultural others’ and need to learn the language, conventions, and skills of their discipline(s) (Baynham, 1999; Lea & Street, 1998; Leask, 2006). Students struggle with concepts such as balancing drawing on sources with presenting ‘original’ work (Blum, 2009; Briggs, 2003), using their “own words” (McGowan, 2005a, p. 1), and understanding how to position themselves within their academic writing (e.g., Angélil-Carter, 2000; Lea & Street, 1998). For example, different disciplines have different academic writing conventions, including how much referencing or citation is acceptable (or necessary) in academic writing, and whether or not the use of the personal pronoun (‘I’) is acceptable (e.g., Angélil-Carter, 2000; East, 2010a).

Arguably, an apprentice period, during which students are inducted into the conventions of academic writing and research, may work to resolve students’ struggles with the language and discourse conventions of their particular discipline (McGowan, 2003, 2005b). However, the argument that students need to be initiated into different disciplines does not take into account commonalities across disciplines (Ivanic, 1998). Therefore, a broad institutional response to plagiarism may be a more desirable panacea than a discipline-based approach (e.g., Carroll, 2002; Devlin, 2006; Gullifer & Tyson, 2010; McCabe & Trevino, 1993; Sutherland-Smith, 2008; Zwagerman, 2008). A holistic approach to plagiarism (Carroll, 2002) focuses on educating students about citation practices and avoiding plagiarism, alongside the establishment of institution-wide procedures.
for monitoring and deterring cheating behaviours. A holistic approach to reducing plagiarism would recognise staff and institutional responsibility for ensuring students receive sufficient information to avoid plagiarising, and for ensuring assessments are designed to minimise plagiarism (e.g., Devlin, 2006; Carroll, 2002; Sutherland-Smith, 2008; Abasi, 2008). In the plagiarism literature there is, therefore, a move away from a moral view of plagiarism where the responsibility for avoiding plagiarism lies solely with students, towards a view where policy makers, staff and students have equal responsibility for ensuring that students do not plagiarise (Anson, 2008). However, a holistic approach towards plagiarism, whilst acknowledging institutional responsibility for ensuring that students know how to avoid plagiarism, and establishing an educative response to unintentional plagiarism, still relies on regulatory factors; in particular, that students must adhere to university policy on plagiarism and cheating, and adhere to the rules of referencing. Furthermore, a holistic approach assumes that teaching students the conventions of academia can enable students to become members of an academic discourse community (Ivanic, 1998), and that those conventions are static.

Students as developing academic writers

The literature framing plagiarism as part of learning to write draws on a developmental view of students, as learning to be an academic writer is a developmental process (Howard, 1999). Much of the literature focusing on plagiarism within students’ writing practices comes from research into NESB students (e.g., Currie, 1998; Abasi, 2008; Valentine, 2006). This is possibly because it is easier to identify plagiarism and other textual features in texts produced by
students writing in a language in which they are not a native speaker. In their academic writing, students struggle with the specific vocabulary of their discipline (Currie, 1998), understanding what is required of them in their assignments (Currie, 1998; Abasi, 2008), and managing their workload (Currie, 1998; Blum, 2009; Abasi, 2008). These difficulties can lead students to mimic academic texts in their written assignments (Currie, 1998; Howard, 1999; Abasi, 2008). Howard (1993) coined the term ‘patchwriting’ to describe the practice where students patch together sentences and phrases from a variety of sources to produce new texts, in an effort to mimic the discourses and conventions of their discipline. From a regulatory perspective, the practice of patchwriting is framed as plagiarism but, when considered from a writing perspective, it is recognised as a legitimate step in learning to become an academic writer (e.g., Currie, 1998; Howard, 1999).

Research viewing plagiarism in relation to students’ learning of academic writing conventions acknowledges writing as a social practice where students interact with existing texts in order to produce new ones (Howard, 1999; Isserman, 2003; Kaposi & Dell, 2012).

In their research into first year NESB students’ textual practices, Abasi and Akbari (2008) found that the context in which students write needs to be addressed. They argue that some students may patchwrite in an attempt to compensate for their perceived lack of linguistic competence. For example, some students may perceive the expectations of written assignments to be beyond their linguistic ability – particularly expectations such as using an “appropriate academic writing style” (Abasi & Akbari, p. 272). To combat this, some students deliberately included specific language from their source material, and essentially
patchwrote portions of their assignment in order to meet the criteria. Abasi and Akbari see the problem here as not with the expectations put on students, but with the students’ perceptions of these expectations. They found that some students perceived that they were expected to write like a “professor” (Abasi & Akbari, p. 272). In other words, students felt they were expected to write with a “linguistic legitimacy” (p. 273) that they believed they did not possess, and, therefore, used patchwriting as a scaffold to achieve this.

From a writing perspective, academic writing is not a technical skill that can be taught through rules. Rather, it is viewed as a skill that can only be learned through “repeated, mentored practice” (Howard, 2008, p. 93). From this perspective, students must be exposed to the conditions that allow such practice to occur. In general, mentoring and the opportunities to practise the skills of academic writing are provided through graduate research supervision, but such conditions are often not provided for undergraduate students (Blum, 2009). Some authors argue that as part of providing mentoring and opportunities for repeated practice, it is necessary to ensure students understand the reasons why citation is fundamental to academic research (e.g., Fountain & Fitzgerald, 2008; McGowan, 2005b).

Despite the clear message in some higher education literature that academic writing and avoiding the textual appearance of plagiarism can only be learned through practice and mentoring, many teachers expect students to have an understanding of plagiarism and how to avoid it when they commence university (Sutherland-Smith, 2008). However, research reveals that many students do not
adequately understand what is meant by the term ‘plagiarism’, or why and how they should avoid it (e.g., Ashworth et al., 1997; Blum, 2009; Bond et al., 2013; Hayes & Introna, 2005; Lea & Street, 1998; Löfström & Kupila, 2012; Marshall & Garry, 2005; Roig, 1997; Sutherland-Smith, 2008). As noted, different institutions, departments and staff use the term ‘plagiarism’ in different ways, and like staff, students find it difficult to understand what is meant by ‘plagiarism’ and how plagiarism can be avoided (Gourlay & Deane, 2012).

Summary

From the literature reviewed above, it is clear that much has been written about the ‘problem’ of plagiarism and how it can be addressed. Three different perspectives are evident in the literature. These view plagiarism as a moral issue, a regulatory or policy issue, or as a natural part of learning to write from sources. These three perspectives are aligned with three viewpoints on how the plagiarism problem can be solved: through punishing offenders, through tightening policies and regulations, or through educating students.

The literature reviewed reveals to us a range of different ways in which theorists and researchers understand plagiarism, and therefore how it is positioned in higher education. In order to see if the solutions the literature presents are helpful to students, we need to examine how students understand plagiarism, and how and whether these solutions fit with students’ views. Despite a growing number of studies into students’ perceptions of plagiarism, research in this area is
still limited (Radunovich et al., 2009). The research that does exist suggests that, in
general, students are confused about what plagiarism is and how they can avoid it.
Students express a desire for more information and support in the area of
developing good academic writing skills. Bertram Gallant (2008, p. 6) calls for a
reframing of academic integrity, moving away from the question, “how do we
stop students from cheating?” and asking instead “how do we ensure students are
learning?” Analysis of the literature reveals that framing plagiarism within the
context of learning to write at university is the most effective way of ensuring
students are learning. However, to assess if students are learning, we must look
beyond assessments and grades. In order to fully examine if and what students are
learning, we need to gather their perspectives and consider what students think
and understand about writing, citation, referencing, and plagiarism. We can then
begin to address any disjuncture between what students understand and what they
need to understand in order to avoid accusations of plagiarism.

In the remainder of this thesis I consider the literature explored in this
chapter alongside students’ articulated understandings of plagiarism. In Chapter
Five I present an overview of what the students in my study said about plagiarism.
In Chapter Six I explore the discourses the students drew on in the research
interviews, and relate these to the themes I identified in the academic literature
and the discourses present in the University plagiarism policy. In Chapter Seven I
investigate the relationships between the students’ beliefs about learning,
assessment, and the purpose of a university education and their views on
plagiarism. In Chapter Eight I present a summary of the main findings of this
research in relation to the literature reviewed in the current chapter. I also
consider my research in relation to plagiarism policy and practices at the University of Otago. Firstly, however, I explain the theoretical considerations that underpin this research (Chapter Three) and the study’s methodology (Chapter Four).
Chapter Two: Tracing the plagiarism literature: From panic to panacea

Poststructural notions of subjectivity are criticised by some theorists who perceive that, through authorising the idea that people are subject to discourses, people are positioned as lacking in agency. From this perspective, people are merely the products of discourses over which they have little control (e.g., see Clegg, 2005). However, a discursive view of subjectivities does not necessarily imply that discourses are all-powerful in defining us. Carbine (2001, p. 279) explains that although discourses may have regulatory intentions, this does not mean that they ultimately result in regulatory outcomes. Individuals are active agents and discourses are themselves in a state of constant reconstitution and contestation. Nor do discourses exist in splendid isolation but, rather, are themselves also influenced by other, even more power discourses.

In this research, the students were able to exercise agency through their choice of which available discourses to take up, and which discourses to resist (e.g., see Cameron, 2001; Honan et al., 2000). In order to explore the discourses at work in the students’ understanding, I undertook the analysis using a discourse analytic approach.

Theoretical framework

Analysing discourse

Discourse analysis is a method of examining the language people use, either in spoken or in textual form. The aim of a discourse analytic approach is to illuminate patterns of thought of or ‘being’ through noticing the way people have used language to create meaning (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Parker, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1994; Wetherell, 1999). For the purpose of this research, therefore, the literature I drew on and the students’ interviews I analysed were not just text, transcripts, or data – they were ‘discourse’ (Potter & Wetherell, 1994).

Underlying my use of discourse analysis is the idea that discourses are “fluid and often opportunistic” (Carbine, 2001, p. 269) in the sense that, as discussed above, at
Introduction

The ways a particular researcher conceptualises a phenomenon such as plagiarism depends on the assumptions underpinning her view of the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). A researcher’s use of theory is informed by her ontology (understanding of the nature of existence) and epistemology (beliefs about knowledge) (Crotty, 1998; Grant & Giddings, 2002). Theory explains the parameters within which we view phenomena, and the explanations we are able to provide for them (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). In this chapter, I explain my use of theory with reference to the ways it has shaped my readings of the plagiarism literature, the students’ interview responses, and the contextual data I examined for this research.

In qualitative research, theory provides a means of “organizing a whole slew of unassorted facts, laws, concepts, constructs, and principles into a meaningful and manageable form through its assistance in guiding research design, analysis, and interpretation and revealing gaps, inconsistencies, and future directions” (Macdonald et al., 2002, p. 134). In order to explain how I used theory in this research, it is first necessary to explain that, for me, theory is not just a way of explaining data. I also view theory as a process that informs the data analysis, and that is informed by the data analysis; thus it is a means for creating new knowledge (Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). My use of the theories I have drawn on for this thesis has therefore both informed and been informed by my reading and thinking about the
literature on plagiarism, the understandings of plagiarism the students in this research shared with me, and the policy and plagiarism-related documents I examined.

I begin this chapter by presenting a broad overview of my beliefs about the social construction of knowledge and how social constructionism relates to my examination of students’ understandings of plagiarism. I follow this with an explanation of my use of the poststructuralist notions of discourse, knowledge, power and subjectivity. I then relate these concepts to academic literacies theory, and explain my use of academic literacies in this research. In the next chapter I outline the methodological decisions I made in this research and explain how these decisions were informed by my theoretical lens.

A social constructionist lens

As noted in the introduction, in this thesis I approach my use of theory, and plagiarism more specifically, from a social constructionist perspective. Social constructionist concepts of multiple possible truths and constructions of reality are useful for critically challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about academic writing and plagiarism. Social constructionism emerged from the field of Social Psychology in the 1960s as a theoretical perspective in direct contrast to the positivist (scientific) paradigm (e.g., Berger & Luckman, 1966; Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1994; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Shotter, 1993). Whereas a positivist lens assumes a single reality that can be found and proven (Guba & Lincoln, 2005), a social
constructionist lens views reality as constructed through social interactions, particularly language (Burr, 2003; Gergen & Gergen, 2003). Burr (2003, p. 45) explains:

A lot of the things we take for granted as given, fixed and immutable, whether in ourselves or in the phenomena we experience, can upon inspection be found to be socially derived and socially maintained. They are created and perpetuated by human beings who share meanings through being members of the same society and culture.

From a social constructionist perspective, therefore, there is an infinite range of constructions of concepts or events, plagiarism included (Burr, 1998).

Social constructionism challenges the notion that our thoughts and experiences pre-date and are reflected by language. Instead, through a social constructionist lens, language is viewed as pre-dating thought and action – language is a means of constructing meaning and therefore constructs thought and reality through social exchanges (Gergen & Gergen, 2003). Language provides a set of labels through which we come to understand both ourselves, and the world around us. In this sense, language is a form of action, and is therefore performative (Burr, 2003). Furthermore, language and meanings of words differ between cultures and change over time (Burr, 2003): therefore, reality is both culturally and historically dependent (Gergen, 1994). According to a social constructionist perspective, our understandings of the world are shaped by our own location in time and space; we are bound by the value systems of our own cultural and historical location (Burr, 1998).
From a social constructionist perspective, constructions of reality dictate social actions, including what people are able to do within particular contexts (Burr, 2003). This means that our (constructed) reality both constrains and enables the actions available to us, including the language available for us to use (Gee, 2005). Social constructionism is a lens through which we can examine the ways in which people interact with each other, and how these practices produce knowledge or phenomena through the meanings they invest (Burr, 1998, 2003). Through acknowledging the idea of multiple (constructed) realities, social constructionism enables us to recognise that alternative constructions of concepts such as academic writing and plagiarism can challenge our taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of such phenomena, thus paving the way for change.

The phenomenon that is plagiarism is a clear example of a social construct. As discussed in the previous chapter, there are many different understandings of what plagiarism is, including different understandings of the behaviours and/or textual features that can be labelled as plagiarism. In Chapter Two I explained how, in the research literature, plagiarism is understood differently according to whether it is constructed as a moral issue, a regulatory issue, or a writing issue. Researchers’ constructions of plagiarism are evident in the language they use to describe the phenomenon, and this language in turn informs social constructions of plagiarism. However, this study moves beyond a simple acknowledgement that plagiarism is a socially constructed phenomenon. In this research I examine how plagiarism is constructed through language in the research literature, in the University policy and information for students on
plagiarism, and in the responses of the students I interviewed. In order to achieve this, I draw upon poststructural notions of discourse, knowledge, and power; in particular how these work to position people.

**Discourse, knowledge, and power**

Overall, this thesis is concerned with students’ understandings of plagiarism, how their understandings are influenced by broader discourses in their university context, and how students position themselves within and in relation to the discourses of academic writing, the “good student”, and plagiarism (Grant, 1997, p. 1010). Foucault (1983, p. 187) asserts that “[p]eople know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does.” In other words, to Foucault, what people say and do, alongside how they choose to say or do it, may serve to position themselves and others in particular ways, even if unintentionally. Throughout the thesis, in order to examine what the students said about plagiarism, and explore some of the consequences of their expressed understandings, I draw on poststructuralist notions of discourse, knowledge, and power.

As with social constructionism, a poststructuralist perspective emphasises language as the prime site of the construction of the person: “the person you are, your experience, your identity, your ‘personality’ are all the effects of language” (Burr, 2003, p. 39). Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organisation and their likely social and political consequences are defined.
and contested (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005; Weedon, 1997). Consequently, what people are able to say and do within a given setting is constrained by the discourses within which they operate (Danaher, Schirato, & Webb, 2000). For example, from a poststructuralist perspective, what the students were able to say in my research interviews was constrained by the discourses of academic writing, the good student, and plagiarism, within their social and educational contexts.

The term ‘discourse’ describes “an instance of situated language use” (Burr, 2003, p. 63) or, more complexly, “ways of combining and integrating language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity” (Gee, 2005, p. 21). Potter and Wetherell (1995, p. 89) use the term “interpretative repertoire[s]” to describe the linguistic resources people use when drawing on particular discourses. However, discourses are more than just talk. ‘Discourses’ include conversations or other spoken dialogue, or any kind of written text, as well as practices that occur alongside language (Burr, 2003; Gee, 2005). From a poststructuralist perspective, language and practices combine “as bodies of ideas that produce and regulate the world in their own terms, rendering some things common sense and other things nonsensical” (Youdell, 2006, pp. 35-36).

Foucault (1972, p. 49) identifies discourses as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.” This indicates that there is a direct relationship between discourse, knowledge, and power; it is through discourses that knowledges or truths are created, and discourses are sites of power. From
Foucault’s perspective, power is something that is constituted; that is, both created and enabled through relationships (McHoul & Grace, 1998). Foucault (1980, p. 93) explains the concept of power within discourses as circular:

In a society such as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.

Knowledge, or truth, “authorizes and legitimates the exercising of power” (Macdonald et al., 2002, p. 142), as it is the dominant discourse in any context that holds the most power as a way of ‘naming the world’. In this study, I view power as being revealed through the discourses that the students draw upon and/or resist in their conversations about plagiarism. I am also interested in the ways in which the discourses both enable and constrain particular ways of being a student and/or engaging in academic writing, and reveal broader institutional plagiarism and good student discourses.

Discourses are historically and socially specific, illuminating “the historically specific relations between disciplines (defined as bodies of knowledge) and disciplinary practices (forms of social control and social possibility)” in any given place and time (McHoul & Grace, 1998, p. 26). Within any historical period, the ways in which people are able to think, speak and write are constrained by the
discourses available to them (Danaher et al., 2000; Weedon, 1997). However, at any given time we are both subject to, and the subject of, multiple discourses. Discourses are therefore sites of subjectification (Davies, 2006; Weedon, 1997; Youdell, 2006). The ‘self’ is constantly changing according to whom the person is with, according to the circumstances, and according to the purpose of the interaction (Burr, 2003; Gee, 2005; Weedon, 1997). Davies (1997, p. 274) explains this as “a move from the self as a noun…to the self as a verb”, emphasising the constructed nature of subjects (the ‘verb’), rather than an essentialist view of people (the ‘noun’). This idea is captured in the word ‘subjectivity’.

Subjectivity is a concept that is central to poststructural notions of discourse, power, and agency. Weedon (1997, p. 32) explains subjectivity as “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world.” Subjectivity conveys the idea that people are both subjected to and subjected through language, (Jones, 1993; Weedon, 1997) in that they can only take up subject positions that are available to or known to them (Danaher et al., 2000). In Jones’s (1991, p. 98) words, “the limits of my words are the limits of my world.” From a poststructural perspective, because subjects are discursively constructed, they are always in the process of (re)construction, and never fully coherent nor complete (Honan, Knobel, Baker, & Davies, 2000). Through recognising that our “social relations are constituted in particular relations of power-knowledge” (Macdonald et al., 2002, p. 142), we can examine how people are positioned and how they position themselves through discourse. I discuss this in more depth in the following chapter.
Some theorists argue that poststructural notions of subjectivity position people as lacking in agency, or as the products of discourses over which they have little control (e.g., see Clegg, 2005). However, a discursive view of subjectivities does not necessarily imply that discourses are all-powerful in defining us. Carbine (2001, p. 279) explains that:

> Although discourses may have regulatory intentions, this does not mean that they ultimately result in regulatory outcomes. Individuals are active agents and discourses are themselves in a state of constant reconstitution and contestation. Nor do discourses exist in splendid isolation but, rather, are themselves also mediated by other dominant, sometimes more powerful, discourses.

In this research I am interested in the ways in which the students exercise agency through the discourses that they take up and resist in their discussions about plagiarism, study, and academic writing (e.g., see Cameron, 2001; Honan et al., 2000). In order to explore the discourses at work in the students’ understandings of plagiarism, I read their stories using a discourse analytic approach. I explain my use of discourse analysis in the following chapter.

Plagiarism is situated within the broader phenomenon of academic writing. Writing is of utmost importance in the higher education setting (Campbell, Smith, & Brooker, 1998; Prosser & Webb, 1994). It is through students’ academic writing that their understanding of a particular subject is often assessed (Prosser & Webb, 1994). It is also in writing that the phenomenon of plagiarism most commonly manifests. In line with my epistemological belief in the socially constructed nature of knowledge, I view students’ writing from an academic literacies perspective (e.g., Lea & Street, 1999; Lea, 2004; Lea & Stierer,
2000; Lea & Street, 1998; Lea & Street, 2006; Lillis, 2003; Lillis & Scott, 2007). I explain my use of academic literacies in the next section.

Academic literacies theory

Academic literacies theory emerged from a school of thinking about literacy known as ‘the new literacy studies’, which acknowledges the social aspects of language and literacies (Gee, 2000; Street, 1984, 1995). In their seminal research, Lea and Street (1998) identified three approaches to student writing in higher education: study skills, academic socialisation, and academic literacies. Lea and Street argue that these approaches play a crucial role in shaping how we think about academic skills (for example, plagiarism). Lea and Street (1998) posit that the study skills approach to academic writing is based on the belief that success in higher education is dependent on learning a set of skills that can be taught independently and transferred to any context. These skills include the technical aspects of writing, and are deemed to be generic. The academic socialisation approach encompasses the study skills approach, but acknowledges that there are different literacies to learn in different contexts. Consequently, from an academic socialisation perspective, students need to learn the characteristics of academic writing specific to the discipline in which they are studying. Finally, an academic literacies approach encompasses both the study skills and academic socialisation approaches but, in addition, it positions academic writing as a social practice:

It views student writing and learning as issues at the level of epistemology and identities rather than skill or socialisation. An academic literacies approach views the institutions in which academic
practices take place as constituted in, and as sites of, discourse and power. It sees the literacy demands of the curriculum as involving a variety of communicative practices, including genres, fields and disciplines (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 159).

An academic literacies approach focuses on how higher education students develop as readers, thinkers and writers, with a particular emphasis on the literary practices underlying this development (Lea & Street, 1999; 1998). Lillis (2003, p. 195) explains that, as a theoretical perspective, academic literacies:

has helped to foreground many dimensions to student academic writing which had previously remained invisible or had been ignored; these include the impact of power relations on student writing, the centrality of identity in academic writing, academic writing as ideologically inscribed knowledge construction, the nature of generic academic, as well as disciplinary specific, writing practices.

The three approaches to literacies in higher education that Lea and Street (1998) identify (above) align with the discourses of plagiarism in the higher education literature that I outlined in Chapter Two. A moral view of plagiarism aligns with a study skills approach, emphasising that avoiding plagiarism is dependent on learning and applying a set of writing skills. Both a study skills approach, and a moral view of plagiarism assume that, as long as students are taught specific, discrete skills such as referencing and developing an argument, they will be able to produce acceptable academic writing. Consequently, poor academic writing, or plagiarism, is attributable to a deficit on the part of the student. An academic socialisation approach to students’ literacies echoes aspects of a regulatory view of plagiarism. Both study skills and academic socialisation
perspectives acknowledge that it is the institution’s responsibility to make writing expectations explicit to students. However, beyond this, it is the student’s responsibility to ensure that they follow the rules. Transgressions are viewed as a deficit on the part of the student. In contrast, an academic literacies perspective on student writing aligns with a view of plagiarism as situated within students’ development as academic writers. As explained above, an academic literacies approach acknowledges that writing is both a process and a product. As such, it aligns with the plagiarism literature that recognises some practices that could be considered plagiarism (for example patchwriting), as part of the process of students learning how to (re)create knowledge.

In terms of my own study, the approaches to writing in higher education that Lea and Street (1998) identified have informed my recognition that students are required to operate within the rules and expectations of the institution at which they are studying. Institutions are the sites of discourse and power that shape students’ learning in higher education, and the rules and expectations of academic writing within particular institutions are often tacit rather than explicit (Lea & Street, 2000). Specifically, I understand students’ academic writing as “the manifestation of students’ understandings of what is required” by the assessment task (Prosser & Webb, 1994, p. 126). Therefore, when considering students’ writing, it is important to consider that there is an implicit power relationship between the student and the lecturer, and this impacts on students’ writing (Ivanić, Clark, & Rimmershaw, 2000; Sterngold, 2004). Many students perceive lecturers as having knowledge (Moore, 2007), and themselves as wanting or needing this knowledge, thus creating a dichotomy of power (Grant, 1997; Ivanić
et al., 2000; Read, Francis, & Robson, 2010). Further, students are required to write for an audience who has more knowledge of the subject than they do, and who will assess their writing (Lea & Street, 1998; Read et al., 2010). However, students are expected to write in a confident style implying an equal amount of knowledge and status (Read et al., 2010). Power further becomes an issue when students are required to present an argument within their academic writing. The presentation of an argument usually requires the writer to criticise the work of authors and other academics within their field of study, and often students may not feel they have the relevant knowledge or experience, and therefore the right, to do so (Lea & Street, 1998; Read et al., 2010). This may subsequently impact on the student’s ability to write in a confident style.

An academic literacies approach calls for institutions to attend to students’ literacies in a broader sense. Currently it is normal for students’ literacies to be attended to only in the form of assessments, such as essays, lab reports and exam papers. An academic literacies approach recognises assessments as products of literacy work, and calls for us to attend to the process of literacies as well as the product (Baynham, 2000; Lea & Street, 1999; Lea & Street, 2006). In other words, an academic literacies approach advocates focusing on how writing and knowledge is produced, alongside what is produced. Prosser and Webb (1994, p. 137) argue that, if students’ writing is valued only as an end product, then

the aim can only be to teach students to think for the mere sake of thinking, and to write for the mere sake of writing. The exercise is devoid of purpose and therefore meaning. By contrast, where writing development is seen as a fundamental part of learning a new
discipline, the learner is learning how to think *something*, and how to
write *something*.

It is noticeable that plagiarism in students’ texts is a textual feature of the
completed text (product). Attention to plagiarism can therefore ignore the process
that produced the product. A view of plagiarism as a feature of the product
ignores the reality that learning to write in the academic setting is a developmental
process, and academic writing differs between (and sometimes within) disciplines.

My purpose in using an academic literacies perspective to inform this
study is to consider students’ beliefs and academic practices in relation to
plagiarism in order to better understand how these operate as barriers and/or
enablers to student learning. Specifically, identifying barriers and enablers to
student writing will help inform how university policies and practices in this area
can be enhanced to better support improved student outcomes.

**Summary**

In this chapter I outlined my theoretical lenses and how they inform this study. I
explained my understanding that the socially constructed nature of knowledge
results in multiple (constructed) realities that are both culturally and historically
dependent. I then presented my understanding of ‘discourse’ and how knowledge
and power operate through discourses. Finally, I explained how academic
literacies theory informs this research, with particular reference to how students’
writing is constituted in relationships of knowledge and power. In the following
Chapter Three: Theoretical framework

chapter I explain my research methodology and how my theoretical lens influenced the methodological decisions I made.
Chapter Four

Methodological Journey

I chose to recruit students from first year lectures for a number of reasons. Firstly, I wanted to ensure my cohort contained students in their first year of university study, as other research indicates that these students may be at the most risk of plagiarising (e.g., Franklyn-Stokes & Newstead, 1995; Johnson & Clerehan, 2005; Perry, 2010; Power, 2009). As the interviews were to take place in the second semester of the academic year, I assumed that first year students would have completed at least one written assignment in the previous semester, and been exposed to information on the University plagiarism policy and practices. Added to this, their high school experiences and their first semester of university study would be fresh enough in their minds to provide an indication of whether writing papers in secondary school were substantial different to what they experienced at high school. Secondly, I wished to recruit ‘typical’ students. First year lectures at the University often contain a mix of students from all levels of study, so this was a practical and efficient way to ensure a cohort representative of different levels of undergraduate study. In order to attract participants from a variety of disciplines, I obtained permission to recruit students from Commerce, Science and Humanities lectures. In addition, one of the courses I recruited participants from was a ‘service course’ that attracts students from the spectrum of disciplines at the University.

Through addressing students at these lectures and promising a reward of chocolate for participating in an interview, a total of 41 students provided their email address to be contacted with information about the research. These students were subsequently emailed an outline of the research project (Information for Participants, Appendix X), a copy of the consent form they
Introduction

In this chapter I provide an outline of how I conducted this study, and describe my qualitative approach to the research. I link the methodological decisions I made with the plagiarism literature I discussed in Chapter Two, and my theoretical lens, which I discussed in Chapter Three. I begin by explaining my decision to undertake a qualitative investigation into students’ understandings of plagiarism, and discussing the importance of reflexivity to the research. I then briefly outline the research context, and introduce the student participants. Next, I outline my use of the qualitative interview as a method of data collection, and explain how I used general inductive analysis and discourse analysis in my readings of the interview data. I then briefly explain my attention to the study’s trustworthiness, and outline some ethical issues inherent in the study.

Choosing qualitative research

As noted in Chapter Two, although there is a growing volume of research presenting understandings of plagiarism in higher education, much of this focuses on the views of academic and teaching staff. Although some studies gather students’ perceptions of plagiarism, much of this information has been collected through questionnaires or surveys that require respondents to either mark their position on a Likert-type scale, or to provide a short written response to each question (see Chapter Two). As noted in Chapter One, there are only a handful of
studies involving focus groups or interviews with students regarding their perceptions of plagiarism (e.g., Gullifer & Tyson, 2010; Power, 2009), but few seem to have explored the consequences and implications of students’ views on plagiarisms beyond making recommendations for educative interventions in the areas of academic integrity and citation skills. Although some research refers to a “wealth of studies explaining the students’ perspective” on plagiarism (Flint et al., 2006, p. 146), relative to the total amount of literature on plagiarism, there seems to be a paucity of research reporting in-depth information on students’ understandings of plagiarism. In particular, little research has considered students’ understandings in relation to their broader study context.

The methodological choices I made throughout this study are guided by my theoretical lenses (see previous chapter), and by my research question: What are higher education students’ understandings and experiences of plagiarism policy and practice, and how can these inform higher education policy and practices towards better supporting students in this area? Specifically, I have chosen to take a qualitative approach to this study. Qualitative research emphasises people’s ‘lived experience’, and generally employs data collection methods such as observation, interviews, and document analysis (Cresswell, 2013; Macdonald et al., 2002). Through analysis of collected data, researchers are able to explore both “the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10, emphasis original; also see Kraus, 2005; Denzin, 2009), and how these meanings are related to the context(s) in which they occur. Exploring meanings is an important consideration in this research as a consequence of my background as a Learning Advisor (as I
explained in Chapter One). By examining the meanings students associate with plagiarism and academic writing, we are better able to consider how institutional plagiarism policies and practices could be structured to provide more effective support for students’ learning.

My exploration of meaning in terms of participants’ understandings and experiences of plagiarism aligns with my social constructionist view that there is no single objective truth to be found. Qualitative research methods allow for multiple readings and interpretations. They acknowledge that “[w]e know a thing only through its representations” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5), and that these representations may have multiple and complex meanings and interpretations (Burr, 2003; Denzin, 2009; Kraus, 2005), some of which may be contradictory (Grant & Giddings, 2002). From my social constructionist viewpoint, what interests me most in exploring the meanings students associate with plagiarism is the discursive resources the students draw on “to constitute themselves as subjects and the consequences of this in terms of power and their social and cultural positioning and responses” (Macdonald et al., 2002, p. 143). My interest in the students’ discursive resources guided my decision to collect data through in-depth research interviews, and to apply a discourse analytic approach to my analysis of the interview conversations.

In the following sections, I explain the practical methodological decisions I made regarding how I recruited my participants, conducted the research interviews, and examined the discourses the students drew on when they shared their understandings and experiences of plagiarism.
Consent and recruitment

Initially I obtained approval to carry out this research from the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee (reference code 12/148). This involved a process by which information on the study’s intended objectives and methodology was submitted to the committee, along with copies of the intended interview questions (Appendix D), the information for participants sheet (Appendix A), and participants’ consent form (Appendix B). The consent form outlined the participants’ right to withdraw from the project at any stage, and stressed the anonymity assured to all participants. The right of withdrawal was reiterated verbally to prospective participants at each point of contact throughout the research process.

I sought participants from the population of University of Otago undergraduate students currently enrolled in a first year paper\(^7\). I chose to recruit students from first year papers for a number of reasons. Firstly, I wanted to ensure my cohort contained students in their first year of university study, as research indicates that these students may be at the most risk of plagiarising (e.g., Franklyn-Stokes & Newstead, 1995; Johnson & Clerehan, 2005; Perry, 2010; Power, 2009). As the interviews were to take place in the second semester of the academic year, I assumed that first year students would have completed at least one written assignment in the previous semester, and been exposed to

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\(^7\) Because of the modular structure of degree programmes at the University, ‘first year’ papers attract students from all levels of study, from first year students through to postgraduate students. The majority of students taking first year papers are, however, students in their first year of university study.
information on the University plagiarism policy and practices. Secondly, first year papers at the University usually contain a mix of students from all levels of study, so this was a practical and efficient way to ensure a participant group containing students from a variety of levels of study. In order to attract participants from a cross-section of disciplines, I obtained permission to recruit students from Commerce, Science, and Humanities papers. In addition, one of the papers I recruited participants from was a service paper designed to teach transferrable academic skills. Consequently, enrolments in that paper included students from the spectrum of disciplines at the University.

In order to recruit participants, I spoke to students at lectures for the papers described above, offering chocolate as a thank you for participating in an interview. A total of 41 students indicated willingness to be contacted with information about the research. I subsequently emailed these students an outline of the research project (Appendix A), a copy of the consent form they would be requested to sign if they agreed to an interview (Appendix B) and an outline of the questions the interview would likely focus on (see page 94). From the 41 students I emailed, 24 scheduled an interview time. Three students failed to turn up to their scheduled interview, and I interviewed the remaining 21 over a five-week period in semester two of 2012.

It became evident during the interviews that two of the students had a prior interest in the topic of plagiarism and had consented to participate in the

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8 In New Zealand, the university academic year is split into two ‘semesters’. Semester One typically runs from late February/early March until late June, and Semester Two typically runs from mid-July until early November.
research for personal reasons. One of these students admitted to plagiarising previously, and explained that he wished to tell his story as a deterrent to other students. The other student strongly expressed his belief that the University had an overly “draconian” stance on plagiarism and reported that he wished to express his opinion in an effort to influence institutional change. These two participants seemed to view participating in an interview as an opportunity to effect change (Hoffmann, 2007; also see Jacobsson & Åkerström, 2012). There may have been other students in the cohort who had similar reasons for participating, but they did not make this explicit during their interviews.

Introducing the participants

Participants in this study were self-selected, but the participant group was broadly representative of the University student population as a whole in terms of gender, age and ethnicity (see Table 1). Of the 21 students I interviewed, most identified as New Zealand European/Pākehā⁹ students (n=13). One student identified as Māori, one as Pacific Islander¹⁰, two as Asian and seven either did not state their ethnicity or recorded it as ‘other’.¹¹ Although the participants represented a variety of ethnicities, the intention of this research was not to examine cultural differences in how plagiarism is understood. Information on ethnicity is presented here to illustrate that the participants reflected the broad make up of the general

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⁹ Pākehā is a term derived by Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand (Baker, 1945) to refer to ‘white’ New Zealanders or ‘New Zealand European’ (Barber, 1999). The use of the term Pākehā is contentious (Baker, 1945), however I use it in this study to acknowledge the privileges of the dominant ‘white’ culture in New Zealand (Addy, 2008).

¹⁰ Pacific Islander refers to people who identify as ethnically originating from an island in the Pacific (Nakhid, 2006).

¹¹ Some students recorded more than one ethnicity.
student population. Eight of the participants identified as male, and the remainder female.

Table 1: A demographic comparison of my research participants (n=21) and the wider University population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>My participants</th>
<th>University population*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8 (38%)</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13 (62%)</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ European/Pākehā / European</td>
<td>17 (81%)</td>
<td>74.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/unknown</td>
<td>7 (33%)</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These 2012 statistics include students studying at both undergraduate and postgraduate level (University of Otago, 2012)

Participants described a variety of previous university study experiences - 12 had entered university straight from high school or foundation year, and the remaining nine participants had either worked or studied prior to coming to university. One participant had a Bachelors degree, and another had a Masters degree. Two participants had completed a year at university before taking one or more gap years. Five of the participants had been in employment prior to commencing university study, with the time employed ranging from one year to 30 years. These differing experiences are a reflection of the variety of ages represented in my participant group, with 10 participants identifying as 19 or under, seven as between 20-24, two as between 25-34, and two as between 45-54. Sixteen of the participants had completed high school in New Zealand, three had

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12 ‘Foundation year’ is a single year certificate programme, designed to prepare students for university study. The programme emphasises students’ development of English language skills.
completed it overseas, and the remainder had studied both in New Zealand and overseas. Table 2 lists the research participants by codename (see following section), and provides an overview of their demographic details.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Current level of study</th>
<th>Previous Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carl</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>≤19</td>
<td>Other European</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>≤19</td>
<td>Māori &amp; NZ European/ Pākehā</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>≤19</td>
<td>NZ European/ Pākehā</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justine</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>≤19</td>
<td>NZ European/ Pākehā</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>≤19</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>≤19</td>
<td>NZ European / Pākehā &amp; Other European</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>Completed 3 university papers whilst in high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>≤19</td>
<td>NZ European/ Pākehā</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>≤19</td>
<td>NZ European/ Pākehā</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>≤19</td>
<td>NZ European/ Pākehā</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>≤19</td>
<td>NZ European/ Pākehā</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>Bachelors degree, 3 years working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>3rd year</td>
<td>Foundation year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>NZ European/ Pākehā</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>1 year university, 1 year working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirsten</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>Other European</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>2 years work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>Foundation year (x2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>NZ European/ Pākehā</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>1 year working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>Other European</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>1 year working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>3 years working, polytechnic diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>NZ European/ Pākehā</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>1 year university, 3 years working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>25 years working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugh</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>NZ European/ Pākehā</td>
<td>3rd year</td>
<td>Masters degree, 30 years working</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research interviews

All interviews were held in a private, closed room at the University’s Student Learning Centre, with the consent of each interviewee. This venue was chosen as it is a student-friendly space in the centre of the University campus, and is relatively easy to find. Tea and coffee were available for participants if they wished.

Prior to the commencement of their interview, each participant was advised of their right to terminate the interview or withdraw from the project at any stage. The anonymity of their identity, interview, and any subsequent contact was also re-iterated. Each participant was then invited to sign a consent form, and all participants willingly did so. Participants were also invited to fill out a form asking for basic demographic information (Appendix C). Throughout the thesis, all participants are named by codename (see Table 2). As part of the pre-interview discussions, each student was given the opportunity to choose their own codename for the study, however only one participant chose to do so. I chose codenames for the remaining participants using an Internet-based random name generator, and these bear no relation to the participants’ actual names.

The interviews were semi-structured in format with the basic interview schedule providing the framework for a conversation between the researcher and each participant (Kvale, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In order to fully
explore students’ understandings of plagiarism, the interviews included questions designed to elicit the students’ beliefs about the purpose of a university education, their views on assessment, and their conceptions of learning. I hoped that these questions would enable me to situate the students’ understandings of plagiarism in relation to their broader ideas about university study. However, the bulk of the interview questions were structured to gain an understanding of the students’ views on plagiarism policy, practices, and consequences.

The questions I asked in the interviews were informed by the broad themes in the literature (see Chapter Two) and in particular by other research gathering students’ perspectives on plagiarism, learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 1992; Blum, 2009; Devlin & Gray, 2007; Ford & Hughes, 2011; Power, 2009; Säljö, 2009). I also asked the students about their knowledge and experience of SafeAssign, the software that staff at the University are able to use, and make available to students to use, to check for text matching. The interviews took the form of a discussion, loosely based around the following pre-determined questions13 (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009):

- Why did you decide to come to University?
- Can you tell me about something you have learned recently?
- What do you actually mean by learning?
- How do you go about learning?
- What sorts of assessment tasks have you been asked to do at university?

13 The full list of questions the students were asked (excepting prompt questions and questions that were asked in response to a specific reply) is included as Appendix D.
• Why do you think universities require you to do assessment tasks?
• Can you give me an example of what you think plagiarism is?
• Why do you think students plagiarise?
• Do you know of any plagiarism occurring in your course?
• Have you heard of SafeAssign?

I prompted for further information, or asked related questions where appropriate in the interviews. Participants were emailed a copy of the (above) questions prior to their interview; therefore, some responses in the interviews may have been considered or pre-meditated. Arguably, this may have lead to richer data. Some students may also have researched plagiarism and plagiarism policy at the University prior to their interview, which may have impacted on the responses they gave.

The interviews constituted a turn-by-turn conversation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Mattson & Stage, 2003; Stage & Mattson, 2003) towards gaining an understanding of the students’ perceptions of, and beliefs about, plagiarism. Thus, the nature of the interviews was pre-determined by the conventions surrounding the qualitative interview process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Wetherell, 1999). I do not assume that the responses the participants gave during their interviews were a complete record of each students’ understanding of plagiarism, as the qualitative interview process impacts on what participants feel able to share (Kvale, 2006; Roer-Strier & Sands, 2014). As Cameron (2001, p. 145) explains: “It [was] not the case that respondents [were] simply imparting
information to a passive recipient. Rather they [were] actively constructing the accounts they give for a certain kind of recipient in a certain situation.”

Consequently, participants will have chosen what not to say, what to say, and how to say it. However, it is through examining and combining such partial perspectives, or situated knowledges that qualitative researchers can begin to make “rational knowledge claims” (Haraway, 1988, p. 589) about phenomena such as plagiarism.

I audio-recorded the interviews with the consent of each participant. During and after each interview, I also wrote fieldnotes in an attempt to capture what seemed to be the dominant themes or points of interest as well as the non-verbal aspects of the interview, such as participants’ apparent nervousness or perceived (dis)comfort in talking about particular topics. Although I anticipated that each interview would last around an hour, in reality they ranged in time from 36 minutes to 75 minutes. Immediately following each interview, I transferred the audio file into a secure folder on my computer and replayed it, checking for clarity and adding to my fieldnotes (I discuss my use of fieldnotes in more depth later in this chapter). The electronic audio files were then sent to an external, confidential transcriber for verbatim transcription. Once I received the completed transcripts, I checked them against the audio recordings. Participants were offered the opportunity to read and check the transcript of their interview, but none chose to do so. During the process of checking the transcripts, I added in aspects of the interview not recorded by the transcriber, for example, pauses and emphases. During this process, I also recorded further fieldnotes and used my notes.
Chapte r Four: Methodological journey

alongside the transcriptions to develop a list of themes that emerged from the interviews, against which to code the transcribed data.

Data analysis

In order to code the interview data I used HyperResearch coding software. Initially, I read each transcript several times to familiarise myself with the data and to immerse myself within it. This allowed me to identify key themes and contradictions within the data, adding to the list of themes I had identified from my fieldnotes. I then scrutinised each interview on an individual basis and began coding the data. Using Thomas’ (2006) inductive analytic approach, I looked for the themes I had identified in the fieldnotes and in my initial readings of the data. As I worked through the interviews I further added to the list of themes, leading to a list of 77 themes against which I had matched the data. I then worked through these 77 themes, grouping together themes that were similar, and adding descriptions of each theme. After this process of data reduction (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Thomas, 2006) I had a list of 17 broad themes. Going back to the interview data, I re-coded the students’ responses against these 17 themes. Throughout the whole coding and analysis phase I focused on responding to my primary research question as outlined in Chapter One: What are higher education students’ understandings of plagiarism policy and practice?

Once I had completed this analysis of the students’ interview responses about plagiarism, I went back through the interview transcripts and used the same
process to code the students’ responses about learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education. Specifically, I was looking to respond to my secondary research questions (as stated in Chapter One):

- Is there a connection between students’ understandings of learning and assessment and their understandings of plagiarism?
- Is there a connection between students’ beliefs about the purpose of a university education and their understandings of plagiarism?

In keeping with my social constructionist lens, and in order to answer my research questions, I was also interested in the discourses the students drew on when they discussed plagiarism, learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education. I explored the discourses the students drew on by working through the coded interview data, noticing both the emerging themes and the language the students used in their interview conversations. Through noticing the language the students used and the images or ideas this language invoked, I began to identify the discourses students were drawing on in their explanations. Using HyperResearch, I searched through the themes to examine the discursive strategies participants used within a particular coding. For example, I noted that when students were discussing what I had coded as ‘referencing’, some drew on the language of learning, whilst others drew on the language of rules and procedures (or both). Furthermore, I noticed that although some students talked overtly about their fear and/or anxiety about (unintentional) plagiarism, others indicated fear and anxiety through other discursive means (for example, heightened breathing). In keeping with a discourse analytic approach, I focused on identifying the dominant discourses, and paid particular attention to the
constructions of plagiarism participants presented in their interviews. In the following section, I explain in more detail how I analysed the discourses in the students’ conversations.

**Analysing discourse**

Discourse analysis is a way of examining how the language people use, either in spoken or in textual form, constructs realities and identities (Gee, 2005). In particular, discourse analysis is attentive to the ways in which power, knowledge and agency emerge through language. The aim of a discourse analytic approach is to illuminate patterns of thought or being through noticing the way people have used language to create meaning, with particular attention to notions of power and agency (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Parker, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1994; Wetherell, 1999). For the purpose of this research, therefore, the literature I drew on, the students’ interviews, and the documents I analysed were not just texts, transcripts, or data – they were examples of discourses (Potter & Wetherell, 1994).

Underlying my use of discourse analysis was the idea that discourses are “fluid and often opportunistic” (Carbine, 2001, p. 269) in the sense that at any given time, we may draw on a number of different discourses to conceptualise a particular issue or topic. In this study, following Gee (2000), I was interested in the specific language that students used to talk about plagiarism, learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education; the meanings expressed or
implicit in their language use; and the rhetoric devices they drew on in their conversations. More specifically I was interested in the ways in which the students conceptualised plagiarism. Throughout the thesis I also consider the ways in which plagiarism researchers and policy makers conceptualise plagiarism. Through using discourse analysis I aimed to “reveal the operation of these constructive processes” (Gee, 2000, p. 190) and examine the subjectivities that the students’ discussions on plagiarism revealed.

In my analysis of the data, I was interested in not only what was said, but also what was not said (Parker, 1992). Therefore, in the remainder of the thesis, while I attend to the way(s) in which an interview respondent framed plagiarism, I also consider the ways in which they chose not to frame it. For example, I acknowledge when a participant may have chosen not to directly answer a question (e.g., see Cameron, 2001). I consider other aspects of speech, such as pauses and hesitations, or ‘umming’ and ‘aahing’ to be equally important as speech, as they often work as discursive markers (Cameron, 2001) that have a function in speech. In my analysis therefore, I attended to the whole text, not just what is coherently stated.

In addition to examining the discourses the students drew on in their interviews, in the remainder of this thesis, I also examine the context of these discourses. In Chapter Two I examined the discourses that appear in existing plagiarism literature. In Chapter Six I examine the discourses that appear in the official policy and information on plagiarism made available to students at the University of Otago. In Chapter Seven I explore the discourses the students drew
on in their conversations about learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education. In Chapters Six and Seven I consider the ways in which the students spoke about plagiarism in light of the broader University policy documents. As Gee (2000, p. 190) states, “[t]he fact is that words give meaning to contexts just as surely as contexts give meaning to words. Words and contexts are two mirrors facing each other, infinitely and simultaneously reflecting each other”. In this study, therefore, the context of the students’ interviews is just as important as what they actually said.

In order to identify the discourses at play in the interviews and in the literature and policy material I examined, in the rest of the thesis I also focus on identifying what Wetherell and Potter (1992, p. 90) term ‘interpretative repertoires’: “broadly discernible clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech often assembled around metaphors or vivid images.” In any given interaction, people usually draw on more than one discourse, and these discourses may often seem contradictory (Cameron, 2001). These contradictory discourses work to further illuminate the ways people position both themselves and the issue or concept under discussion. In the thesis I use discourse analysis to look for the common threads and influences exposed by the language the students used. I consider both the discourses the students’ conversations revealed, and the discourses that their use of language create (Cohen et al., 2007).

My aim in identifying the discourses in the University documents I reviewed, and in the students’ interview responses, is to recognise the effects of the discourses used (Fairclough, 1992). Discourses illuminate relations of power.
Because they “produce the objects of which they speak” (Carbine, 2001, p. 268), discourses can reveal what is a person’s truth at particular moments or in particular situations, and the power outcomes implicit in these truths (Carbine, 2001; Fairclough, 1992; Parker, 1992; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). For example, in Chapter Two of this thesis, I highlighted that when a researcher sees plagiarism as a moral issue, plagiarisers are situated as immoral or bad, and people who do not plagiarise as moral or good. Therefore, from this perspective, plagiarism is something that immoral people do, and the idea that it can happen unintentionally is not available from within a moral discourse. By examining the ways in which the students positioned themselves through the discourses that they drew on in their interview responses, I am able to gain insights into the power structures at play in their study context. Through considering students’ responses alongside University policy discourses, I am also able to examine which discourses are powerful, or have more authority or validity within the context of the University (Carbine, 2001), how the students position themselves in relation to these broader institutional discourses, and how institutional power shapes and/or is resisted in the students’ meaning making.

In addition to language being a means of constructing the self, the interactive nature of talking means that in spoken dialogue we are both speakers and listeners. The implication of this is that all participants in a conversation play a role in the construction of self (Cameron, 2001). Discourses are a means through which people define themselves and their identities. Whenever people talk or interact with others they are “telling [their] listeners something about [them]selves” (Cameron, 2001, p. 170) and demonstrating their chosen identity.
(Cameron, 2001; Honan et al., 2000). Any one person’s account of an event or phenomenon will be different according to both the context and function of the account (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Discourse analysis therefore provides a way to explore the particular identities people choose in a given context, and to examine the ways in which people construct these identities and differentiate themselves from others, through language. In this research, the students positioned themselves within their view of what was acceptable within the format of a research interview, but they were also being positioned by me, which in turn affected how they positioned themselves, and so on. Cameron (2001, p. 145) explains that, “the evidence research subjects provide when they interact with a researcher may be enabled, constrained, and in general shaped by the fact that what is going on is a particular kind of talk”. The students were making sense of plagiarism within the bounds of the language available to them, and within what they deemed it was acceptable to say in the interview situation. This required “negotiating identities for themselves … identities [that were] not… fixed and permanent, reflective of an essential and true self, but fluid and shifting constructions reflecting the contingencies of their accounting situation,” that is, the interview (Wetherell, 1999, p. 265). Furthermore, what the participants said in the interviews will also have been affected by how they positioned me – if they positioned me as part of the institution (academia) they may not have felt able to criticise it, or to speak freely of their views. However, as Haraway (1988, p. 590) argues, qualitative research “seek[s] those ruled by partial sight and limited voice – not partiality for its own sake, but, rather, for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible.”
This thesis explores students’ understandings of plagiarism through examining the discourses that appear in University policy about plagiarism and in our interview conversations. However, as a researcher, my understanding of both the policy and the interviewees’ accounts are in turn informed and constrained by the discourses in which I operate, and my reading of both the literature and the data are a reflection of this. Consequently, the research presented here could be seen as “nothing more than the discourse…trying to secure another within its bounds” (Wittgenstein, cited in Jones, 1991, p. 86). The interview data for this research represents a snapshot of a moment in time for each participant, analysed at a particular moment in time for the researcher. As such, both the data and the analysis are “determined and dated by a particular task that is at once something we do in the present, and infiltrated by traces of past and future readings” (McHoul & Grace, 1998, p. 23). However, perhaps because of this, a discourse analysis approach is valuable as it can provide “great insight into the complexities of agency as lived experience” (Clegg, 2005, p. 153, see previous chapter). Discourse analysis, therefore, provides insight into the participants’ agency in terms of how they make sense of both plagiarism and our research interaction, and my own agency as researcher (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

All research is necessarily a view from somewhere (Haraway, 1988), and in this thesis I present my situated account of the research process and my research data, as I understand them, based on my theoretical framework (Chapter Three). In the following section, I explain the reflexive practices I engaged in throughout my research journey to ensure the trustworthiness of this project, and outline the ethical considerations that informed these.
Practising reflexivity

From a social constructionist and poststructuralist viewpoint, researchers as well as their research subjects are embedded in discourses. Consequently, social constructionist and poststructuralist researchers often employ reflexivity “to better represent, legitimize, or call into question their data” (Pillow, 2003, p. 297, also see Grant & Giddings, 2002). ‘Reflexivity’ is a contested term in qualitative research (D’Cruz, Gillingham, & Melendez, 2007). In this thesis I use ‘reflexivity’ to refer to my (self)conscious awareness of the participants in the research, the analytical judgements I made throughout the research process, the effects of the research, and how I am located in relation to it (Cohen et al., 2007; Pillow, 2003). Reflexivity involves foregrounding the inevitable bias a researcher brings to their work as a result of their individual world-view (Haraway, 1988). As such, reflexivity is concerned both with researchers’ epistemological and ontological beliefs and with the outcomes of their research (Pillow, 2010). Reflexivity is an ongoing process throughout a research project (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

In Chapter One I outlined my personal background, and in doing so I revealed some of the assumptions I brought to this research from my life experience. In Chapter Three, I outlined my ontological and epistemological beliefs, and provided an explanation of my theoretical lenses. Through presenting this information, I have attended to the confessional aspect of reflexivity in the thesis (Pillow, 2003, 2010). However, alongside my background and beliefs, my involvement at the University where this study took place embeds me in relations
of knowledge and power with my participants and with my colleagues (including my supervisors) who are responsible for making and/or adhering to the policies and practices I may challenge in this research. I am both constrained and enabled by the discursive contexts in which I interact; these impact on what I think, say, and write about plagiarism.

Alongside my role as a PhD student, at the time of this research I continued to be employed at the University’s Student Learning Centre as a learning advisor. In this role, I facilitated academic skills workshops for undergraduate students, and was available to students for one-to-one consultations for academic skills advice/assistance. Although I did not make this role explicit to the students I interviewed, it is possible that some of them may have been aware of my dual role. In addition, all of the research interviews were held at the Centre. My role as a learning advisor may have impacted on this research, as “the power relations that are embodied in such situations” (Malone, 2003, p. 803) may have influenced what participants felt they were able to say during the interview (also see Hoffmann, 2007; Roer-Strier & Sands, 2014; Scheurich, 1995). Alternatively, it is possible that my belief that the students may have been constrained in what they were able to say during the interview may have in fact influenced my reading of their conversations and shaped how I wrote about the data (Kvale, 2006; Roer-Strier & Sands, 2014).

Pillow (2010, p. 271; also see Pillow, 2003) urges qualitative researchers to consider reflexivity as “something more uncomfortable” or dangerous than confession. Pillow’s notion of dangerous reflexivity calls for researchers to engage
in practices that uncover and challenge their taken-for-granted beliefs. In order to achieve this, she advocates that researchers map their thinking throughout the research project, creating a resource they can reflexively return to throughout the research process in order to challenge their assumptions. Pillow advocates three particular practices towards this resource; keeping a research log, writing fieldnotes, and journaling (Pillow, 2010, also see Miles & Huberman, 1984; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Throughout the current research, I engaged in all three of these practices. I carefully documented my processes, including recording notes, documenting my research process, and writing a research journal. Revisiting my personal writing throughout my research journey enabled me to challenge my own thinking and recognise where my knowledge-making may have been based on an emotional response or on my personal assumptions and values, rather than on careful consideration of the participants’ conversations. I was also able to reflect on my own uncertainties in my analysis and thus foreground doubt (Grant & Giddings, 2002) in my examination of the students’ understandings of plagiarism. The foregrounding of doubt often led me to further examine and consider the discourses the students drew on, challenging my assumptions. My personal writing throughout this project also became a rich resource in my research journey.

**Trustworthiness**

Although this research is concerned with further understanding higher education students’ understandings of plagiarism, rather than with attempting to uncover the
truth about their understandings, it is nevertheless important to attend to the trustworthiness or credibility of the research (Freeman et al., 2007; O’Brien, Harris, Beckman, Reed, & Cook, 2014; Salner, 1989; Thomas, 2006). Lincoln and Guba (1985) put forward four criteria that qualitative researchers should address to ensure the trustworthiness of their research. These are that the research should be; credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. Trustworthiness provides confidence “that the conclusions are not unreasonable, that another researcher facing the data would reach a conclusion that falls in the same general ‘truth space’” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 22).

I endeavoured to ensure the trustworthiness of this research in the following ways. Firstly, in order to ensure the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research, this thesis provides a careful and accurate description of my epistemology (Chapter Three) and subsequent methodological choices (this chapter). This detail works to provide a thorough rationale for my analysis and conclusions in the following chapters (Miles & Huberman, 1984; O’Brien et al., 2014). Secondly, throughout my analysis of the interview data, I repeatedly consulted the plagiarism and other relevant literature, searching for research that might either confirm or discredit my analyses. Thirdly, I have taken every opportunity to discuss the research data and my analysis with colleagues. In particular, I have shared the interview transcripts with my supervisors, and at all stages of the research engaged with them in discussions about my analytical decision-making. In addition, I have discussed my findings with other colleagues at the University, either informally or through facilitating or participating in internal workshops and seminars. I have also taken opportunities to present my
findings at national and international conferences in higher education with an explicit aim of seeking feedback on my research. I make no claims to the transferability of this study as, consistent with a discourse analysis approach, my intention was to produce research that reports on the discourses drawn on by the participants in this study, rather than generalisable or transferrable research results. Instead I have focused on transparency so that the credibility of the results and conclusions is clear, and the study can be replicated in other contexts. Notably, although the study is not statistically generalisable, qualitative research can provide a basis for what Patton (2002, p. 243) refers to as “logical generalisation”, or theory building that can inform policy and practices across contexts.

Ethical considerations

In this study, I attended to “procedural ethics” requirements (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 269) through attaining ethical consent to carry out this project. I have also reflected on possible “ethics in practice” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 269) throughout the course of the study. Although it is never possible to fully predict ethical problems one might encounter in research involving human participants (Malone, 2003), my reflections did lead me to anticipate two potential ethical issues prior to carrying out the study. Firstly, I anticipated that participating in an interview might provide a catalyst for emotional (di)stress for some participants. Consequently, before the first interview, I ensured that I obtained the contact information for the University’s health and professional services, in case they were
needed. As noted, I also advised each student that they could terminate the interview at any time.

A second ethical consideration was that of anonymity. Because the students I interviewed all attended the same University, and participant recruitment was a public act, there was the possibility that participants may be identifiable based on information they discussed in the interview. In order to ensure participants’ anonymity, I removed any details from the interview transcripts that might identify them, including any department they may be studying in, particular paper names, names of other students, lecturers or services, etc. I also removed anything that participants said in their interviews that might allow them to be identified through some other means (for example, their previous study location).

Summary

In this chapter I have outlined my research methodology: how my theoretical framework has informed my research methods and the methodological decisions I made throughout the course of the study. First, I introduced my 21 participants, and explained the interview process. I outlined how I examined the data using an inductive and discourse analytic approach, and then explained how I practiced reflexivity throughout this research and attended to the trustworthiness and ethical considerations inherent in the study. In the following chapters, I consider the understandings of plagiarism, learning, assessment, and the purpose of a
university education that the students shared with me. I pay particular attention to the discursive resources the students drew on in their accounts. In Chapter Five I present an overview of the students’ understandings of plagiarism. In Chapter Six, I explore the discourses the students drew on when discussing plagiarism, and relate these to the discourses evident in the University policy and information on plagiarism. In Chapter Seven I examine the discourses the students drew on when they discussed learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education, and how these relate to the discourses they drew on when discussing plagiarism. In the final chapter I draw together the literature, and my analysis of the discourses the students drew on. I conclude by offering some suggestions as to how we might move forward in developing more effective policies and practices in relation to plagiarism.
happening, however, the inclusion of ‘seldom’ in this statistic indicates that the proportion of students who think it ‘never’ happens (and therefore presumably do not know of any actual incidences) may be even lower than 23%. In the interviews, students who reported knowledge of plagiarism occurring invariably recounted a story of deliberate plagiarism, which seems to reflect a belief by these students that plagiarism is a deliberate behaviour. Institutional data, however, shows that intentional plagiarism accounts for just over one quarter of reported plagiarism at the University (SA report), therefore unintentional plagiarism is more prevalent than ‘dishonest’ plagiarism at the University. It is interesting then that the students more commonly perceived plagiarism as intentional, and recounted stories of deliberate behaviour. When discussing plagiarism during interviews:

A few of the students appeared to believe that ‘tons’ of plagiarism was common in the university. For example, Matt reported, “tons of people do it,” and explained:

I know a lot of instances really in my life at university. I’ve only had three semesters and there’s a lot of people that just go around and copy and paste their works and they’ll just pay them like 20 or 30 dollars, and if they just send through the assignments from last year, they can see what they’ve done before they’ve even got the assignment themselves. So spend at least go through, spend half an hour, change a few words around, hand it in, you know, miles before the due date and then that’s them kind of, that’s a paper done for them. It’s pretty hard to stop them in a way.

Leroy also thought plagiarising was a “routine” behaviour for some students. David expressed a similar view of plagiarism being common, stating, “sometimes even good people do it, because it’s just everyone doing it”. Although in their interviews Matt, Leroy and David all expressed their opinion that deliberate plagiarism is wrong, they all seemed to share the view that is a survival strategy for some students at university. It also appeared that students who knew of specific (deliberate) plagiarism occurring thought the practice was common, whereas students who did not know of any incidences thought plagiarism was rare. Although the focus of this study is not prevalence, it is worth noting that students’ perceptions of the prevalence of plagiarism may be affected by their understanding of what behaviours are included as plagiarism.
Chapter Five: Students’ understandings of plagiarism

Introduction

In this chapter I provide an overview of the research data. Specifically, I examine the contested understandings of plagiarism expressed by the students in this study. I pay particular attention to the contradictions within and between the interviews, as well as the broad themes that emerged within and across them. In this chapter I present an overview of the students’ understandings in order to commence addressing the research question “what are higher education students’ understandings and experiences of plagiarism policy and practices?” I refer to existing plagiarism literature to highlight where the students’ responses are either reflective of, or contradictory to, other research on students’ understandings of plagiarism. I start by explaining the differences in how the interviews progressed, and provide some possible explanations for this. I then discuss the varying definitions of plagiarism that the students articulated. I follow this with an outline of the students’ beliefs about who plagiarises, and why, and present the students’ understandings about unintentional plagiarism and how plagiarism relates to knowledge and learning. Finally, I discuss the students’ views on plagiarism policy at the University.

As I explained in the introduction to this thesis, the focus of my study is to explore the ways in which students understand plagiarism. As noted in Chapter Four, participants were drawn from first year papers; however, there was a variety of ages and experiences of study represented in the cohort. As I also noted, there was considerable variation in the length of the interviews. I had anticipated the
interviews would each take around an hour; however, some were quite short (36 minutes), whilst others were substantially longer (75 minutes). Despite the differences in interview length, the majority of the interviews lasted about 45 minutes. The differences in interview length seemed to reflect the age and life experience of each participant. Interviews with mature students (particularly Hugh, Aaron, Eric and Christian) generally lasted longer than interviews with younger students straight from high school (notably, Emily, Lydia, Marie, Monica and Vanessa). Mature students seemed to have a lot more to say, and illustrated the points they made with reference to their life experiences. The mature students all problematised plagiarism to a greater degree than their younger peers and, in particular, they all questioned whether behaviours such as collaboration or poor referencing skills should be considered plagiarism.

In contrast to the mature students in this study, the younger students seemed to have a more basic understanding of plagiarism and were more likely to view it as simply intentional copying. Very few of the cohort talked about collusion, and no one mentioned self-plagiarism. Younger students were more likely to express acceptance of the University policy and the official information available to students on plagiarism. That participants’ understandings of plagiarism seemed to vary according to their ages and/or life experience is consistent with theories of how students develop understandings of knowledge. For example, Perry (1970) proposed that students move through nine stages of knowing in a developmental process. This process starts from viewing knowledge in terms of duality (right/wrong, good/bad, etc.), through to a commitment to a set of values and knowledges alongside a respect for the values and knowledges of
others. Similarly, Baxter Magolda (1992) charted students’ ways of knowing and mapped a developmental process from a simplistic view of knowledge and knowing through to more complex understandings.

At times throughout the interviews it seemed that my questioning challenged the students’ understandings of plagiarism and plagiarism policy, and often they would begin to hesitate and show signs of uncertainty or confusion before indicating more explicitly an uncertainty about their understanding of what behaviours are considered to be plagiarism. I discuss this further in the following section. On several occasions I had the uncomfortable impression that interviewees, particularly the younger students, left the interview more confused and possibly more anxious about plagiarism than when they arrived.

Defining plagiarism

Across the interviews, students expressed a broad range of definitions or understandings of plagiarism. Some of the students explained plagiarism as “copying and pasting” text, whereas others had more complicated understandings of plagiarism. There was also some variation in the students’ beliefs regarding whether plagiarism that occurs without intent to deceive should be considered plagiarism. Other plagiarism literature has also reported variance or confusion in students’ understandings of what behaviours constitute plagiarism (e.g., Bond et al., 2013; Löfström & Kupila, 2012; Roig, 1997). Further, some research has found that although students are often able to provide a clear definition of
plagiarism, they cannot necessarily apply their definition to practice (e.g., Bond et al., 2013; Power, 2009). Gullifer and Tyson (2010, p. 499) speculate that such confusion might suggest students’ beliefs in the “existence of a concrete and agreed upon definition of plagiarism somewhere ‘out there’,” along with a concurrent inability to fully articulate or recall this definition. Responses from the students in this study also indicate this may be the case.

Several students held the view that plagiarism is copying text verbatim into a written assignment without acknowledging the source. For example, Emily defined plagiarism as “copying another person’s words to use in your own context without sort of actually saying, well this came from here.” Similarly, Penny explained plagiarism as when you “use another person’s work and just copy down exactly what they said in their book or in their article, and not make it clear and reference that it’s really someone else’s work.” Although these explanations seem to indicate a view that plagiarism is a deliberate act, Penny went on to express her awareness that plagiarism can occur unintentionally through “forgetting to reference it properly”. In contrast, Emily clearly stated her belief that plagiarism is a deliberate act and, even though she related the story of a flat-mate who had not deliberately copied another student but was accused of plagiarism as a result of suspected unauthorised collusion, she did not vary her expression that plagiarism is an intentional behaviour.

Other students acknowledged that plagiarism is a complex issue. For example, Christian explained, “I think there are clear cut cases and I think there are cases that are [a] bit more grey.” David’s understanding of plagiarism was
notable in that his use of the word ‘plagiarism’ included all academic dishonesty behaviours; his responses intertwined examples of textual features such as copying and pasting from the Internet and poor referencing, with other cheating behaviours such as taking illicit materials into exams, and impersonation. Early in his interview when I asked David to give an example of plagiarism he responded: “Plagiarism, in my opinion, the way I see it, is someone taking a piece of paper that has answers for an exam, and he goes in the exam and just answers from that paper.” However, later he spoke of plagiarism in terms of failing to reference or acknowledge source material in written assignments.

Across the interviews, students also expressed varied viewpoints as to whether plagiarism refers simply to using another’s words, or to using other people’s words and/or ideas. Lisa stated outright her view that plagiarism encompasses both words and ideas. She explained that plagiarism is “either quoting someone verbatim without adequately referencing them or using someone’s idea without adequately referencing them.” In contrast, Vanessa explained plagiarism as simply copying and pasting text and using it without acknowledging the source. When I asked her for clarification on her definition of plagiarism, she stated: “I don't think copying and putting it in your own words is plagiarism. Just if you copy it and then just paste it in their words,” indicating a belief that plagiarism refers only to using another’s words. Vanessa expressed the belief that if she can effectively paraphrase a text, she has “done the learning” and is therefore not plagiarising, as by learning it, the idea is now hers. This seems to reflect a view that plagiarism is simply repetition without learning, and that for Vanessa, plagiarism was defined not simply by intent, but by whether or not
learning had occurred. One implication of this view is that Vanessa may be at risk of (unintentionally) plagiarising in her written assignments.

Despite the diverse definitions of plagiarism students gave in the interviews, most understood plagiarism to involve the use of another’s words and/or ideas without acknowledgment. The majority of students expressed their belief that plagiarism can happen unintentionally, with the exception of Emily (as discussed above), and Aaron and Hugh, both mature students who expressed a view that plagiarism refers only to deliberate or intentional cheating.

The prevalence of plagiarism

In the interviews, students expressed a range of views about the prevalence of plagiarism at the University of Otago. Most seemed unwilling or unable to comment on how common or otherwise plagiarism is at the University. When I asked, “do you know of any plagiarism happening?” the most common response was “no”. This seems to contradict other data from the University that reports that only 23% of students thought plagiarism seldom or never occurs in their course (Bond et al., 2013). This discrepancy might be explained by the wording in the University questionnaire. The questionnaire did not ask students if they knew of any plagiarism happening, rather it asked students how often they thought it happens. However, the inclusion of ‘seldom’ in this statistic indicates that the proportion of students who think it ‘never’ happens (and therefore presumably do not know of any actual incidences) may be even lower than 23%. In my research,
excepting Emily (as discussed earlier) the few students who reported knowledge of plagiarism occurring invariably recounted a story of deliberate plagiarism, which seems to reflect a belief by these students that plagiarism is a deliberate behaviour. Institutional data, however, shows that intentional plagiarism accounts for just over one quarter of reported plagiarism at the University (Bond et al., 2013); therefore, unintentional plagiarism is apparently more prevalent at the University than plagiarism from intentional dishonesty. It is interesting, then, that the students in my study more commonly perceived plagiarism as an intentional behaviour, and recounted stories of deliberate behaviour when discussing plagiarism during interviews.

Despite most students denying knowledge of any plagiarism at the University, a few students spoke explicitly about their belief that (deliberate) plagiarism was common in the university. For example, Matt reported, “tons of people do it,” and explained:

I know a lot of instances really in my life at university. I’ve only had three semesters and there’s a lot of people that just go around and copy and paste and even sell stuff from last year. You know, if they’ve got like a good mark and they’ll just pay them like 20 or 30 dollars, and if they just send through the assignments from last year, they can see what they’ve done before they’ve even got the assignment themselves, and then they’re able to just go through, spend half an hour, change a few words around, hand it in, you know, miles before the due date and then that’s them kind of, that’s a paper done for them. It’s pretty hard to stop them in a way.

Leon also thought plagiarising was a “routine” behaviour for some students.

David expressed a similar view of plagiarism being common, stating, “sometimes
even good people do it, because it’s just everyone doing it”. Although in their interviews Matt, Leon and David all expressed their opinion that deliberate plagiarism is wrong, they all seemed to share the view that it is a survival strategy for some students at university. Interestingly, students in my study who knew of specific (deliberate) plagiarism occurring thought the practice was common, whereas students who did not know of any incidences thought plagiarism was rare. Although the focus of this study is not prevalence, it is worth noting that students’ perceptions of the prevalence of plagiarism may be affected by their understanding of what behaviours are included as plagiarism, and by their own experiences of/encounters with students’ academic behaviour.

Of the students who stated that they knew of plagiarism occurring at the University, only one admitted to having plagiarised. Although I did not ask the students directly if they had plagiarised, David recounted some of his “cheating” practices at a previous institution. As mentioned above, David used the words ‘plagiarism’ and ‘cheating’ synonymously throughout the interview. He described cheating behaviours as being “common” among students, and suggested that students have to cheat in order to do well and achieve good grades. David was adamant however, that despite never having been “caught,” this behaviour was in his past, as for him it was not effective practice and he was able to earn “better marks” without cheating. When I asked David why he had chosen to participate in an interview on plagiarism, he told me that he wanted to tell his story “so other students can learn from [his] mistakes.”
Although many of the students discussed the possibility that they might unintentionally plagiarise in their written assignments, none expressed the concern that they may have previously submitted work that contained unintentional plagiarism. Students seemed to think that if they had not been accused of plagiarism, then they had not plagiarised. This view seemed to contradict the belief that students also expressed, that they needed to learn and practise how to reference and avoid plagiarising before they could do so effectively. I return to the links between learning and plagiarism in subsequent chapters.

Students who plagiarise

Most of the students provided a description of the type of student who they thought might deliberately plagiarise in response to my question, “how do you think a student might avoid plagiarising?” Commonly, the description was of a student who had poor academic skills, a poor understanding of the subject topic, or poor time management with a propensity to leave assignments until the last minute. Leon explained this in his interview:

If they run out of time, they [are] pretty stressed and they don’t know what to do. The only way they can get out of this basically is just leave a blank page, or write something on it, or copy.

The descriptions participants gave of a student who they thought might plagiarise often contained a moral judgement, and in these descriptions, plagiarism was perceived as a choice or something students might “resort to”, usually because of poor time management, or lack of focus on their academic studies. Often the description given was of a student who wished to gain better marks. Leon
suggested that students who “want a result” might perceive plagiarism as the only option available to them. Linked to this was the idea that students who are insecure about the quality of their own work may be tempted to plagiarise. Justine explained, “a person doesn’t think that their own ideas are valuable so they would steal somebody else’s.” This echoes the view in the literature that some students plagiarise because they do not believe they have sufficient originality in their assignment; therefore, they may deliberately overlook referencing some of the ideas they have sourced in order to bolster their perceived originality (Briggs, 2003).

Some of the students expressed a view that “lazy” students plagiarise. For example, Justine stated “It’s easier to copy someone else’s work than to think of your own,” and Vanessa indicated a similar opinion. Aaron held the view that “at 100 level I think it’s incompetence, at 300 level I think it’s probably laziness” revealing his belief that, beyond first year, unintentional plagiarism is reflective of laziness as students should essentially have the knowledge and ability to avoid plagiarising. Lydia also labelled students who plagiarise as “lazy”, but she had a slightly different explanation for this than the other participants. Most of the students who used the word “lazy” or a similar term seemed to be referring to students who “can’t be bothered” writing their assignment, or who leave it until the last minute. In contrast, Lydia explained lazy as someone who “can’t be bothered doing the rules around [referencing] or misunderstanding it.” When I probed further, Lydia stated: “I think [lecturers] scare them too much into like

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14 At the University of Otago, a “100 level” student is a first year student, and a “300 level” student is a third year student.
citing things. I’m absolutely terrified of [plagiarising], mortified,” thus revealing her belief that many students are too scared of the consequences to plagiarise.

Hannah expressed the view that students are at risk of plagiarising if they do not reference everything they write in their assignments. She explained that if you write an idea that someone else has published, whether or not you have read the published material, you are plagiarising. Although this is consistent with students’ views presented in other research (e.g., Thompson & Pennycook, 2008), for Hannah it meant that avoiding plagiarism was impossible, and essentially she was dependent on luck to avoid an accusation: “I know that probably the person marking it also hasn’t read all the available information out there and therefore, you know, maybe she or he hasn’t read that piece that I haven’t read that does say that.” Despite this view, Hannah did not show awareness that, according to her understanding of plagiarism, she had almost certainly plagiarised in past assignments, leading me to wonder if she believed that plagiarism is only plagiarism if you are ‘caught’. Although Hannah was the only student I interviewed who expressed a belief that she had to reference everything whether or not she had sourced it from another text, several students expressed dissatisfaction over the amount of references they believed necessary in their written assignments. Again, Hannah articulated this clearly:

The last assignment I did for [subject], I knew nothing about it until when I went to the first lecture, so absolutely everything that I wrote into my essay came from somewhere because I didn’t know it before. I felt like I handed in an essay that was full of brackets because the whole thing was got from somewhere.
Hannah’s statement is in direct contradiction to Justine’s view (earlier) that students plagiarise to make themselves seem more original or intelligent, and to Emily’s view (earlier) that ideas sourced from elsewhere do not need acknowledgement. Marie expressed her contrasting belief that she is able to create knowledge that is new (for her) and present it in her assignments, and that it is possible for many people to come up with the same idea. “I think everyone has similar ideas about stuff as well and that’s not necessarily stealing someone else’s idea, if you come up with it yourself. You know, you claim it as your own.” For Marie, it was possible to claim a single idea as her own and, regardless of whether or not someone else has had the same idea, she did not feel the need to find a reference for it.

Why students plagiarise

Students’ explanations for other students’ plagiarism drew directly on the descriptions that they also gave of a student who would plagiarise. As noted, many of the participants gave similar reasons as to why they thought someone might plagiarise. These included laziness, a lack of academic skills and poor time management. When first asked why a student might plagiarise, most participants took a moral view, suggesting that plagiarism is a “fault” of students who should know better. In apportioning blame in regard to plagiarism, the students’ implicit message was that plagiarising is necessarily a matter of choice. It seemed that when I asked the students why someone might plagiarise, they focused their answers on plagiarism as a deliberate act. These explanations resonated both with
those given by students in other research (e.g., Bond et al., 2013; Devlin & Gray, 2007); and staff explanations for students’ plagiarism (e.g., Bond et al., 2013; Flint et al., 2006).

The poor academic skills view was also evident when I asked participants about unintentional plagiarism. For example, Katie stated, “I think the main [reason for plagiarism] would be that people don’t realise.” A view of plagiarism as unintentional is consistent with other data from the University, which shows that most reported plagiarism relates to what the University labels as unintentional, or “naïve” behaviour (Bond et al., 2013, p. 41). When discussing unintentional plagiarism, students rarely spoke in moral terms, and did not apportion blame. They seemed to have a sympathetic view towards students who plagiarise unintentionally. The one exception to this was Carl who took a moral view of plagiarism, even when discussing unintentional plagiarism. Throughout his interview, he discussed plagiarism in criminal terms. For example, Carl stated a belief that it is possible to “commit unintentional plagiarism.” He went on to explain, “as police officers like to say, ignorance is no excuse” indicating a view that if the rules exist, it is the responsibility of individuals to ensure they follow them. Despite this, Carl seemed unsure about the consequences of plagiarising at the University:

I don’t really know what to think about it. In some senses, [a strict consequence is] good, because it will try to prevent people from taking work which is not their own. In other senses, it might unduly punish people who just commit, made a mistake. So, because as I say, there’s not much way to reliably tell who’s accidental and who’s deliberately stealing work, I have mixed feelings on the policy.
Carl was not the only student who clearly articulated a belief that it is students’ responsibility to avoid plagiarism. Most of the students expressed this at some point during their interview. Karina commented that plagiarism is easy to avoid, and that lecturers just need to give students the information about how to avoid it, so that students can act on the information. As discussed in Chapter Two, other research also reports as common the view that it is the students’ responsibility to avoid plagiarism, noting that this view is either made explicit or is implied through the language used in plagiarism policies (Bond et al., 2013; Grigg, 2010). I return to this point in the next chapter.

Although some participants, for example Vanessa, seemed to see plagiarism as “an easy option” for some students, other participants seemed unable to comprehend why students would plagiarise. These participants explained their belief that plagiarising takes a lot of effort and students would be better off putting that effort into doing the work properly in the first instance. The conflicting themes of ‘plagiarism as an easy option’ and ‘plagiarising as too difficult’ were also noted by Power (2009) in her analysis of students’ focus group conversations.

**Unintentional plagiarism**

Interestingly, participants talked about plagiarism differently when they were referring to the behaviours of other students than they did when they were referring to themselves. As mentioned above, when I first asked for an example
Chapter Five: Students’ understandings of plagiarism

or definition of plagiarism, many students indicated a view of plagiarism as a deliberate behaviour. Often, in this context, they discussed plagiarism using moral terms such as ‘wrong’ or ‘cheating’, which seemed to cast judgement on students who plagiarise. When speaking about plagiarism as a deliberate and (im)moral act, all of the students (except David and Hugh, who I discuss further below) were referring to the behaviours of other students. The participants seemed to reflect a view of plagiarism as a very black and white behaviour. Plagiarism was positioned unproblematically as a deliberate act, with participants stating that they would not plagiarise. In comparison, when I questioned further and, in particular, when either the student or myself broached the topic of unintentional plagiarism, definitions or understandings of plagiarism seemed to become less defined and more confused. The language the students used in this context did not reflect a moral judgement. Instead of using words like “wrong”, “cheating”, and “dishonest”, students used words like “mistake” or “unfair” as they acknowledged that plagiarism can be a textual feature such as poor paraphrasing or (unintentionally) inadequate referencing, rather than an outcome of deliberate cheating. Students’ views that other people plagiarise to “cheat”, but if they themself plagiarised it would be unintentional, seemed to also reflect a belief that lecturers understand what plagiarism is, but students do not. A view of lecturers (and the institution) as powerful or all-knowing, and students as weak or not knowing echoes the findings of other research. For example, students in Power’s (2009) research reported that lecturers tend to give warnings against plagiarism rather than teaching them about plagiarism. Arguably, issuing warnings indicates a belief that students already understand what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. I discuss this further in Chapters Six and Eight.
Chapter Five: Students’ understandings of plagiarism

Aaron firmly stated his belief that what the University labels unintentional plagiarism is not plagiarism at all. As mentioned above, Aaron held the view that plagiarism is by definition an intentional act, and incorrect or insufficient referencing due to lack of skills or knowledge should be labelled a “mistake”:

If you don't cite properly it can be treated as accidental or a mistake.
But I think that [plagiarism] is deliberate. I think that's the problem with it, I don't think you can do it accidentally. It's like sending someone else in to sit your exam for you.

Hugh was also adamant that plagiarism is a deliberate and dishonest behaviour, and expressed his belief that students would not plagiarise: “In general, students are very honest and they’re very considerate and they want to do the right thing so I’d really find it hard to believe that any student here would be dishonest.”

Although not going so far as to say that unintentional behaviours should not be called plagiarism, other students also indicated a view that unintentional behaviour should not be dealt with as dishonesty. As discussed in Chapter Two, some recent plagiarism literature similarly calls for a re-positioning of plagiarism as something other than dishonesty (e.g., Briggs, 2003; Howard, 1995). However, to date, most plagiarism policies in Australasian universities continue to cast both unintentional and intentional plagiarism as a dishonest act or breach of integrity by including them in dishonest practice or academic integrity policies (Grigg, 2010).

Plagiarism, knowledge, and learning

Some of the students’ understandings of plagiarism reflected a belief that knowledge can be owned. For Hannah, this seemed a simple idea: “If you have an
idea it’s yours. You own it just like if you made a cake. It’d be your cake.”

However, this directly contradicts her view (described earlier) that if she expressed an idea that was previously voiced by another (unaccessed) author, she would be plagiarising. Hannah’s contradictory views indicated a level of confusion about the ownership of knowledge, particularly about who owns knowledge and how they come to own it. Other students spoke of ideas or knowledge as “intellectual property”. When Hugh explained his beliefs about ownership of ideas and plagiarism he used a metaphor of patents. For Hugh, citation seemed to be the acknowledgement of some kind of academic patent. Other students used legal terms such as “intellectual property” in relation to plagiarism; however, plagiarism is not a legal concept (Posner, 2007), and therefore is not an illegal act. Some students spoke of the need to give people “credit” for their ideas, and expressed a view that this is the purpose of citation. Often in these instances, participants also noted that they would like to receive credit for their own ideas. Arguably, a view of knowledge as belonging to a person situates knowledge as a commodity, which I discuss further in Chapter Seven. The students in my study did not display an awareness or understanding of how knowledge is developed in academia; that not only is knowledge something that is constantly built on, but that knowledge building is defined and constrained by institutional and disciplinary conventions and practices (Briggs, 2003; Fairclough, 1989). Other research (e.g., Ashworth et al., 1997; Gullifer & Tyson, 2010) has also found that students seem not to understand how knowledge is developed in academia.

15For further discussion on intellectual property and copyright as they relate to plagiarism, see Blum, 2009; Posner, 2007; and Sutherland-Smith, 2008.
Many of the students spoke of plagiarism in terms of referencing or citation. Often, when I asked how students could avoid plagiarising, their responses focused on correct referencing. For example, Katie stated that plagiarism can be avoided “by referencing your information properly,” and Monica suggested that students should “just familiarise themselves with the style of referencing”. In contrast, Christian described plagiarism as, “simply a sign that [students] don’t probe enough into whatever material it is that they’re supposed to learn”. He seemed to think that plagiarism is the consequence of a superficial approach to learning, and an outcome of the student failing to think about or fully understand the material they are writing about. Christian suggested that plagiarism is a symptom of the much bigger problem of students not knowing how to learn, or misinterpreting what is expected of them at university. Several students put forward the idea that plagiarism should be measured by whether or not the accused student understands the plagiarised material. These students seemed to be calling for lecturers to place a greater focus on assessing subject content rather than academic skills like referencing. This view seemed reflective of the belief that avoiding plagiarism is linked to the mechanics of correct referencing, rather than to the broader concept of drawing on sources in the writing of academic texts. Danielle seemed to tacitly understand the need to understand source material in order to avoid plagiarising when she incorporated that material into her own assignments. She described a couple of views regarding how students plagiarise, then expressed her opinion that plagiarism is time consuming and difficult, and “it would just be better if you can understand what information you’re spouting.” For Danielle, referencing was less of a concern than understanding what she was
Plagiarism policy

When I asked about plagiarism policy at the University, many of the students responded by telling me what they understood about the consequences of plagiarism – largely, that the policy was an articulation of the sanctions for plagiarism. Most of the students understood that plagiarism (either intentional or unintentional) may result in expulsion; however, there were mixed views around the appropriateness of this. Some students thought such consequences were “fair”, whereas others expressed the opposite view, and used words such as “excessive” and “draconian”. In general, younger students were more likely to see formal consequences for plagiarism as fair, while the mature students were more likely to view plagiarism penalties as over the top. One explanation for this could be that the younger students were more likely to think of plagiarism as a deliberate act. In contrast, mature students, consistent with the research on ways of knowing discussed earlier (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 1992; Perry, 1970) seemed to have a better understanding that the University definition of plagiarism includes unintentional behaviours. Aaron, a mature student, was the exception in that he thought that severe penalties for plagiarism are fair. When I initially asked Aaron what he thought the consequences of plagiarism were, he replied, “I think they get dragged up in front of some star chamber of some description and read the riot act”. He went on to explain that penalties for plagiarism “seem to be in line with the
offence”. Aaron’s viewpoint could reflect his definition of plagiarism as an intentional behaviour (see earlier). Aaron’s view was more forceful than that of the other students, and he expressed it with conviction.

Despite repeating the words “I don’t have a problem with it” throughout his discussions on plagiarism policy and responses to plagiarism, it seemed that Aaron had a problem with what he viewed as an inequity between consequences for students and consequences for university staff who have plagiarised. He referred to a 2009 high profile example where a well-known member of staff at another New Zealand university was publicly accused of plagiarism in his recently published novel. The author had denied intent; however, Aaron repeatedly pointed out there were no “consequences” for the author, despite his academic position. He clearly articulated his view that it is unfair to sanction students when it seems that academic staff in New Zealand universities are not subject to the same regulations. A small number of other participants also briefly expressed their opinion that academic staff seem not to be subject to the same plagiarism rules and regulations as students at the University.

Many of the students admitted to never having read the University plagiarism policy, or the information for students regarding plagiarism, and indicated a lack of interest in doing so. Danielle claimed that she “tunes out” in lectures when warnings against plagiarism are voiced, as she had “no intention” of plagiarising. Emily indicated a sense of boredom with warnings against plagiarism, saying, “you get to a stage of university where it’s like, okay, yeah, I know what it is. All good. Not going to do it. Next thing.” Carl stated that he had never read
the policy because he believed he was “not going steal anybody’s work”. He qualified this by saying, “at least I’ll try not to accidentally steal anybody’s work, so I don’t need to know much about it”, indicating a view that avoiding (unintentional) plagiarism is easy. As I discussed in Chapter Two, other research has also reported that many students do not read policy information and have little awareness of what these documents actually say (Gullifer & Tyson, 2013; Power, 2009).

Although Carl was the only student who explicitly stated that plagiarism falls under the dishonest practice procedures at the University, most of the students expressed an understanding of plagiarism as dishonest. Only a few students seemed aware that unintentional plagiarism and deliberate plagiarism are dealt with separately under the University policy. For example, Carl stated:

If you’re found to have accidentally plagiarised a small bit, they might tell you about it and penalise you a part of your grade, whereas if you’ve stolen a massive bit, they’re just going to fail you and possibly suspend or even expel you.

The students’ views that both intentional and unintentional plagiarism are subject to punitive responses could be a reflection of the University policy which does not clearly differentiate between the responses to each. I return to this point in Chapter Six. Leon and Lisa both expressed their understanding that the University acknowledges two levels of plagiarism. However they seemed unaware that the distinction between the two levels is based on intent. Rather, like Carl, they spoke about the distinction being based on the “severity” of the plagiarism.
Justine spoke of “warnings” against plagiarism, and expressed uncertainty about whether the warnings and information her lecturers gave about plagiarism were designed to be helpful in assisting students to avoid plagiarising, or if they were intended as threats in order to deter students from plagiarising. Emily expressed the view that without lecturers’ vigilance in relation to plagiarism, “everyone would be doing it”. This view was also echoed by Danielle, who explained that “if the University ended up slacking off on its plagiarism policy, then it’d probably just encourage people to do it more often”, and “if they don’t get caught then they’ll obviously continue to plagiarise because they know they can get away with it”. Several other students also expressed a view that the University’s stated consequences for plagiarism are necessary as a deterrent. Despite expressing a view that consequences for plagiarism are necessary, Emily suggested that expulsion is not a good option:

Like they, they should get a rap around the knuckles first to sort of put them a line a bit and then like, right, sort it out. But yeah, I don’t think taking them out or suspending them or anything straight away is a fantastic option because then it sort of just makes the student go, ohh fuck you (laughs) and set more couches on fire.

Emily’s statement above seems to reflect a belief that it is possible for a student to be suspended or excluded from the University as a consequence of a single incidence of plagiarism. Emily, like students in other research (e.g., Gullifer & Tyson, 2010), viewed some sanctions as overly punitive and as potentially creating more problems, since they are likely to lead to resentment or rebellion.

The view that overly punitive responses to plagiarism may be unproductive was related to a belief that plagiarism should not be given so much
importance by the University. Hugh conceded the need for “rules” to ensure standards, but indicated a belief that the University’s rules on plagiarism were less than helpful when he said, “rules are necessary, but good rules are better than bad rules. And bad rules can be worse than none at all.” Students in other research have also expressed their view that plagiarism does not hold the same importance for them as it does for staff (e.g., Power, 2009), and therefore it is an external concept. Similarly, students in this study largely viewed plagiarism policy as a set of rules being (unnecessarily) imposed on them. Lydia seemed to not understand why the University had such a serious stance on plagiarism, and stated, “I just don’t think it should be so ridiculously important because there’s so many more things in the world that are more important than citing a piece of sentence.” Her view was that plagiarism is an insignificant problem compared to issues such as “world poverty and global warming”. For Lydia, the (to her) inexplicable importance of avoiding plagiarism was “ruining” her university experience. Throughout her interview, Lydia expressed anxiety that she might inadvertently plagiarise:

I will somehow get caught for plagiarism by accident, by accidentally forgetting to write something. I will get kicked out of the University or I’ll fail my paper. I will not be able to finish my degree and I’ll end up a bum on the street.

Although Lydia was the only student who explicitly expressed fear of plagiarising throughout her interview, other students admitted to being “anxious” that they may unintentionally plagiarise. In other research, fear has been highlighted as a common response by students to questions about plagiarism (e.g., Gullifer & Tyson, 2010).
Students’ reports of how much information they received on plagiarism and how to avoid it varied. Some students said that they received ample information, whereas other students indicated that they would appreciate more information, and more opportunities to learn about referencing and how to avoid plagiarism. Matt spoke about having warnings “drilled” into him by lecturers, but later indicated he would appreciate being given more information on how to avoid plagiarism. Although most of the students stated they received information on how to avoid plagiarism, over the course of the interviews I became aware that this was an area of tension. All of the students spoke about information or teaching they had received on avoiding plagiarism, however, many of them said they needed more. This seems to indicate that, either the students were not accessing the information they were given, or that the information was not being presented in a form they understood or considered useful. Some students mentioned that different “rules” in different subjects were confusing, and that they were often unsure of what was expected of them. I discuss the issue of discipline-specific academic conventions in more detail in Chapters Six and Eight.

Several students seemed to take the responsibility of avoiding plagiarism quite seriously. Lisa stated in her interview that it would be good to have “some sort of electronic tool” to run her assignments through to check for plagiarism. This was an interesting comment, as prior to the interview I emailed the students an outline of the questions I intended to ask. On this list was a question about SafeAssign. Later in the interview, when I asked Lisa to tell me what she knew about SafeAssign, she admitted that she had no knowledge of it, so “looked it up”

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16 SafeAssign is a text matching software that, despite being unable to detect plagiarism, is commonly referred to at the University as ‘plagiarism detection software’ (Bond et al., 2013)
before attending the interview. It seems that despite having read the information on SafeAssign, Lisa did not understand that it can be used as an educative tool. Other students also had little or no knowledge of SafeAssign, and several stated they had never been told how it worked or what it does, despite having to upload assignments through the software for scanning and marking. This is consistent with Bond et al’s (2013) findings that at the University of Otago, SafeAssign is being used predominantly as a method of plagiarism deterrence or detection, and its educative function is largely not used. Most students expressed a desire to know more about the software and, after the interview had formally finished many asked me to explain how it worked and what it did.

Summary

In this chapter I have presented an overview of the broad understandings of plagiarism that the students in my study expressed during their interviews. As noted throughout the chapter, it is evident that the understandings of plagiarism expressed by the students in this study are consistent with other reports of students’ understandings in other research. What was most notable was the wide variation in definitions of plagiarism given by students in this study. Younger students seemed less able to articulate their understandings of plagiarism. This appeared to be because they had a more limited knowledge of plagiarism and, in particular, a less comprehensive understanding of the ways in which it is possible to plagiarise unintentionally. Arguably, there is an irony here in that, due to their
lack of understanding of how plagiarism can occur, these students may be at greater risk of plagiarising.

Overall, it seemed that most students did not have a thorough understanding of what plagiarism is, or how to avoid it. Added to this, many did not seem to understand the University plagiarism policy, or the official responses to either intentional or unintentional plagiarism. This could be due to a number of reasons. One explanation is that, as became evident in the interviews, most of the students had not actually read the policy. Another explanation is that understanding plagiarism is not a simple matter, and students in their first year at university are unlikely to have developed a comprehensive understanding of the concept. In this study, older or more academically advanced students (students who were not strictly first year students) seemed to have a more sophisticated understanding of plagiarism. This suggests that understandings regarding citation, attribution, referencing, and plagiarism may be developmental and linked to the process of learning to write and be a student in academia. A further reason could be that some of the students’ understandings of plagiarism differed significantly from the University definition (for example, whether unintentional plagiarism is in fact plagiarism). Alternatively, students’ difficulties in understanding plagiarism may be because the University’s way of approaching and presenting information on plagiarism is not effectively communicating to students. In the following chapter, I examine the discourses present in the University plagiarism policy. I then highlight a number of discourses present in the students’ interview responses. I examine the similarities and disjunctures between the discourses in
the plagiarism policy and the discourses that the students drew on when discussing plagiarism.
Chapter Six

Discourses in policy and practice

Arguably, the definitions that determine what constitutes plagiarism are those within university policy. It is these definitions that all stakeholders in the university setting must abide by, and that set the parameters for reporting, investigating and penalising infringements. More importantly, it is these definitions that should be the benchmark for assessing how well students understand plagiarism. (Gullifer & Tyson, 2013, p. 2)

Much of the literature on plagiarism acknowledges that it is difficult to define. Gullifer and Tyson conclude that “a standard definition does not exist” (2013, p. 2), and Howard argues that it is unhelpful “to try to define it unambiguously” (2000, p. 473). Yet most higher education institutions have distinct policies on plagiarism that necessarily include a definition of plagiarism (Girgen, 2010). Price argues that in order to achieve consistency the policy ‘policies must treat plagiarism as something fixed and absolute” (Price, 2002, p. 89), despite the fact that plagiarism is a constructed phenomenon, rather than an occurring one, and is therefore neither fixed nor absolute (Howard, 1999). Consequently, institutional policies on plagiarism reflect specific historical and academic discursive traditions (Burr, 2003). Although there are, in the literature, calls to pay attention to or modify the discourses revealed in policies and information on plagiarism (for example, see Howard, 1999; Price, 2002), to date there has been little examination of the discursive effects of institutional policies and documents on students’ understandings of plagiarism.

In this chapter I present a brief overview of discourses of plagiarism identified in the existing literature. I then outline the policy on plagiarism at the University of Otago where this study was located¹, and relate it to existing literature on plagiarism discourses. I follow this with an overview of the discourses that were

¹ I also refer to the University of Otago as the “University” in this thesis
Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explored the different meanings that the students in this study associated with plagiarism, and the difficulty they had defining it. In this chapter, I outline the policy on plagiarism at the University of Otago where this study was located. I follow this with an overview of the discourses that were evident in the students’ interviews; namely, ethico-legal, fairness, confusion, and learning discourses. In my description of these discourses and how they were taken up by the students in my study, I discuss the connections and disconnections between the students’ discursive constructions of plagiarism and the discourses present in the university’s policy and information on plagiarism. I conclude the chapter by suggesting some implications for teaching, learning, and plagiarism policy.

As I reported in Chapter Two, some of the literature on plagiarism acknowledges that it is difficult, if not impossible, to define. Gullifer and Tyson (2013, p. 2) conclude that “a standard definition does not exist,” and Howard (2000, p. 473) declares that plagiarism is “inherently indefinable”. Yet most higher education institutions have distinct policies on plagiarism that necessarily include a definition (Grigg, 2010). Price (2002, p. 89) argues that in order to achieve a definition for policy purposes, institutions “present plagiarism as something fixed and absolute” despite the fact that plagiarism is a constructed phenomenon, and is therefore neither fixed nor absolute (also see Howard, 1999). Consequently, institutional policies on plagiarism reflect specific historical and academic
discursive traditions reflective of a view of plagiarism as intentional dishonesty. Although there are calls to pay attention to or modify the discourses revealed in policies and information on plagiarism (e.g., Howard, 1999; Price, 2002), to date, there has been little examination of the discursive effects of institutional policies and documents on students’ understandings of plagiarism.

Previous literature has focused on plagiarism as discursively constructed. Howard (2000) identifies discourses of plagiarism as including confusion, legal, ethical and medical discourses, and makes a call for plagiarism to instead be situated within textual or writing discourses. Valentine (2006) describes a moral discourse of plagiarism and explores some implications of this, concluding that moral discourses are unhelpful when the goal is to teach students acceptable academic practice. Gullifer and Tyson (2010) conducted focus groups examining students’ perceptions of plagiarism and conclude that students perceive plagiarism in terms of confusion, fear, perceived sanctions, perceived seriousness, resentment, and/or academic consequences. These descriptors of the students’ perceptions are also reflective of a moral framing of plagiarism. Kaposi and Dell (2012) examined the plagiarism literature and identify four dominant discourses as evident in the research: moral, procedural, developmental, and writing/inter-textuality discourses. There are notable overlaps in the discourses of plagiarism discussed in the research cited above. The most commonly identified plagiarism discourses relate to ethics/morals, fear, confusion, rules, and sanctions. These discourses provide a useful starting point for analysing institutional policies on plagiarism.
University of Otago plagiarism policy

The University of Otago policy on plagiarism falls under the University’s “dishonest practice” procedures. These procedures are available to staff, students, and the public via the University website and, in many courses, to students through the course material distributed by individual departments. In addition, the procedures are synthesised and presented on the University website on a public page available to students seeking information on plagiarism and how to avoid it, and as a coloured brochure available both in print and from the website in electronic format.

A keyword search for ‘plagiarism’ on the University website pulls up links to examination conduct, SafeAssign (the University’s ‘anti-plagiarism’ software as discussed in previous chapters), a document on plagiarism and Internet use, information for staff on dishonest practice, and an online interactive learning module on essay writing which contains information on plagiarism and how it can be avoided. Most of the information available on the website describes and portrays plagiarism in a similar manner. For example, the University webpages consistently describe plagiarism as a form of dishonest practice. Information on plagiarism is disseminated to students in many ways, including through specific course documents, and through material written and distributed by individual lecturers. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse all the information

17 http://www.otago.ac.nz/administration/policies/otago003145.html
18 The nature and amount of material given to students varies between departments and individual papers, but most departments, whether or not they provide additional material, direct students to the University website for information on plagiarism.
19 http://www.otago.ac.nz/study/plagiarism/
available to students on plagiarism. I have, therefore, chosen to focus on the two sources of information on plagiarism that students at the University are most likely to be directed to, or to source for themselves: the University plagiarism procedures and the plagiarism information for students that is located on the ‘dishonest practice information for students’ webpage, both described above. These documents are also likely to have informed any other information given to students by any department within the University, and can therefore be considered a fair representation of the information students are likely to receive.

The University policy on plagiarism is publicly available on the University website. It falls within the University “Dishonest Practice Procedures” (University of Otago, 2011b) and is governed by the University’s Academic Statute (University of Otago, 2011a). The policy defines plagiarism as “copying or paraphrasing another’s work, whether intentionally or otherwise, and presenting it as one’s own” (University of Otago, 2011b). The policy clearly states that students are responsible for ensuring they are familiar with, and take all steps to avoid, dishonest practice behaviours. The information for the students’ webpage provides a more detailed explanation of plagiarism, defining it as follows:

- Copying or paraphrasing another person's work and presenting it as your own.
- Being party to someone else's plagiarism by letting them copy your work or helping them to copy the work of someone else without acknowledgement.

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20 The University labels documents listed in the University’s policy database with various titles including “procedures”, “regulations” “statutes” and “policies”.
Using your own work in another situation, such as for the assessment of a different paper or program, without indicating the source.

Plagiarism can be unintentional or intentional. Even if it is unintentional, it is still considered to be plagiarism. (University of Otago, 2011c).

In both the plagiarism policy and the ‘information for students’ webpage, it is made clear that plagiarism encompasses enabling or assisting another student to plagiarise.

The University recognises two levels of plagiarism – level one plagiarism is usually “a first offence” (University of Otago, 2011b), and is perceived to be a consequence of poor academic skills or poor understanding of academic practice. It is generally accepted within the University that level one plagiarism is unintentional, although it is not explicitly labelled as such (Bond et al., 2013).

Level two is categorised as deliberate plagiarism, or repeated plagiarism where the student is perceived to be aware that their behaviour is not acceptable academic practice. The level of plagiarism determines the outcomes for the student, with the expectation that level one cases will be dealt with at departmental level and result in penalties such as a warning, reduced or no marks for the particular assessment, or reduced marks for the whole paper. Level two plagiarism, which is expected to be handled by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor21, can also result in a range of outcomes, from receiving no marks for the whole paper, to “exclusion” from the University (University of Otago, 2011c). When plagiarism is suspected, there is a defined set of procedures for staff to follow, with guidelines provided as to how

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21 Each division within the University is overseen by a Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC). Each PVC reports directly to the Vice-Chancellor (VC), who heads the University’s central organisation.
and when the student is notified. All incidences of both level one and level two plagiarism are expected to be reported to the University’s Student Administration office. Student Administration hold a central database of reported cases of plagiarism so information can be cross-referenced between departments.

Plagiarism at Otago is framed as dishonesty. This implies that students who plagiarise are either “breaking the rules of acceptable behaviours, or… lacking in honesty, diligence or the necessary knowledge” (Baynham, 1999, p. 8). The overall message of the information on the University website is that plagiarism is taken very seriously, that it is the individual student’s responsibility to ensure they are aware of what plagiarism is and take steps to avoid it, and that if students plagiarise they will be sanctioned, regardless of whether or not the plagiarism was intentional. The information on the website, therefore, provides a warning to students. However, on the information for students webpage there is a link to a page on how to avoid plagiarising, which contains information on the academic skills of referencing, paraphrasing and summarising, time management, and note taking. The page also includes a single paragraph on the use of other people’s ideas to produce original work. From this page, students can also link to other resources such as print resources on referencing and time management, a short video clip explaining what plagiarism is and how to avoid it, and links to the University’s Student Learning Centre. Although this page and the subsequent links are available, they are not immediately obvious.

In the following section I explore the discourses present (or absent) in the University of Otago policy and information for students on plagiarism. I do this
in order to provide a contextual backdrop against which to read the discourses that emerged in my research interviews. I do not aim to discredit the University information in any way, as it is a typical example of university plagiarism policies and information.\footnote{For more information on Australasian university plagiarism policies, see Grigg (2010).}

A discursive reading of the University of Otago plagiarism policy and information

By including plagiarism under its dishonest practice procedures, the University positions plagiarism alongside behaviours such as impersonation, falsification, use of unauthorised materials, and assisting other students to do the same. As such, plagiarism is aligned with behaviour that involves a deliberate decision to act or not to act in a certain way. Plagiarism at the University of Otago is therefore situated as a moral issue; students who plagiarise are positioned as making a conscious decision to behave in a morally reprehensible way. Within moral discourses on plagiarism, only two subject positions are available to students – honest student or dishonest student (Valentine, 2006). This means that regardless of a student’s intentions, if their work is deemed to contain plagiarism, they are positioned as dishonest. Despite this, the University acknowledges that it is possible to plagiarise unintentionally – University policy defines plagiarism as “copying or paraphrasing another’s work, whether intentionally or otherwise, and presenting it as one’s own” (University of Otago, 2011b). However, whilst the procedures in respect to plagiarism acknowledge that plagiarism can happen...
unintentionally, the underlying moral discourses preclude taking intent into account when identifying plagiarism, judging it unproblematically on the basis of the text.

When reading the University plagiarism webpages there is the possibility for confusion regarding whether or not students’ intentions are important in deciding on or dealing with plagiarism. Although the webpage descriptions of what plagiarism is signal both intentional and unintentional behaviour, a student’s intentions are evidently not considered when deciding whether or not plagiarism has occurred. That plagiarism is judged as a feature of the text is highlighted by the statement: “Plagiarism can be unintentional or intentional. Even if it is unintentional, it is still considered to be plagiarism” (University of Otago, 2011c). Despite this, by distinguishing between level one and level two plagiarism, the policy clearly signals that intent is a key factor in determining the consequence. The University describes unintentional plagiarism (level one) as “usually due to lack of care, naïveté, and/or to a lack to [sic] understanding of acceptable academic behaviour” (University of Otago, 2011c). Notably, the use of the word ‘lack’ can be read as indicating a deficit view of the plagiarising student, which in turn can be seen as placing the responsibility of avoiding plagiarism solely on the student. Elsewhere on the website, the expectation that students are solely responsible for avoiding plagiarism is made explicit:

All students have a responsibility to be aware of acceptable academic practice in relation to the use of material prepared by others and are expected to take all steps reasonably necessary to ensure no breach of acceptable academic practice occurs (University of Otago, 2011c).
Despite this explicit placing of responsibility on students, the deficit, or lack of acceptable academic practice, is not particularly well explained. The webpage advises that:

Acceptable academic practice is associated with ideas about authorship, academic standards and academic integrity. In New Zealand high value is placed on full acknowledgement and referencing of the words and ideas of others. If you want to use information that you find elsewhere you must acknowledge where it came from (University of Otago, 2011c).

Acceptable academic practice can therefore be assumed to be simply acknowledging sources of information. This, however, does not allow for the possibility of plagiarism through poor paraphrasing (e.g., Park, 2003; Vardi, 2012) or patchwriting (Howard, 1993). Although it can be assumed that plagiarism is unacceptable academic behaviour, the lack of an adequate explanation of what is acceptable academic behaviour implies an unproblematic and universally shared understanding of both plagiarism in general, and the descriptors given on the University of Otago information on plagiarism webpage in particular. Research highlights not only a lack of a unified understanding of terms such as plagiarism and paraphrase, but also confusion about them (e.g., Gullifer & Tyson, 2013; Park, 2003; Yeo, 2007). Despite the University webpage proclaiming that unintentional plagiarism “can be easily avoided” (University of Otago, 2011c), there is no clear explanation on the webpage of what unintentional plagiarism might look like, or how to avoid it. Instead, the information seems to imply that once students know the rules, they will be able to apply them accurately and without difficulty. This is likely to be particularly problematic for students from
contexts or cultures where concepts of authorship and knowledge may differ from those assumed by the University (Sutherland-Smith, 2005, 2008).

What seems to be missing in the policy and information on unintentional plagiarism are the developmental and writing discourses evident in the academic literature discussed in Chapter Two (e.g., Howard, 2000; Kaposi & Dell, 2012). The University website does provide links to some educative information, including referencing, time management, note taking, and a link to the University of Otago Student Learning Centre website. However, much of the information provided is still rooted in rule-based, moral discourses. The website and other policy material present information, and the assumption seems to be that students can assimilate and apply it to their studies independently. The information on the website aligns plagiarism with citation and referencing, rather than with authorship or students’ development as academic writers. Gullifer and Tyson (2013) explain that there is “an expectation that students entering university understand the values of authorship, therefore the importance of attribution” (p. 2). The University policy on plagiarism seems to reflect such an expectation through emphasising referencing without fully explaining why it is important. Consequently, students could interpret the information as a set of rules they are expected to follow, rather than as an explanation of how to ensure acceptable academic practice. Although the information suggests that students “are expected to develop and use these skills” (University of Otago, 2011c), there appears to be no allowance in the dishonest practice procedures for students to commence their development from a skill level where they might unintentionally plagiarise.
Intentional plagiarism (level two) is described as “gaining academic advantage by copying or paraphrasing someone else’s work and presenting it as your own, or helping someone else copy your work and present it as their own” (University of Otago, 2011c). The phrase “gaining academic advantage” can be read as revealing a rule-based discourse and suggests that breaking the rules around academic integrity affords an advantage to the rule-breaker. The breaking of rules is treated as dishonesty, and the consequence is punishment: “As with other dishonest practice intentional plagiarism is treated very seriously by the University” (University of Otago, 2011c). This view is highlighted by warnings of vigilance and punishment: “You should also be aware that plagiarism is easy to detect and the University has policies in place to deal with it” (University of Otago, 2011c). However, research (e.g., Brown & Howell, 2001) suggests that such warnings are not an effective means of reducing plagiarism. To further highlight the rule-based discourses indicated by these words, the information for students’ website clearly links plagiarism with law. It states: “It is very important to be aware of the rules about copyright and the use of information at Otago” (University of Otago, 2011c). Although it might be useful to alert students to copyright laws, describing copyright (a legal concept) as rules may work to suggest that plagiarism is also a concept bound by law.

Although this is by no means a comprehensive analysis of the University policy and information for students on plagiarism, it does highlight that the dominant discourses present in the documents have a moral or rules focus. Current literature (e.g., Kaposi & Dell, 2012; Valentine, 2006) posits that such a focus may inhibit students from learning acceptable academic practice.
Nevertheless, the statements present in the University documents are representative of other Australasian universities’ policies and information on plagiarism (Grigg, 2010).

Discourses in the interviews

I turn now to the different discourses that the students in my study drew on when discussing plagiarism, and how these discourses constituted particular subject positions as available or unavailable to the students. Within the interview data, I identified four dominant discourses, which I have called ethico-legal, fairness, confusion, and learning discourses. These discourses were often intertwined within each interview but, for analytical purposes, in this chapter I will focus on each of them individually. Sometimes a discourse was explicit and marked by the use of particular language or code words, and at other times it was more implicit. Therefore, what I present in this chapter are the most clear or coherent examples of the discourses at work. It is also important to note that not all of these discourses were present in all of the interviews.

What follows is an overview of how the four discourses described above were drawn on in my research interviews. In the remainder of the chapter I briefly describe, explain, and then illustrate each of these four discourses in turn, and relate each back to the University plagiarism policy and information for students.
Ethico-legal discourses

The ethico-legal discourses were the most prevalent discourses in my conversations with students, and were notably present in all of the interviews. Ethico-legal discourses positioned plagiarism as constructed and defined by a set of rules, particularly University policy, the law, and/or referencing rules. These discourses were often revealed in the use of language, such as “stealing”, “theft”, “misrepresentation”, “sanctions”, “atrocious”, and “discipline”. Ethico-legal discourses were often recognisable through participants’ use of moral, legal, criminal, or related language and/or metaphors. The use of such language reflects and perpetuates a view of plagiarism as a criminal act, and positions plagiarism as a moral or ethical problem, implying that students who plagiarise are bad/dishonest, whereas students who do not plagiarise are good/honest (Valentine, 2006). Ethico-legal discourses position plagiarism as an intentional or wilful act, with the (bad/dishonest) student electing to plagiarise either through deliberately flaunting the rules, or through choosing not to familiarise herself with the rules. The responsibility to avoid plagiarism therefore seems to rest with the students rather than with the institution, justifying the institution’s role in ‘policing’ plagiarism by monitoring students’ practices (exercising surveillance), and providing a consequence for students who transgress (enacting punishment).

In ethico-legal discourses plagiarism is represented as if it is a clearly defined concept, and plagiarised texts are represented as easily distinguishable from non-plagiarised texts (also see Kaposi & Dell, 2012). There is an assumption that students are able to make this distinction, and that a decision to either plagiarise or not plagiarise is consciously made based on this knowledge (Briggs, 2003).
During the interviews, the students often reflected ethico-legal discourses when they talked about why students might plagiarise. As discussed in Chapter Five, when I asked why a student might plagiarise, most of the students focused their response on intentional plagiarism – that is, they seemed to interpret my question as asking why students might decide to plagiarise. Often their responses were couched in moral tones. For example, Monica labelled plagiarism associated with last-minute assignment writing as “stupid” and “dumb”, and she seemed to have little tolerance for this practice. She stated: “well it’s pretty stupid. I mean if you leave it that late then it’s pretty dumb. You should plan more ahead and start your assignments earlier so that you don’t have to resort to that.” Four of the students (Matt, Monica, Aaron, and Karina) used the phrase “[they] can’t be bothered” when discussing others’ plagiarism as being a consequence of having left assignment writing until the last minute. This can be read as indicating a moralistic view of plagiarism behaviour as deliberately lazy.

Often when students took up ethico-legal discourses they described plagiarism and its avoidance in terms of University policies and procedures, and the need to follow a set of rules. In particular, some of the students spoke of the need to follow referencing rules in order to follow the institutional rule of avoiding plagiarism. This view is consistent with findings in other research. For example, Power (2009) reported that students viewed the need to avoid plagiarism as an institutional regulation, and Hutchings (2014) noted that students referred to referencing most often as the means for avoiding plagiarism. When drawing on ethico-legal discourses, students seemed to express the belief that as long as they followed the rules they would avoid plagiarising. For example, Maria stated:
You know, they always put in the booklets for each subject guide, “you must source where this all comes from. You must use quote marks, you must even source it when it's a paraphrase.” So that's kind of what I think. I honestly don't have a great understanding of what plagiarism is outside of that. That's kind of as far as my understanding goes.

Danielle also expressed the view that avoiding plagiarism is about simply following the rules of referencing. When I asked her to define plagiarism, she responded “people not referencing a work properly or just not referencing them at all”. Maria and Danielle’s comments seem to reflect the information available to students on the University website, where plagiarism is linked with referencing rather than with authorship. The linking of plagiarism-avoidance with the rules of referencing seems to situate citation as a mechanical act, rather than as an essential aspect of authorship. As discussed in Chapter Two, other research has highlighted students’ struggles with authorship, particularly their difficulty in establishing authority in an assignment that draws on expert knowledge and is to be marked by someone they perceive as an expert (Angélil-Carter, 2000; Grant, 1997; Ivanić, 1998).

In the interviews, some students aligned plagiarism with “law”. For example, when I asked why universities require students to reference their assignments, Eric responded, “I'd say it's probably a law or something”. This can be read as indicating that some students may perceive university policies as akin to legal documents, with legal consequences for breaking the rules therein. This perception of policy as law is understandable in light of the perception of
plagiarism policy as a set of rules, particularly as the policy at Otago University specifically aligns plagiarism with the legal issue of copyright, as discussed in the previous section. The ethico-legal discourses were also present, to some extent, in the accounts of students who discussed plagiarism in terms of fairness.

Fairness discourses

In the students’ interviews, fairness discourses were evident in the students’ judgements about the fairness or otherwise of policies and behaviours surrounding plagiarism. Students drew on fairness discourses to position the University policies and behaviours as either strict or lenient (also see Howard, 1999). Fairness discourses were evidenced by the explicit use of code words such as “it’s not fair” and/or “it is fair”, along with other words and phrases that seemed to be used in a similar manner; for example, “reasonable”, and “it’s pretty tough”. Fairness discourses typically positioned the University as having or not having the right to impose plagiarism policy. For example, when I asked Marie for her thoughts on the University plagiarism procedures she responded, “I think it’s fair because you come to university to learn and you’re not learning anything if you’re using someone else’s words because it’s not your own ideas.” This view of the policy being “fair” as regards to intentional plagiarism was echoed by Monica who stated: “if you’ve plagiarised quite a large part of an assignment or something, you know, knowingly, then it seems fair enough that you would get a zero for the paper.”
In contrast, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Hugh expressed a view that students would not intentionally plagiarise; therefore his perception was that all plagiarism is unintentional. Hugh used the word “draconian” to express his view that sanctioning students for unintentional plagiarism is unfair: “I think it’s unfortunate to be overly draconian on punishments which are just pure oversights and not intentional, because that serves no benefit.” He went on to state that in the interests of fairness, people who sanction students for plagiarism should themselves be sanctioned:

If such people have expelled students for accidents, for unintentional plagiarism, I think those people should really be held to a court of law and the same standard should be applied and expulsion from the university should be applied for them. In other words, tit for tat. Just desserts.

Although in the statement above Hugh was expressing his views on fairness, his views were also reflective of ethico-legal discourses.

Some participants drew on fairness discourses when discussing students who plagiarise, describing such students’ behaviour in terms of a lack of fairness. For example, Justine stated: “It’s not fair that I did that work and got that grade on my own merit and somebody else did it on somebody else’s merit.” This view of plagiarism as unfair behaviour also reflected the view presented above that sanctions for intentional plagiarism are fair. Monica, who expressed the view that it is fair to penalise students for intentional plagiarism, stated: “everyone should have to put in the same amount of, or a similar amount of effort, if they’re going to get the same degree, especially if they’re getting good marks, having plagiarised. You know, it’s not really fair.”
Other Australasian research has indicated that students view plagiarism policies as fair (e.g., Gullifer & Tyson, 2013). However, my reading of the interviews with students in the current research indicates that their views may not be so clear-cut. Some of the students in my study struggled to determine if they thought that the way the University deals with plagiarism is fair or unfair. For example, Emily spoke of the necessity for students to correctly reference everything as “pretty tough… particularly [for] first year students that don’t really know how to cite very well”, then immediately countered this with “but I mean fair enough. Like, you’ve got to set a standard and if you’ve set the standard, you can’t exactly chop and change it for Tom, Dick and Harry.”

The students’ use of fairness discourses seemed to be reflective of a view that plagiarism is judged as a textual feature by the reader/marker, and that the student has no control over how their text is perceived. What makes plagiarism policy unfair, therefore, is the possibility that the student is judged as a (dishonest) plagiariser when they had no intent to plagiarise. This view was expressed by Justine:

I guess I could be put in a very awkward scenario if I unintentionally plagiarised and you know, like just forgot to cite a reference or something and then you know, it’s like, umm, hi, you’ve plagiarised. Do you know the consequences of your decisions? You can be kicked out of uni.

Although Justine is describing her view of what might happen if she plagiarises unintentionally, by saying that a lecturer might ask about the consequences of her “decisions” she seems to be expressing a view that any plagiarism is considered intentional. This may be reflective of the University policy on plagiarism, which
Chapter Six: Discourses in policy and practice

situates plagiarism as a textual feature and does not explicitly distinguish between intentional and unintentional plagiarism. Justine seems to be aware that plagiarism is determined by the text, and regardless of intent the student is punished: “you can be kicked out of uni.” David also expressed the view that sanctioning students for unintentional plagiarism is unfair:

You are trying, really trying, honestly trying, to do homework or do an essay and you will just get something by mistake or something that you don’t know, and you will just do it wrong and then you will just be penalised or expelled for plagiarising. I don’t think that’s fair.

These students’ views seem reflective of Howard’s (1999) suggestion that if the student’s intent is removed from determining if plagiarism has occurred, and plagiarism is judged solely on the basis of the text, then plagiarism is a textual feature rather than a behaviour and we must therefore question why the student is punished.

In constructing plagiarism as not fair, unintentional plagiarism is positioned as a phenomenon over which students have little or no control. This view problematises an ethico-legal view, as unfairness discourses position plagiarism as clearly not a choice, but something that happens to people. By taking up unfairness discourses, students can disagree with policy and procedures, while evading the need to do anything about avoiding unintentional plagiarism. As such, they position a student who plagiarises as a *victim* of university plagiarism policy and procedures - arguably enacting what Gullifer and Tyson (2010, p. 477) describe as “learned helplessness”. This view was demonstrated by Lydia throughout her interview as she spoke about her fears of being “caught” for unintentional plagiarism and her belief that there was little she could do to ensure
she did not plagiarise. Fairness discourses position students who unintentionally plagiarise as subject to the same consequences as students who deliberately plagiarise. Lydia, for example, expressed fear about this when she explained her anxiety that, through accidentally forgetting to provide a reference she might be excluded from the University and consequently be left with no options except to be “a bum on the street.” Often, when the students I interviewed discussed plagiarism in terms of it being not fair, they also reflected confusion discourses, which I consider next.

Confusion discourses

Confusion discourses were characterised throughout the interviews by contradictions within students’ comments, umming and aaahing, and responses such as “I’m not sure”, “I don’t know”, “it’s ambiguous”, “it’s really confusing”, and “does that count?” When drawing on confusion discourses, the students expressed their lack of understanding of what plagiarism is, and why it needs to be avoided. Consequently, confusion discourses constructed plagiarism as problematic, unclear, and something to be anxious about, troubling the possibility that one might plagiarise unintentionally and be sanctioned as a consequence.

In my research interviews, confusion discourses commonly positioned students as learners and as not knowing, and teachers as having the knowledge, but being unwilling to make it explicit. Consequently, confusion discourses positioned the students as weak, and teachers and the institution they represent as
powerful and authoritative, with the ability to survey students’ practices and punish them for unacceptable practice. Some students were confused about why plagiarism is treated seriously at university; in particular why it is treated differently to how it was at school. For example Carl spoke of his experience: “In high school a small amount of copying and pasting were allowed.” Carl went on to describe instances of students’ cut-and-paste behaviours in high school assignments, and teachers’ apparent lack of concern that this was happening. When I asked him what he thought of this, he responded:

Well because it was only a few sentences, it was like, like 50 words out of a thousand-word essay, so I’d say that wasn’t too significant seeing as it fitted, it did fit in. There are some times that you find research and there’s just no other way to word it but how it’s already been worded. So sometimes lecturers, teachers really just have to let something slide.

It is interesting to note that Carl had expressed earlier in his interview that plagiarism is a transgression of the rules, and that plagiarisers should be sanctioned. The tension between these two views can be read as further indication of Carl’s confusion surrounding what should and should not be considered plagiarism.

Other students also shifted between confusion discourses where they spoke of their fear of unintentional plagiarism, and ethico-legal discourses where they viewed avoiding plagiarism as rule-following. The tension between these two discourses is reflected in the information provided to students. For example, the webpage with information for students on avoiding plagiarism states: “You plagiarise when you use knowledge that has been created elsewhere without
indicating the source of that knowledge.” (University of Otago, 2011c), and this may have been read by some students as indicating the need to reference everything they write. Kirsten expressed such a view when she said: “You’re not allowed to just have your own ideas. You’ve got to have proof of every single sentence, and usually finding references is the hardest part of the essay.” When I asked Kirsten how students could avoid plagiarising she responded: “By referencing every sentence they write.” Hannah also expressed this view when she said, “we have been told… even if you didn’t read something, that if you’ve written something that someone else has said, it’s plagiarism.” Whether or not Hannah had been told this is immaterial – what is important is that this is the message she received, and for Hannah this message was the cause of confusion and anxiety.

In this study, as in other research (e.g., Hutchings, 2014), students expressed a view of the rules and processes around plagiarism as difficult to understand and “get right”. Lisa spoke at length about her perception that the expectations around avoiding plagiarism are unclear:

They take you through all the plagiarism spiels and then they only give you examples of what is plagiarism really. We just had a plagiarism talk the other day actually, and what was quite unclear was… they were like, “ohh well, it’s pretty borderline if you’re just paraphrasing someone else’s stuff, even if you quote them,” but realistically that’s kind of what you have to do if you’re going to quote them; you have to, in some way. I don’t know what they meant. Maybe they meant paraphrasing the whole thing, but you kind of have to take a section of it and paraphrase it and use it in your own work if you’re going to use their idea at all. So I thought, the way they teach what is and isn’t plagiarism could be improved in
that they [could] clear up the grey areas in terms of is it okay to paraphrase to some extent, but you shouldn’t be just keeping the same word order with slightly different words.

As mentioned above, the University policy and information for students does not provide information on, or examples of, what acceptable academic practice looks like, and for Lisa this seemed to be a problem. Other students in my study also expressed their view that the expectations around avoiding plagiarism are unclear. Lydia, for example, said “they just make it so ridiculously complicated,” and “there’s just too many ways of doing it wrong.”

Often when the students in my study took up confusion discourses they expressed a level of student voicelessness within the University, noting a lack of opportunity to clarify questions around plagiarism and plagiarism policy/procedures. Students commonly reported learning how to reference or avoid plagiarism by searching for information on the Internet, or by asking friends for clarification, and this is echoed in other research at the University (Bond et al., 2013). Students who took up confusion discourses often positioned themselves as too scared to act or ask for help from lecturers, and were therefore positioned as a victim of policy and procedures.

One of the main areas in which the students I interviewed expressed confusion was when I asked them to define the concept of plagiarism. As discussed in the previous chapter, the definitions the students gave ranged from very black and white understandings of plagiarism as simply copying and pasting text, to more problematised understandings acknowledging the difficulties in
determining factors such as collusion and intent. Often, individual students displayed confusion about their understanding of what is plagiarism. Danielle gave a fluent definition of plagiarism when I asked her, and clearly stated that plagiarism “covers outright copying other people’s work, and it also covers just accidental plagiarism, and people not referencing a work properly or just not referencing them at all.” However, further questioning revealed her underlying confusion about why certain unintentional behaviours are considered plagiarism:

If you accidentally umm, plagiarised somebody by not referencing them properly then, to me, that counts as plagiarism; but if you’re pulling information from, that you think is from your head, it is actually what you memorised in a paper or somewhere and then forgot, then umm, yeah, that’s, I wouldn’t call that, I suppose, technically, it is plagiarism but I’d feel a bit more sympathetic to the person who got done in for doing that.

What is most notable about Danielle’s response here is her use of “umm,” the halting nature of her explanation, and her use of phrases such as “I suppose”, all which can be read as reflective of uncertainty. Earlier in the interview when she gave a definition of plagiarism, she spoke in complete sentences, confidently and with very little hesitation. It could be that when stating her initial definition of plagiarism, she was to some extent repeating information from policy and procedures, and was therefore able to speak with confidence and clarity.

However, when I asked her to expand on specific aspects of what she had said, she seemed unable to maintain the clarity of her earlier response, and seemed to be working out her understanding as she spoke. When I asked Danielle why she thought there is so much concern about plagiarism in universities, she was unable to give a reason, and eventually responded with “if I think about this long enough,
then I may be able to come up with an answer.” Implicit in the students’ confusion seemed to be the belief that it was their responsibility to avoid plagiarism – a belief that is reflective of the University plagiarism policy as discussed earlier. Often students who indicated confusion highlighted what they perceived to be a lack of information about plagiarism, or a lack of opportunities to learn how to avoid it.

**Learning discourses**

In the students’ interviews, learning discourses were characterised by words such as “learning”, “process” and “developing”. Learning discourses constructed plagiarism and its avoidance as part of the learning process – as learning how to cite and reference, within the broader skill of learning how to be part of the particular discipline being studied, including using discipline-specific language. In the students’ interviews, learning discourses positioned students as learners or apprentices within their respective discipline, and emphasised joint (student and institutional) responsibility for their learning. When drawing on learning discourses, students expressed a view of the University as partially responsible to ensure that students were given the relevant information and support to properly learn the knowledge/skills required to avoid plagiarism. Further, within learning discourses, students emphasised a view that education is a logical response to plagiarism – either skills teaching aimed at avoiding plagiarism, or education around what plagiarism is and why we should avoid it. For example, Emily said that avoiding plagiarising is: “just a matter of getting better and sort of actually
learning more about where things go and how it’s meant to be displayed.” Many of the students seemed to share this view.

Although learning discourses were present in the students’ responses, they do not seem to be reflective of a wider learning discourse within plagiarism policies and information at the University. As noted previously, learning discourses are largely absent in the plagiarism information available to students on the University website, and unsurprisingly were also absent when the students spoke about University policy and procedures. It may be that these discourses are present in students’ interactions with individual lecturers; however, if this is so, it was not made explicit by any of the participants. In the interviews, learning discourses were mainly evident when students spoke of how they thought plagiarism should be dealt with, rather than how it is dealt with. Many of the students expressed a belief that plagiarism could or should be viewed in terms of development, or that students should be scaffolded and supported through learning to avoid plagiarism, or to reference correctly, and become good academic writers. These students, therefore, were unknowingly echoing the academic literature (discussed in Chapter Two) that calls for plagiarism to be framed in relation to students learning to become academic writers.

Many of the students who I interviewed expressed the belief that unintentional plagiarism should be dealt with separately from intentional plagiarism. They positioned unintentional plagiarism as not dishonest, and suggested that, as such, it not be considered dishonest practice, or result in punishment. Hugh, who expressed this view most strongly, indicated his belief
that students who plagiarise unintentionally should not be punished. This view was echoed by Carl who thought that the policy “might unduly punish people who just commit, make a mistake,” and that for unintentional plagiarism the consequence should be “trying to educate the student, you know, how references are meant to be done properly…and teach them how to properly word things in their own ways so it’s not plagiarism.” As noted in the previous chapter, Aaron went a step further when he articulated his belief that unintentional plagiarism is not plagiarism. This echoes some of the literature (e.g., Howard, 1999) that calls for unintentional plagiarism to be dealt with as an expected part of learning to write in academia, rather than as a problem of academic dishonesty. I return to this point in Chapter Eight.

Some of the students, however, expressed a belief that the University treats unintentional plagiarism with leniency. For example, Katie stated:

I think they’d genuinely be able to tell if someone was like, ‘I don’t know how to plagiarise, I don’t know how to not plagiarise or I don’t know how to reference properly’, that they, you know, [would] be given an opportunity to try and fix it and to go and find help as to how to avoid it.

In addition, Matt believed that teachers have different expectations of students at different levels of study, and indicated a view that in first year there is some “leniency” on referencing as students learn and practice their citation skills. In general, many of the students seemed to think that unintentional plagiarism due to lack of academic or referencing skills should be treated as a writing or citation issue rather than as a plagiarism issue, and should be dealt with using educative rather than punitive measures. This is also reflective of (un)fairness discourses.
where students expressed the view that it is unfair to punish unintentional plagiarism.

Students’ use of learning discourses generally positioned people who (deliberately) plagiarise as not learning. David expressed this when he stated that:

[Plagiarism] just make[s] you get a lower grade than what you’re supposed to, because if you use your brain you’ll get a better grade and if you use your brain, you’ll understand and learn something new that you might use in the future or you might use somewhere else in life.

Other participants expressed a view that students may plagiarise as a consequence of not having learned or understood the course material. Danielle articulated this view:

A student can plagiarise a resource if they don’t understand a subject. Like if they don’t understand what they’re talking about, then they will just copy words from a paper which explains the subject and they won’t cite it just so they appear to know what the subject is about, because if they don’t, then the marker can see pretty quickly that they don’t know what they’re talking about, so they use the information or the words from other papers to try and make them sound smarter, I suppose, or just make them sound like they understand what’s going on.

Not plagiarising, therefore, may be read as an indication that a student has learned the material. Eric expressed this view: “if you agree with the ideas, you sort of need to be able to put it in your own words or else you haven’t really learnt anything. If you can understand it, you can write about it.” In contrast, Christian expressed the view that plagiarising does not prevent learning, nor is it simply a sign that a student does not understand the material. He stated, “I don’t think it
precludes learning. I think that learning is precluded and plagiarism is a by-
product of that whole attitude and process.” Christian was expressing a view that
some students plagiarise because they are not engaged in their studies.

Summary

In this chapter I have presented an analysis of the discourses present in the
University policy and information for students on plagiarism, as well as an
introduction to the discourses present in the student interviews. The official
University plagiarism policy and information draws heavily on ethico-legal
discourses, and these discourses were reflected in the students’ interviews through
the students’ expressions of ethico-legal discourses. Ethico-legal discourses in the
University documents were also revealed through the fairness discourses the
students drew on when discussing the University plagiarism policy and processes.
The academic literature, however, emphasises that an ethico-legal framing of
plagiarism is unhelpful towards resolving the plagiarism problem (Brown &

Confusion discourses were also prevalent in the students’ interviews, and
some students explicitly stated that the information they are given on plagiarism,
and in particular how to avoid it, is inadequate or lacking. This is consistent with
other reports in the literature (e.g., Ashworth et al., 1997; Gullifer & Tyson, 2010).
It is possible that staff at the University are also confused by the official
information, as figures from the University’s Student Administration Office
indicate only small numbers of incidences of plagiarism being reported to them, despite the stated requirement that all suspected cases be reported. This could be an indication that staff across the University are not consistently following the official procedures for some reason, or it may indicate that staff are also confused about the issue of plagiarism and are consequently uncomfortable with or unwilling to follow official procedures. If staff are confused about plagiarism or the plagiarism procedures, it is possible that this confusion is being passed on to students.

The University policy and information for students indicates that the student’s intent is not taken into account in determining whether a text is plagiarised, and in deciding how a student who has submitted plagiarised work should be sanctioned. The students I interviewed seemed to read this as indicating that intent is therefore assumed. Although the consequences for unintentional plagiarism at the University are different from those for intentional plagiarism, the students did not seem to be receiving this message. This could be a consequence of the information on level one (unintentional) plagiarism being included in the dishonest practice procedures alongside level two (intentional) plagiarism, or it could be because there are overlaps in the recommended sanctions for plagiarism at each of these levels (Bond et al., 2013). Unintentional plagiarism is therefore underlined by the same ethico-legal discourses as deliberately dishonest behaviours. As plagiarism is the only form of academic dishonesty that can happen without intent, it may be necessary to address it separately from other dishonest practices. Howard (1995) calls for institutional definitions of plagiarism that acknowledge three distinctions of plagiarism: deliberate deception, poor
Chapter Six: Discourses in policy and practice

referencing practices, and patchwriting. Within this model, poor referencing and patchwriting should be viewed as steps towards becoming a competent academic writer, and responses to these textual features should reflect that. Deliberate deception, however, should be responded to as dishonest behaviour.

Many of the students I interviewed called for more information and education about plagiarism. Although the University indicates an awareness of the need to provide this (for example, through their provision of links to educative material on the information for students’ webpage), learning discourses are notably absent in the policy and information the University provides. Further, the University policy on plagiarism and the information for the students on the plagiarism webpage indicate a view that plagiarism is a consequence of either a lack or flouting of morals, or a lack or ignorance of citation skills (also see Howard, 1995). The policy therefore does not appear to allow for the possibility that plagiarism might happen as a consequence of a student misinterpreting the task (e.g., Valentine, 2006), or as a consequence of differing perceptions of what is plagiarism. For example, a student may believe she has practiced “acceptable academic behaviour” (University of Otago, 2011c), but a lecturer may interpret the text as plagiarised. Different understandings of plagiarism or acceptable academic practice may be informed by contextual factors, such as students’ understandings of learning and assessment or their beliefs about the purpose of a university education. In the following chapter, I explore what the students said about learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education. I examine the discourses the students drew on when discussing these three things, and how their discourses connected with the plagiarism discourses outlined in this chapter.
Chapter Seven: Contextualising students' plagiarism discourses

Chapter 7

Contextualising students’ plagiarism discourses

Introduction

All students come to university with existing beliefs and meanings they make of their experiences at university as well as their sense of success (in terms of good grades) at university. However, little research has been conducted on these students’ understanding of the nature of plagiarism. Despite this, students believe that plagiarism is an indicator that the students have not mastered these skills.

Many plagiarism researchers agree that the problem of plagiarism is more complex than simply not understanding what plagiarism is, or how to avoid it. As discussed in Chapter 2, plagiarism is often related to academic writing (e.g., Howard, 1999; Howard & Robillard, 2008; Lea & Street, 1998). Students’ struggles with authorship and/or identity in their writing has been identified by some researchers as an explanation for plagiarism (e.g., Fountain & Fitzgerald, 2001). As well as the need for students to ensure their success (in terms of good grades) at university is another common explanation for plagiarism (e.g., Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2003). Students’ struggles to understand the prevalence of plagiarism is based on their premise that: “elements of successful student writing are in essence related to particular ways of constructing the world” (1998, p. 165), and that knowledge construction is discipline specific, therefore academic writing is...
Introduction

In the previous chapter I explored the discourses present in the University policy and information on plagiarism, and the discourses the students drew on when discussing plagiarism. However, all students come to university with existing beliefs, and these beliefs help shape the meanings students make of their experiences at university (Baxter Magolda, 1992). The beliefs that students hold when commencing university impact on their approaches to learning, their success at university, and their understandings of concepts such as plagiarism (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Blum, 2009). Little research has been published in this area (exceptions include Baxter Magolda, 1992; Blum, 2009; Henderson-King & Smith, 2006). In this chapter, I examine what the students said in the research interviews in response to my questions about learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education, and I explore how these responses connect with their understandings of plagiarism that I presented in the previous two chapters.

Students’ experiences are influenced by more than what we can observe in the classroom, and some researchers have begun to explore this (e.g., Blum, 2009; Henderson-King & Smith, 2006). Research that has examined students’ beliefs about higher education includes Baxter Magolda (1992), Blum (2009), and Spronken-Smith, Bond, Buisink-Smith, and Grigg, (2009). Spronken-Smith et al. (2009) retrospectively canvassed university graduates regarding their experiences of university. They found that students viewed a university education in four
qualitatively different ways: as allowing them to gain a qualification for a specific job or career; as providing broader preparation for work; as an opportunity to develop life skills and learn how to think; or as education for its own sake. Spronken-Smith et al. concluded that in a changing higher education landscape it is necessary to acknowledge these qualitatively different ways of viewing higher education in order to “provide appropriate support to all students entering higher education” (p. 363). Baxter Magolda (1992) carried out a longitudinal study, annually interviewing students about their college experiences and noting how their beliefs changed as they progressed through higher education. Although the focus of Baxter Magolda’s analysis was on identifying ways of knowing, she presented the students’ in-depth accounts of their experiences of college. These accounts provided rich insights into how students perceived and experienced higher education. For example, in students’ accounts of learning, they often gave clear explanations of classroom practices such as methods of teaching, and how these met or did not meet their expectations of college. A small amount of research has indicated possible links between students’ views and expectations of university and their views on plagiarism and ‘good academic practice (e.g., Ashworth, Freewood, & Macdonald, 2003; Blum, 2009). In her book on “plagiarism and college culture,” Blum (2009) reports that the students she interviewed for her American research study held beliefs about the purpose of higher education, and understandings about the construction and dissemination of knowledge, that seemed to contradict good academic practice. For example, she found that contemporary students’ views on downloading music and acknowledging sources focused on concepts such as sharing and collaboration, rather than on concepts such as originality and authorship which are arguably at
Chapter Seven: Contextualising students’ plagiarism discourses

the heart of good academic practice. Blum argues that the contradictions between students’ views and those of higher education institutions are linked to the occurrence of plagiarism.

Many plagiarism researchers agree that the problem of plagiarism is more complex than students simply not understanding what plagiarism is, or how to avoid it. As I discussed in Chapter Two, over the last two decades, plagiarism has increasingly been considered in relation to students’ development as academic writers (e.g., Howard, 1999; Howard & Robillard, 2008; Lea & Street, 1998). Students’ struggles with authorship and/or identity in their writing has been identified by some researchers as an explanation for plagiarism (e.g., Fountain & Fitzgerald, 2008; Ivanic, 1998). Students’ non-mastery of the skills they need to ensure their success (in terms of good grades) at university is another common explanation for plagiarism (e.g. Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2003). A further explanation for the occurrence of plagiarism is the challenge of understanding discipline-specific conventions (e.g., Baynham, 1999; Lea & Street, 1998; Leask, 2006). In Chapter Three, I described Lea and Street’s (1998, p. 163) seminal theory of academic literacies as based on the premise that “elements of successful student writing are in essence related to particular ways of constructing the world”, and that knowledge construction is discipline-specific, therefore academic writing is discipline-specific. However, the understandings that students have of their discipline are formed in part by the beliefs they already hold when they enter the discipline.
In this study, I asked each participant several questions regarding their beliefs about learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education in order to explore the broader contextual understandings associated with the discourses the students drew on when discussing plagiarism. As I discussed in Chapter Three, an academic literacies approach to students’ writing views the “institutions in which academic practices take place as constituted in, and as sites of, discourse and power” (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 159). Discourses both shape and are shaped by the beliefs of individuals interacting within a broader context or environment, and are what Gee (2005, p. 7) refers to as “ways of being in the world”. Within the university setting, the context in which students interact and in which they therefore make sense of concepts such as plagiarism includes the department, programme, or course in which they are studying, the university as a whole, and the broader society in which the university is situated.

In this chapter I outline and explore the discourses the students drew on during my research interviews as they discussed learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education. I was interested in exploring my participants’ beliefs about ways of being in the university context, and if or how the discourses they drew on when discussing the broader university context were reflected in their conversations about plagiarism. A consideration of each student’s views on learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education was not the primary focus of this research, and therefore only a small proportion of each interview was devoted to discussing the students’ beliefs about these. Despite this, the students’ responses provided rich data, and a number of interesting discourses were evident in the students’ reflections. The main discourses the students drew
on in their responses were: market discourses, where the students positioned universities as businesses; employment discourses, where the students described universities as places in which to gain a qualification or prepare for future employment; and learning discourses, where the students portrayed universities as places to learn and grow as an individual. I explain each of these three discourses in turn below, and provide examples of the ways in which the students drew on them. I then explore connections between the discourses the students drew on when discussing plagiarism (see Chapter Six) and the beliefs the students expressed when discussing these broader contextual factors.

**Market discourses**

Over the last few decades, a body of research exploring the market discourses of higher education has emerged in scholarly journals (e.g., Gibbs, 2001; Molesworth, Nixon, & Scullion, 2009; Molesworth & Scullion, 2005; Natale & Doran, 2012). This literature debates both the benefits and disadvantages of market discourses in universities. In a philosophical article exploring what they termed U.K. universities’ “market orientation”, Molesworth, Nixon and Scullion (2009, p. 279) trace the ways in which universities and governments have encouraged the commodification of a university education. They illustrate how, in the U.K., universities actively brand themselves in a profit-driven competition to attract potential students. They point out that, as part of this process, universities are increasingly developing and offering courses based on consumer demand, rather than on what they perceive to be the traditional ideals of higher education,
and offer commodity-based incentives for students who register at their institution. The commodification of university education is also a trend in Australasian universities. East and Donnelly (2012) report that New Zealand universities actively market themselves to attract students; particularly, high fee-paying international students. They state: “At policy level, education is portrayed as a means to address the country’s economic requirements” (p. 67), indicating that higher education policy documents deliberately highlight to the broader community the value of actively attracting university students.

When drawing on market discourses, students in this study typically expressed a view of universities as businesses. Within market discourses, students positioned themselves and other students as consumers paying for a degree, knowledge, and/or a service, and universities as money-making enterprises. Market discourses were characterised by references to money, in particular student fees, and by language and concepts commonly found in the world of business, such as “commodity,” “profitability,” and “copyright.” For example, Carl, Christian, and Hugh all described universities as businesses that fulfil a market niche, and expressed a view of education as an economic transaction whereby universities accept money in exchange for giving knowledge and/or a qualification. Christian stated: “The University has to satisfy the market that we’re embedded into,” and explained his understanding that universities need to survive financially in a changing economic and educational market. Carl explained his view that providing education is a business endeavour when he said: “I’m here to get a degree. So I see it as an education. I also see [the University] as a business
because I recognise they’re charging me an arm and a leg for my course.” He later explained his beliefs about the implications of this view, saying:

The University’s not going to be run by people who are particularly interested in teaching. They’re more interested in running universities. When they initially start, they’re going to be interested in helping people learn. It may be just my cynical world-view, but eventually they’re going to be interested in getting money so they can fund more research.

This statement indicates that Carl held a view of universities as institutions for furthering research, and that he did not see this as compatible with the idea of universities as teaching institutions. Implicit in Carl’s statement was a view that universities may not be working in the best interests of students but, rather, using students as a means of profit-making in order to fund staff and institutional interests. Carl seemed to be conceptualising universities as corporate institutions with the power to make decisions aimed at ensuring large profits rather than satisfying students (consumers).

As discussed in Chapter Five, some of the students spoke about knowledge as a “commodity”. Notably, in their interviews, and perhaps in line with their use of market discourses to describe the University, both Christian and Carl spoke about learning as “gaining new knowledge”. They seemed to view knowledge as tangible and measurable – something that can be gained and therefore owned. Power (2009) also noted that students spoke of knowledge as a commodity. She categorises such responses as referring to intellectual capital, and explains that students who referred to plagiarism in relation to intellectual capital referred not only to concepts of ownership of knowledge, but also to the benefit
or loss resulting from the inappropriate use of other people’s work. Carl also held the view that learning at university is very “directed”. He stated: “If I’m being taught at University, I’ll usually be told ‘this is the question’, and then ‘this is the answer,’” and he seemed to place a lot of emphasis on the idea of “getting it right” in his assessment tasks. Describing knowledge as tangible and measurable indicates a view of knowledge as fixed, and as either true or false. Baxter Magolda (1992) terms this view of knowledge ‘absolute knowledge’, and explains that a view of knowledge as absolute reflects a belief that lecturers and tutors are ultimately responsible for students’ learning. From this perspective, students expect teachers to give them the correct knowledge. This view, and Carl’s statements in particular, seemed compatible with a market view of knowledge as a commodity that can be passed on, held and traded. Carl held a view of university as a place of being told what to think, rather than learning how to think. Similarly, Hugh stated: “Students are not being able to, being allowed to, or motivated to, promote their own ideas that could be unique,” indicating his belief that the University doesn’t promote thinking. Notably, this directly contradicts one of the University of Otago’s marketing campaigns which proclaims that in coming to the University students are “[l]earning how to think, not what to think” (Figure 2).
Chapter Seven: Contextualising students’ plagiarism discourses

Christian indicated his belief that many students view the degree, rather than the learning, as the outcome of a university education, stating that plagiarism is “a sign that [students] don’t perceive university as a valuable process to go through.” Both Carl and Christian viewed assessments as gate-keeping mechanisms for universities. Christian stated his belief that vigilance around (unintentional) plagiarism is part of this gate-keeping, and allegations of plagiarism are part of a larger process of identifying less capable students. Carl expressed a similar view when he said: “I think [universities] use [assessments] first of all to determine whether we would be suitable to continue on with that subject.” Carl also alluded to a view of universities as gate-keepers in his comments about plagiarism, expressing his belief that plagiarism in students’ work makes it difficult for lecturers to determine if the student has done the learning and “earned” the degree: “They want to make sure that we’re able to get the qualification by ourselves and not just having one of our friends do the work for us.” However, later in his interview Carl contradicted this view by indicating his belief that students are paying for a degree, therefore they are entitled to receive it.

Market discourses position the qualification as the desired result of a university education and students as consumers purchasing a commodity (the degree) (Molesworth et al., 2009; Molesworth & Scullion, 2005). Some scholars argue that, given this positioning, some students may employ strategies that are inconsistent with scholarship or effective learning (Molesworth et al., 2009), for example, plagiarising in an effort to secure success (Ashworth et al., 2003). In his interview, Carl also expressed a view of plagiarism as a deliberate strategy for achieving success at university. He stated his belief that students plagiarise
because “either they thought they couldn’t do the work by themselves so they’d have to take somebody else’s or they were just too lazy to do the work.” Christian held a similar view, and explained that students who plagiarise are either unwilling or unable to think deeply about the topics they are expected to learn. Christian viewed assessments as giving students the opportunity to “process” their learning, and he identified plagiarism as a strategy for students who were unwilling to do this. However, in contrast, as discussed in Chapter Five, Hugh argued that students do not deliberately plagiarise or cheat in an effort to achieve success at university.

In addition to situating students as consumers exchanging money (fees) for a commodity (a degree), thus reflecting the commodification of universities (Gibbs, 2001; Molesworth et al., 2009), market discourses position students as consumers with the right to a satisfactory consumer experience. For many students a satisfactory experience is thought to be one that provides value for money in terms of “convenience and high quality, but also low cost” (Molesworth & Scullion, 2005, p. 210). Students as education consumers can be seen as having the power to choose their education provider, or to dictate the nature of the service they receive. Carl seemed to recognise this position of power when he spoke about the purpose of assessment at university. He stated:

[Assessments are] also sort of to determine how well the students are learning. For instance, if most students are failing something, the University is doing something wrong and as a business will realise, if something is going wrong, they need to fix it or they’re going to lose customers. And in this situation, we the students are the customers.
They’re the business. If we’re not getting what we’re paying for, they need to do something about it.

This view of students as powerful customers who have the right to receive an effective service, juxtaposed against Carl’s view presented above of universities as money-making enterprises that do not have the students’ interests at heart, illustrates students’ dual positioning as both constrained and agentic within market discourses. The marketisation of universities positions students as both consumers and commodities of higher education, and therefore as subjects of and subject to the higher education market. Carl’s interview responses indicated that he seemed to recognise this tension.

Carl’s statement that if students are failing, they are “not getting what [they’re] paying for” reflects his view that students are paying to get a degree; if students are failing, then it is the University’s responsibility to “fix it” so that students can pass. However, Carl’s view that students’ academic success is the responsibility of the University did not emerge in his discussions of plagiarism. As discussed in Chapter Five, when explaining his views on plagiarism, Carl clearly stated that naïvety is no “excuse” for plagiarism, thus indicating his view that avoiding plagiarism is the students’ responsibility. Carl’s views on plagiarism seemed to contradict a view of students as consumers in higher education. Such contradictions were also reflected in the confusion Carl displayed when discussing plagiarism (as discussed in Chapter Six). However, in contrast to Carl’s view that it is the students’ responsibility to avoid plagiarism, both Hugh and Christian strongly expressed the opinion that it is universities’ responsibility to ensure students have the correct knowledge and skills to avoid plagiarism.
It is notable that Hugh, Christian and Carl were all enrolled in commerce papers, and this may well have influenced their views (Molesworth & Scullion, 2005). Added to this, Hugh and Christian were both mature students. They were each involved in running their own businesses. In addition, both had experience as employees in different product development companies. Consequently Carl, Hugh and Christian were likely very familiar with marketing language, and able to use it with confidence and ease. However, their use of market discourses reflected educational policy in the New Zealand, and other, contexts.

As indicated earlier, market discourses position the degree as the outcome of higher education. The notion of the degree as an outcome of higher education was also important when students spoke about future employment. Most of the students spoke in their interviews about university as a means to gain future employment, either through obtaining a degree, or through learning the skills and knowledge they would require in their future working life. I discuss this next.

Employment discourses

A second set of discourses that were evident in the students’ interviews was employment discourses. Similar to market discourses, when drawing on employment discourses students spoke about a degree as an outcome of higher education. However, in students’ use of market discourses, the degree was positioned as a commodity for which the student was paying. In their use of employment discourses, the degree was positioned as currency necessary for
gaining future employment. Students also spoke more broadly about the purpose of university as preparation for employment or a vocation, discussing the need to learn the knowledge or skills they believed necessary in order to gain a good job, or obtain a qualification. Students who spoke about the purpose of a university education in relation to employment commonly viewed exams and grades as important for determining who should receive a degree, and therefore a ticket to employment.

Almost all of the students (20 out of the 21 students I interviewed) told me at some point during their interview that they believed a university degree is necessary in order to either prepare for or obtain a desirable job, or to increase their employment options. For example, Carl explained: “I wanted a degree to get a good job because I’m not much into manual labour,” indicating a view of a university education as leading to a better career. Similarly, Danielle stated: “Tertiary education really helps you get a career and helps you get higher paying jobs. It helps you get more money”. Danielle went on to expand on this, saying that a university education provides the knowledge and skill set for particular careers, and the physical degree indicates to employers that you have this knowledge and skills. This is reflective of Spronken-Smith et al.’s (2009) preparation for a job orientation to higher education, where students viewed the purpose of university as preparing for future employment.

Throughout her interview, Danielle continued to draw on employment discourses. Although she stated her belief that the skills she was learning at university would be valuable for the future, when I probed further she displayed
uncertainty regarding the future value of certain academic skills. I asked her to give an example of skills or knowledge she had learned that would be valuable in her future, and she responded:

If you’re able to skim things quickly, or read or write quickly, and are able to look up the appropriate resources quickly or just efficiently, then it helps you complete tasks such as I don’t know what jobs entail you to write an essay but there are probably some out there.

Danielle seemed unable to relate specific academic skills to future employment, and instead, explained such skills as necessary for postgraduate study: “Writing and reading [skills] are just useful in later life because if you go on to do a Masters it allows you to confidently write up a thesis.” Despite seeing academic skills as specific to academia, Danielle viewed assessment tasks as important for both reinforcing what she had been taught in lectures and labs, and for learning skills such as time management and report writing – skills that would arguably be of use in her future employment. However, confusion regarding what skills might be useful for future employment became more evident when Danielle spoke about plagiarism. Her understanding of plagiarism was centred on the idea of not referencing, and she viewed referencing as one of the skills she was required to learn at university. Danielle explained her view that referencing “shows that you’ve looked at the appropriate literature”, indicating a view of assessments as tests of students’ knowledge, or readiness for work, rather than as opportunities for learning as discussed above.

Some students who drew on employment discourses expressed a view that a physical degree is the outcome of university, and that it is necessary to have a
degree listed on your CV in order to gain employment or to progress along particular career paths. For example, Eric said: “it’s just so hard to get a job at the moment. It’s so hard once you get a job to go up without a degree.” However, Eric spoke about learning course content specifically for assessments (tests) and not remembering beyond that: “I don’t think it needs to be cemented further beyond the tests or anything, I retain it for as long as I have to.” He later qualified this, saying, “I think there are some things in the tests that are not important to remember.” Like Danielle, Eric seemed to have difficulty viewing some of what he was learning at university as relevant to his future, even though he recognised a university education as important for “getting a job”. It seemed that, for Eric, obtaining a physical degree rather than the skills and knowledge indicated by achieving the degree, was the most important outcome of university. However, Eric also explained his view that assessments are a means of ensuring that students are performing to the “required standard”. While he seemed to view a degree as more important than the learning required to obtain a degree, Eric also viewed a degree as providing an indication of what the degree-holder knows. As I mentioned in Chapter Six, Eric explained that plagiarism is an issue because “you need to be able to put it in your own words or else you haven’t really learnt anything. If you can understand it you can write about it.” Eric indicated a view of learning as important at university but, for Eric, learning seemed to be linked to the attainment of a degree in order to gain employment. Eric’s view of plagiarism echoed this. He stated: “They want to make sure that when we get into the workforce that we can actually do the things.” For Eric then, plagiarism seemed to be an indication that a student has not learned to the standard required to attain a degree.
A view of valuing the ‘having’ of a degree over the learning required to gain the qualification aligns with Spronken-Smith et al.’s (2009) gaining a qualification orientation to higher education. However, the literature on market discourses in higher education highlights how universities are under increasing pressure to teach skills and knowledge that employers value (e.g., Molesworth et al., 2009), rather than the skills and knowledge of a classical university education, such as critical thinking. Some scholars argue that in doing so, they may be denying students the opportunity for personal growth (e.g., Natale & Doran, 2012). Others trouble this concept (e.g., Walker, 2008; Haigh, 2002). For example, Walker (2008, p. 482) argues that preparation for future employment and knowledge learning are only two of a range of “functional capabilities” students should be equipped with when they graduate from university. Consistent with the students’ reports in my research, other research into students’ views on the purpose of a university education has also reported that many students view the physical degree as a gateway to employability or to a career rather than as a symbol of what they have learned (e.g., Blum, 2009; Gibbs, 2001; Molesworth et al., 2009).

In my study, other students who drew on employment discourses also focused on the skills and knowledge they expected to learn at university, and expressed a view that the benefit of holding a degree is the message it gives to potential employers about the knowledge, skills and abilities the degree-holder has gained through the course of their study. For example, Justine explained:

I think [a university degree] shows different things [depending on] what you’re getting it in. Like if you’re doing Engineering or
Teaching, or a specific course that lines up with a specific job, I guess I see it more as you’re learning a skill set. But if you’re doing like a BA or maybe Computer Science, you might get more kind of problem solving or like how to articulate yourself well or perhaps a more broad skill set.

Justine was expressing the view that the skills students learn in particular degree courses are transferrable to the workforce. Although she explained that some university courses are directly aligned with specific career options, she also saw the value to the workforce of more generic skills learned through studying towards a degree. Justine also drew on employment discourses when she discussed plagiarism. She explained:

Assessments are meant to measure what you know and not what your friend knows. And employers want to employ you on a degree that you’ve earned not you and your flat have earned. And when you’re in the workplace, you have to do the work. You can’t holler at your flatmates to say “hi, can you help me with this work team project?” So I guess [plagiarism is] such a problem because it misrepresents people’s skill set.

However, Justine immediately contradicted her view of her future work environment by explaining:

Lots of times me and my friend would do our assignments together and I wouldn’t say that we plagiarised. We would just bounce ideas off each other or read it and constructively criticise it, like what if you made the theme jungle animals instead of just animals or whatever? And so I mean I guess that’s my idea and not her idea but she doesn’t have to use it and it’s constructively helpful and when you’re a teacher sitting around in the staffroom, you’re probably going to have those discussions anyway.
Justine was displaying her recognition that, in the workplace, colleagues are often a necessary resource for problem-solving. With this in mind, she saw the idea of plagiarism as the sharing of ideas as a problematic concept.

Throughout her interview, Justine seemed to be struggling to understand the relationship between plagiarism and collaborative learning and, consequently, she displayed confusion in her responses. Justine also appeared to have difficulty relating university practices and conventions to the world of employment. Throughout her interview, Justine’s responses indicated a tension between her belief that university is preparation for employment, and her view that practices and conventions at university are not relevant in the workforce. She discussed the contradiction that “bouncing ideas off one another” and “sharing ideas” could be considered plagiarism at university, but are considered acceptable (and often necessary) practices in the workforce. This confusion was also evident when she spoke about referencing. Justine seemed to view the reasons why referencing is necessary in academia as different from why people outside of academia would reference. She explained that referencing is

basically a helpful thing, for the benefit of the reader. If you’re reading an article and they reference and then quote some work, you can look it up. I guess that’s like real world why we reference. But at university it’s probably primarily so that you don’t get credit for somebody else’s work.

Justine seemed to view the academic world as bearing very little relation to the “real world”.

Hannah also expressed a view that academic skills have little place in the ‘real world’, stating: “I find [them] a little bit pointless, but that’s part of academic learning.” She indicated that for her there were two different types of ‘learning’: short-term learning for a particular task, and long-term learning of useful things:

The thing is that there’s two different types of learning in my mind. There’s short-term learning where I’m learning some facts, like names and dates of things, or a theorist that I’ve got to remember what their theory was. The names and dates will go into my short-term memory and be spat back out in an exam and then gone, whereas the actual theory I’ll actually see. I’ll put it deeper down and be able to pull it up and go ‘I can see this theory happening in this group of people.’ And so that learning will then be a deeper learning.

Similarly, Katie indicated that some of what she was learning at University was not useful for her future employment. She stated: “you do stuff in labs but they’re all student labs and you’re not doing things you’d be doing in a job.” A view that some of what she was learning at university was not what she would be “doing in a job” was also evident when Katie spoke of referencing. She explained referencing as important because it acknowledges the originator of an idea.

However, Katie also seemed to view referencing as necessary to display learning, stating “we’re still learning. We’re getting our ideas from other people. Referencing allows us to acknowledge whose ideas we’ve used.” Similarly, Lisa viewed some academic skills as relevant only to the university setting. She explained that some of what she was learning in her undergraduate degree was preparation for postgraduate study:

A lot of the internal assessment that is done seems to be quite preparatory for higher education still. Like lab reports and essays and the sort of thing you’d be doing once you got your undergraduate
degree and maybe you were going on to do research, then you would have at least some basic ability to be writing articles and you know, theses and stuff. So I think a lot of it is preparation for that.

Like Hannah and Justine, Lisa seemed to view some of the skills she was learning as relevant only to the academic environment, perhaps indicating a view of university as not in the “real world”.

Some researchers have suggested that a view of attending university as a means to an end (gaining a degree or to get a job) may be a factor in the plagiarism problem. For example, Blum (2009, p. 140) states: “[F]or those who see their college education as just another hurdle to jump on the way to a bigger goal, plagiarism is another means among many for accomplishing their mission.” Although Blum was referring to deliberate plagiarism or cheating, perceiving assignments as just another hurdle to jump may also be a factor in unintentional plagiarism, as indicated by Kirsten’s explanations of her referencing practices which I outline below. It is also possible that some students, in their desire to complete assignments with minimum effort for maximum grades, may cut and paste from several different sources to quilt together written assignments, producing what Howard (1999) terms patchwriting.

Kirsten made the decision to come to university “because I wanted to get a job that I enjoy doing, and I needed a degree for that.” She saw the purpose of a university education as being “to further your knowledge from school to be able to get a better job.” Although Kirsten spoke of furthering her knowledge, she also seemed to hold a view that the purpose of a university education is to gain a
qualification for a specific job, as she focused on obtaining a degree and preparing for the workforce. Kirsten explained her belief that assessment tasks are “to prove to the lecturers that we’ve learnt what they’ve taught us”, indicating her belief that performance on an assessment is “proof” of learning. This need to show “proof” of her learning was also evident when she discussed plagiarism. She said: “Everything we have to write, we have to have justification of where we’ve learnt it.” She viewed plagiarism in terms of referencing and, despite stating that she wished to pursue a Masters degree and perhaps a PhD, she indicated no understanding of referencing as a means to build an argument or to back up a claim. When I asked her why we need to reference, Kirsten responded: “I suppose to give credit to people who wrote the original journal.” Kirsten indicated that she viewed referencing as a mechanical exercise that she needed to get “right”:

There was one essay where I had all the references written at the bottom, but when it came to put the references through the essay, I couldn’t remember which ones went where. Some of them I worked out, but others I just put a reference and hoped it was the right one.

Kirsten’s self-explained practices indicate that she is likely at risk of plagiarising unintentionally.

Christian expressed a view of universities as gatekeepers for employers, but he was critical of those who view university solely as a pathway to employment. Christian suggested that universities filter out (failing) students who are “incapable” of succeeding in their chosen future career, explaining his belief that universities place too much emphasis on “knowing what things are true” and
not enough emphasis on the process of finding those truths. Christian viewed students’ plagiarism as a reflection of an emphasis on “knowing”, and explained that detection of and responses to plagiarism, once it has occurred, are a waste of resources. He stated: “It’s far cheaper to prevent diseases from occurring rather than treating them once they do occur. Without fixing these broader societal issues that cause plagiarism, it’s just the last thing that [students] can resort to.” As discussed above, Christian stated that he was attending university for “the learning”, rather than to prepare for employment like “other students”. I discuss the learning discourses that the students drew on in the next section.

Learning discourses

A third set of discourses that emerged in the students’ responses about learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education was learning discourses. When drawing on learning discourses, students spoke about universities as places “to learn”, or as places that foster personal growth. Some of the students spoke about assessment tasks as providing opportunities to learn, and about plagiarism as linked to “not learning”. Learning discourses were characterised by students talking about concepts such as “the greater good” and self-improvement; or new knowledge, skills, and understandings. It was notable that when students drew on learning discourses in their explanations of learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education, they seemed to be referring to learning knowledge or subject content. This contrasts with students’ use of learning discourses when
discussing plagiarism, when their explanations often focused on learning skills to avoid plagiarism, or plagiarism as an indication that students are not learning.

Based on Entwistle and Peterson’s (2004, p. 412) claim that “what students believe about learning overlaps with what they hope to achieve from being in higher education,” in each student’s interview I asked “what is learning for you?” Consequently all of the students spoke about learning. Most of the students talked about learning only in the very narrow sense of learning at university. They did not talk about learning outside of the classroom, with the exception of Marie who spoke about leaving home for the first time and “learning to live independently”. One reason why most students focused on learning at university rather than on learning in a broader sense may have been the context of the interviews (see Chapter Four). The interviews took place at the University and the students were also aware that the main purpose of their interview was to explore the topic of plagiarism. Further, the interviews revealed that most of the students seemed to view plagiarism as specific to the university setting.

Although all of the students in this research spoke about learning in response to my specific questioning, for some students, learning was a theme throughout their entire interview. Both Karina and Aaron viewed university as a site of self-improvement or a place to challenge existing beliefs. Karina drew on learning discourses when she articulated her belief that education is important for “its own sake”. She envisaged a university education as providing an opportunity for “personal growth”: self-improvement likely to facilitate her future contribution to society. For example, Karina stated: “I’ve always wanted to study
and I’ve always been interested in science and I wanted to know more. So university just meant more study and I love that. It interested me.” Karina went on to clarify this view, explaining that “with a university education, we can learn from the past and we can build on that and we can progress into the future in terms of technology and science.” Karina was the only student who did not specifically mention getting a job or future employment in her interview, despite being enrolled in a professional programme of study. Karina’s choice of vocation, for which she was preparing through her professional course, was related to her desire to contribute to society and “to make society better”. Her views of learning and the purpose of a university education were reflective of this goal. Karina indicated her belief that learning and success at university is the individual student’s responsibility, stating: “If you don’t do [your assignments], the only person who it affects is you.” Karina carried this view of learning for its own sake into her discussion on plagiarism. She explained: “I believe in stepping on the shoulders of giants.” Karina expressed a view that in order to create new knowledge, we need to learn and build on what is already known. She seemed to view plagiarism as a failure to “give credit” to these “giants”, stating that plagiarism is a problem “because it doesn’t give credit where credit’s due. If you wrote a thesis that you spent years on, you wouldn’t want someone to just pinch that off you.” Karina also emphasised her view of the importance of learning when she voiced her opinion that plagiarism “shows that you didn’t really learn anything, and that’s something to be concerned about.”
Aaron spoke about struggling to learn, and illustrated his belief that understanding is central to learning when he explained his difficulties with learning concepts in his course:

It was just deeply frustrating and you kick yourself because you know that it shouldn’t be this difficult, that it’s a stage one paper, that there are 19 year olds sitting there who don’t know as much about how the world works, who seem to find it much easier. So it was just frustrating. But eventually if you sit there and stare at it long enough and do the exercises for long enough, eventually the penny drops and you go “oh, that’s what they’re trying to get at.”

In this statement, Aaron is indicating a view of learning as about understanding how information fits into his view of “how the world works.” Like Karina, Aaron also viewed learning as a deep process (Säljö, 1979), where learning is viewed as a process towards understanding, changing perspectives, or being changed (transformed) as a person (Marton, Dall'Alba, & Beaty, 1993). Aaron’s statement “eventually the penny drops” refers to a moment of illumination when understanding happens. In order to get to this point of illumination, Aaron spoke of going “over and over” the material he was given in class, and explained that, for him, learning is “confrontational” since it “challenge[s] all sorts of preconceptions that I have” about the “way the world works.” Here, Aaron expressed a view of learning as transformational.

Aaron described the way he viewed learning and the purpose of university as “different” to the way other “young” students view them. He explained:

They’re here to pass. They’re here to pass and then get out into the workforce with their degree and go and do whatever they want to do, and that’s not why I’m here. I’m not here to pass courses and get my
degree, you know. There’s no point in me passing the course if I don’t understand it. That just seems to be a complete waste of time. So yes, I could write the answers down, but if I don’t understand how I get to those answers then I haven’t really learnt anything.

Aaron expressed his belief that (other) students do not value learning, and are just at university to get a degree. Aaron explained that for other students “understanding the subject really doesn't matter, what matters is the final grade.”

Karina’s and Aaron’s views of learning align with Spronken-Smith et al.’s (2009) orientations to higher education of developing life skills and learning how to think, and education for its own sake. From the perspective of these orientations, the participants in the study by Spronken-Smith et al. acknowledged the benefits of higher education in terms of their ability to think, learn, and develop as a person. Like the students in the orientations study who viewed university from a learning perspective, Aaron’s interview responses also alluded to university as associated with a career. Although he told me “I’m not here for vocational reasons”, he qualified this with “well, I’m not here solely for vocational reasons. At some point someone’s going to want the money they’ve loaned me back.” This indicates his expectation that there is a link between a university education and employment. In the academic literature, Walker (2008) argues that employment should be an outcome of higher education, and that an employment focus is not incompatible with a learning focus. Despite Aaron’s acknowledgement that employment is an outcome of higher education, it seemed to be a secondary and relatively unimportant reason for his decision to pursue a university education, and his responses indicated he thought an employment outcome and a learning outcome are incompatible. Karina (earlier) also echoed
the responses of students in Spronken-Smith et al.’s study in her belief that all people have a responsibility to make society better, and a university education provides preparation for this.

Lydia, Christian and Hugh also believed that the reasons they were each attending university were different from those of “other students”. Like Aaron, they expressed a belief that most students attend university in order to become employable, but positioned themselves as here “to learn”. Lydia, Christian, Hugh and Aaron, whilst recognising students’ positioning as consumers/commodities in a higher education marketplace, also actively exceeded market discourses by stating their own intentions to “learn”. Of the four students who held the view that they were attending university for “different” reasons, three (Aaron, Christian and Hugh) were mature students who each had previous careers and work experience. The fact that they had already earned money, alongside the knowledge that they were already employable, may have impacted on their views that the benefit of university is the learning rather than the degree. Neither Christian nor Hugh were focused on completing a particular degree, and both stated they were not necessarily interested in gaining a “qualification”. Instead, while aware of the presence of market discourses in higher education, they were each focusing on particular subjects of interest to them, highlighting the importance of learning as important for its own sake.
Summary

The discourses the students drew on when discussing the broader question of the purpose of a university education revealed that the most common ways the students viewed universities were as businesses, as places to prepare for future employment, and as places for learning and personal growth. Students who viewed universities as businesses and drew on market discourses tended to emphasise the importance of the qualification or physical degree over the learning required to obtain it. However, some students who drew on market discourses emphasised that, unlike most students, they were at university to learn rather than to gain a qualification. Students who drew predominantly on market discourses also seemed to view universities as gate-keepers for employers, and positioned referencing rules and plagiarism detection as part of this gate-keeping process. In addition to this, they viewed plagiarism as a strategy that students might use in order to pass their course or gain a qualification.

Students in this research who viewed universities as providing preparation for employment also often valued the qualification as the primary outcome of a university education. However, when drawing on employment discourses, most of these students also indicated the importance to their future employment of much of the knowledge they were gaining through their course. Students who drew on employment discourses often indicated confusion about plagiarism, and seemed unable to see the relevance of referencing or avoiding plagiarism to their future employment. These students commonly held the belief that it is the responsibility
of lecturers to ensure that students have the knowledge and skills to avoid plagiarism.

Students in this research who viewed universities as places for learning tended to express a view that they were more interested in learning at university than they were in gaining an actual qualification. Many of these students had a more complex understanding of plagiarism. Although several students who drew on learning discourses suggested that unintentional plagiarism should not be considered as ‘plagiarism’, they still seemed to hold the view that it is students’ responsibility to avoid plagiarising. Students who predominantly drew on learning discourses commonly expressed the view that plagiarism indicates that the student has not done the learning, or that they are not interested in learning.

In the academic literature, Barnett (1990) states that the function of higher education is to promote inquiry, deep thinking and critique. Similarly, Walker (2010, p. 487) states: “A university plays a special role in society through its two principle activities: advancing knowledge and scholarship, and educating students and professionals”. Only a small number of students in this study expressed a view of university as promoting inquiry or “advancing knowledge and scholarship” (Walker, 2010, p. 487). Most of the students, however, linked a university education with future employment. Barnett (1990) argues that inquiry, deep thinking and critique are essential elements of higher education. He explains: “To the extent that an educational process falls short of these conditions, it also falls short of achieving the promise of higher education” (Barnett, 1990, p. 203). However, only a small minority of students in the current research indicated that
they viewed learning to think as a purpose of a university education. Furthermore, two students explicitly stated they thought the university discouraged critical thinking. Despite learning and “having economic opportunities” being equally important outcomes of higher education (Walker, 2008, p. 484), many of the students in this research seemed to view future economic opportunities as the most desirable outcome of their university experience.

The views of the students in this research can be seen as reflecting the changing nature of higher education. Biggs and Tang (2011, p. 3) argue that “since 2000 there have been dramatic changes in the nature of higher education,” citing increased participation and greater student diversity as the most notable changes. They argue that this means “more professionally or vocationally oriented programmes are required and more institutions that serve different needs and constituencies from the traditional academic ones” (p. 4). Most of the students I interviewed seemed to have the expectation that university is primarily a place to prepare for employment.

In her research in the U.S.A., Blum (2009) highlights differences between the reasons why students attend college and institutions’ views on the purpose of higher education. As discussed earlier, Blum suggests these differences as a factor in relation to the occurrence of plagiarism. The possible differences between institutional and students’ expectations of and priorities for a university education have also been researched elsewhere. For example, Maher and Mitchell (2010, p. 138) report that a consequence of different expectations of a university education is that “students may struggle to understand the study requirements and the type
of learning necessary in the higher education environment.” Maher and Mitchell conclude, “lecturers and tutors may not fully understand student perspectives on or expectations of the university experience” (p. 138). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore if there is a disjuncture between what the students view as the purpose of a university education and what the University of Otago aims to provide. However, the interview responses from the students suggest that many of them struggled to understand the relevance to their future of some of the academic skills likely to help them avoid plagiarism, such as referencing.

In the next chapter, I conclude this research into students’ understandings of plagiarism. I summarise the main findings of this study, and highlight the contributions it makes to plagiarism research. I then discuss some of the implications of what the students in this study said about plagiarism, learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education. In particular, I examine what the University might do in light of these findings to better support students in the area of plagiarism and academic integrity. I conclude the thesis by suggesting a way in which plagiarism might be re-framed in order to achieve this.
Chapter Eight

Discussion and conclusion:

Troubling plagiarism
Introduction

In this chapter I bring my research into students’ understandings of plagiarism to a conclusion. I revisit each chapter and highlight the main points of each. I begin by synthesising my findings regarding the students’ understandings of plagiarism. I then acknowledge three main limitations of this research. Following this, I outline the contributions this study makes to plagiarism research. Specifically, I explain how this thesis addresses a gap in the plagiarism literature, how the research ‘unsettles’ understandings of plagiarism, and how the study explores students’ understandings of plagiarism in relation to their views on learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education. I also revisit my conceptualisation of the plagiarism literature, and how my conceptualisation contributes to this literature. In my concluding remarks I revisit my research questions, provide my key findings, and suggest how plagiarism could be (re)conceptualised to better support students’ learning. Finally, I highlight some future research possibilities.

Students’ understandings of plagiarism

In this research I examined higher education students’ understandings of plagiarism. My findings provide important insights into a multitude of different ways that the students understood plagiarism. There seemed to be a disjuncture between the students’ understandings of plagiarism, and the information given to students via the University plagiarism policy and information on the University
website. However, the students’ understandings of plagiarism did seem to be connected with their beliefs about learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education. Specifically, many of the students’ views on plagiarism seemed in part to be informed by their thoughts on if (or how), whether, and in what ways, concepts such as citation, referencing, and plagiarism were relevant to their future employment.

In Chapter Two, I reviewed the existing literature on plagiarism, with a focus on what the literature tells us about how students understand or experience plagiarism. I highlighted three main views of plagiarism that are present in the academic literature: plagiarism as a moral issue, plagiarism as a procedural issue, and plagiarism as a writing issue. I explained and illustrated each of these views, and concluded that, from the students’ perspective, neither a moral nor a procedural view of plagiarism is helpful. The literature tells us that students are able to express a definition of plagiarism, and in general they deem institutional policies and regulations to be fair however, most often, students are not able to apply their definition of plagiarism to their own or to others’ written work. Literature suggests that students struggle to avoid plagiarising unintentionally due to a lack of understanding as to how to incorporate source texts in their written work. Consequently, a moral or procedural view of plagiarism, which essentially dichotomises students as either honest or dishonest does little to ensure that students are learning the skills they need to become competent academic writers. Recent literature, particularly the plagiarism literature focusing on student learning and writing, advocates that viewing students’ plagiarism as part of the process of
learning to become an academic writer is the most effective way to respond to plagiarism.

Chapter Three presented an outline of the theoretical framework informing this study. I explained my beliefs about the socially constructed nature of knowledge. I then outlined how the poststructural ideas of discourse and subjectivity informed my theoretical lens. I outlined my use of academic literacies theory in this thesis, and how it relates to plagiarism in higher education. I explained how each of these three theoretical resources informed the methodological decisions I made in this research.

In Chapter Four I explained my research methodology. I introduced the student participants and described the process of interviewing the students regarding their views on plagiarism, learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education. I outlined how, in keeping with my theoretical lens, I used discourse analysis to read the students’ responses. I then explained the reflexive process I engaged in during the study to ensure its trustworthiness.

In Chapter Five I focused on what the 21 students said about plagiarism during our interviews. I highlighted the commonalities, tensions, and contradictions in the students’ understandings of plagiarism, and showed how the students’ responses either echoed or contradicted other plagiarism research. In general, the students in this study did not have a thorough understanding of what plagiarism is or how to avoid it, indicating that they may be at risk of plagiarising unintentionally. In addition, they displayed little understanding of the University
plagiarism policy, and most of the students had not read it. I found that mature students expressed more complex understandings of plagiarism than their younger peers, indicating that understandings of plagiarism may be linked to either maturation or to students’ development as academic writers.

In Chapter Six, using a discourse analytic approach, I examined the University’s official policy and information on plagiarism. I identified a dominant ethico-legal view of plagiarism in these documents, with little distinction between intentional and unintentional plagiarism, particularly in regard to the sanctions for plagiarising. I then analysed the students’ interview discussions and highlighted four dominant discourses of plagiarism that emerged. I described these as: ethico-legal, confusion, fairness, and learning discourses. When talking about plagiarism, the students most commonly drew on ethico-legal discourses, reflecting a view of plagiarism as a moral or rule-following issue. Confusion discourses were also prevalent in the students’ interviews. I found that the students commonly revealed confusion when discussing the possibility that they might unintentionally plagiarise. Notably, students also expressed the view that they are given inadequate information on plagiarism and how to avoid it. Fairness discourses were most evident when the students were discussing the outcomes of plagiarism; for example, sanctions or responses to plagiarism, or the effect of students’ plagiarism on the University or on other students. Learning discourses were absent in the University’s policy and information on plagiarism, however, some of the students drew on learning discourses when they explained their views on how plagiarism should be dealt with at the University. These students expressed a desire for more educative measures around plagiarism and its avoidance, or to
better understand course content and disciplinary conventions in order to lessen the possibility of unintentional plagiarism.

In Chapter Seven, I explored the discourses that the students drew on when discussing learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education. I identified three dominant discourses: market, employment, and learning discourses. I found that all of the students except one drew on employment discourses in their interviews, revealing that for these students, an important purpose of a university education is preparation for employment. In Chapter Seven, I also considered the connections and disconnections between the discourses the students drew on when discussing plagiarism (as outlined in Chapter Six), and those they drew on in their discussions of learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education. In addition, I drew on other literature that explores students’ orientations to and beliefs about a university education to explore the subject positions the students’ beliefs made available to them. I found that students who drew on market and/or employment discourses most commonly viewed the physical degree as the primary outcome of a university education. Students who drew on employment discourses expressed a view that the academic skill of referencing or essay writing is unrelated to their future employment, and is therefore not a useful skill for them. Most of the students expressed a view that the University has a responsibility to ensure that students learn the skills necessary to complete their degree, and that these skills should be relevant to their future career. Students who drew on learning discourses in their interview responses expressed a view that deliberate plagiarism inhibits learning,
and that unintentional plagiarism indicates that students have not adequately learned the necessary skills and/or knowledge to complete their assignments.

In the remainder of this chapter I discuss the implications of my research findings and in doing so I address my research questions and ultimate goal in researching and writing this thesis:

- What are higher education students’ understandings and experiences of plagiarism policy and practices?
- What discourses inform or shape plagiarism policies and students’ understandings of plagiarism?

Specifically, I discuss how the findings of this research might shape future plagiarism policies and practices. First, however, I discuss the limitations of this project. I then highlight the contributions this study makes to plagiarism research.

**Limitations of this research**

In Chapter Four I outlined how I addressed the trustworthiness of this research through attending to credibility, dependability, and confirmability. I explained my focus on reflexivity and transparency. In this section I revisit reflexivity and transparency as I highlight the limitations of this study that have become evident through my research journey.

Firstly, although I have explained that I make no claims to the transferability or generalisability of this research (see Chapter Four), I was
disappointed not to recruit participants from culturally diverse backgrounds. More than half of the participants self-identified as New Zealand European/ Pākehā, and only two as from indigenous backgrounds. Of the remaining participants, it transpired that all except two had received the bulk of their schooling in Western contexts. Only one of the participants had grown up in a cultural context outside New Zealand. In addition, I did not collect information regarding whether the students were enrolled as domestic or international students; however, from the interview conversations, I assumed that all of the students except one were domestic students. I also did not collect information regarding whether English was each participants’ first language. This would have been interesting information to collect as some of the literature suggests that students who receive their schooling in Eastern cultures, or for whom English is not a first language, may have different understandings of plagiarism and scholarship.

Secondly, in the interviews, the questions I asked were limited by my own understanding of plagiarism, and consequently these may have limited the students’ responses. Throughout the course of this research, my own understanding of plagiarism changed and, with the hindsight brought about by this knowledge, I would have asked some different questions. For example, throughout the interviews I (deliberately) did not distinguish between intentional and unintentional plagiarism, leaving it to the students’ responses to reveal what they understood plagiarism to be. However, it would have been useful to explicitly ask the students about both intentional and unintentional plagiarism at some stage during the interviews. Doing this may have revealed more of the tensions and complexities within and between the students’ understandings.
Thirdly, my analysis of the students’ understandings of plagiarism was made on the basis of a single interview with each participant. Consequently I was unable to build up a strong relationship with the participants, and this may have limited what they believed they were able to say in the interviews, as well as possibly limiting my ability to accurately discern intended meanings. It was also often difficult to tease out understandings of plagiarism within the single participant interview setting. It may have been helpful to also conduct focus groups with some of the participants, in order to encourage conversation and the further troubling of plagiarism as the students negotiated meaning together. It may have also been useful to hold focus groups before developing the interview questions, as they may have allowed for the emergence of ideas about plagiarism that I was not aware of and therefore unable to draw out in the interviews.

The limitations highlighted above are attributable to myself as the researcher not knowing at the outset of the project what I know at the conclusion of the project. However, as Anderson, Kang and Foster Page (2011, p. 168) point out, “the influence of our own perceptions, experiences and frames of reference can be seen as both a strength and a limitation of the study.” A strength of this study is that it presents rich insights that problematise taken-for-granted perspectives on plagiarism. Consequently, the research provides an excellent basis for future research.
Contributions of this research

This study contributes to the research on plagiarism in higher education in a number of ways. Firstly, the study focused on understandings of plagiarism from the students’ perspectives. Although the last two decades have seen an increase in the amount of research into plagiarism, within the academic literature only a handful of studies have considered students’ perspectives in depth. The bulk of the research into students’ understandings of plagiarism examines data collected through surveys or questionnaires. Other studies report on staff views of students’ understandings. The current research begins to address this gap.

Secondly, in this research I attempt to unsettle understandings of plagiarism by deliberately foregrounding the tensions and contradictions inherent in the students’ conversations about plagiarism. Through exploring the complexity of the students’ understandings of plagiarism the thesis has highlighted areas that need to be addressed by educational institutions. For example, although in Chapter Six I identified some dominant discourses that the students drew on when discussing plagiarism, my analysis also revealed that most of the students’ understandings of plagiarism were complex and multi-faceted. In particular, most of the students’ discussions of plagiarism revealed distinct differences between how they perceived unintentional plagiarism compared with how they perceived deliberate plagiarism. In their research interviews, when students spoke about plagiarism, in the first instance, most framed plagiarism as an act of deliberate dishonesty. Many of the students became confused when they
considered the concept of unintentional plagiarism, particularly the idea that they themselves might plagiarise unintentionally. My study suggests that there is a need to re-consider how many educational institutions define, respond to, and educate students about plagiarism. I discuss this in more depth in the next section.

Thirdly, this research traces the students’ articulated beliefs about learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education and explores how these beliefs might be reflected in the students’ understandings of plagiarism. The nature of higher education has changed over the last two decades leading to increased participation and greater student diversity in universities (e.g., Biggs & Tang, 2011; Liyanage & Andrade, 2012). My study begins to consider how students in the current higher education climate understand and experience plagiarism, and relates their understandings to institutional expectations of scholarship.

Lastly, through the process of tracing the existing literature on plagiarism, I uncovered some troubling trends in the academic literature. These trends may be contributing to the confusion that surrounds plagiarism, both in terms of research and institutional responses to plagiarism. I presented a new synthesis of the plagiarism literature (Figure 1) that identifies these trends and where in the literature each trend is evident. As I highlighted in Chapter Two, there are three main understandings or framings of plagiarism in the literature:

1. Plagiarism as a moral issue, where plagiarism is positioned an unproblematic concept and students who plagiarise are situated as dishonest,
Chapter Eight: Discussion and conclusion: Troubling Plagiarism

2. Plagiarism as a policy issue where clear plagiarism policy is seen to be the solution to reducing both intentional and inadvertent plagiarism, and

3. Plagiarism as a writing issue that recognises plagiarism as including multiple and complex practices that can be expected to occur as students learn to become academic writers.

In Chapter Two, I identified that, in addition to the three dominant understandings of plagiarism evident in the literature, the plagiarism research comes from three different disciplinary areas: the broader higher education literature, the academic integrity literature, and literature focusing on students’ writing and learning. Each of these literatures frames plagiarism in a distinct way, and often does not draw on the other literatures. In my study, I have drawn on all three areas of the plagiarism literature. This has allowed me to consider the students’ expressed understandings of plagiarism from the multiple perspectives presented in the literature; namely in terms of teaching and learning in higher education, academic integrity, and academic writing.

Reconceptualising plagiarism

I turn now to the question of how the students’ expressed understandings of plagiarism might inform plagiarism policy and practice. In this section, I explain some of the implications of the students’ beliefs about plagiarism, with reference to the University plagiarism policy and information, and the students’ views on learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education.
When plagiarism is not plagiarism

This research highlights that plagiarism is commonly framed as an ethico-legal problem. An ethico-legal view of plagiarism is prevalent in the literature (see Chapter Two), as well as in institutional plagiarism policies, including the plagiarism policy at the University of Otago where this study was undertaken (see Chapter Six). An ethico-legal framing of plagiarism also dominated the students’ responses to questions about plagiarism in the research interviews. In the interviews, all of the students drew on ethico-legal discourses at some point and, in addition, ethico-legal discourses were the most prevalent discourses throughout the interviews (see Chapter Six). An ethico-legal framing situates students as responsible for avoiding plagiarism. Plagiarism is therefore positioned as a (moral) choice that students make.

Reflecting an ethico-legal framing, in the research interviews when I first asked for an explanation of plagiarism, most of the students’ explanations revealed a view of plagiarism as a deliberate and intentional behaviour. However, many of the students became confused when they considered the concept of unintentional plagiarism. Most of the students did not perceive unintentional plagiarism to be a moral issue; therefore these students were unable to make sense of unintentional plagiarism from an ethico-legal perspective. The students’ responses in this research highlighted that, for them, a major problem in fully understanding plagiarism, why we need to avoid it, and how to avoid it, was the combining of two quite distinct sets of behaviours under the label ‘plagiarism’; namely, intentional plagiarism and unintentional plagiarism.
In much of the literature, and in many university policies, it is common for deliberate plagiarism and unintentional plagiarism to be dealt with as a singular concept and labelled ‘plagiarism’. In university policies, unintentional plagiarism is most often presented as a less serious form of plagiarism with less punitive (or sometimes educative) consequences but, apart from this, the difference is usually not made explicit (Grigg, 2010). At the University of Otago, unintentional plagiarism is positioned within the Dishonest Practice Procedures (see Chapter Six), as “inadvertent” or “naïve” behaviour, and is generally only used to refer to a student’s “first offence” (University of Otago, 2011b). Despite this, unintentional plagiarism is still clearly labelled and treated as plagiarism, and as such the policy draws on ethico-legal discourses suggesting that unintentional plagiarism is still a form of deliberate dishonesty. Some of the students’ interview responses also reflected a view that plagiarism, whether intentional or unintentional, is a punishable offence. Some students were confused by the idea that unintentional plagiarism was treated as dishonesty, and others expressed a view that treating intentional and unintentional plagiarism as dishonesty was “not fair”. This view indicates that such a framing is not helpful for students.

Learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education

In the research interviews, some students also displayed confusion regarding the relevance to their future careers of learning correct citation and referencing practices. When considering the purpose of a university education, most of the students drew heavily on employment discourses, indicating a view that university
is a gateway to employment. Many of the students stated that they did not see the relevance to their future employment of learning to reference. Although most of the students acknowledged the need to avoid cheating, including deliberately passing off someone else’s work as their own, they emphasised concepts such as “passing” and “getting a degree”. When they spoke about learning, some students talked about learning subject knowledge and skills relevant to their future employment, and several of the students explicitly stated that they did not view essay writing or referencing as relevant skills. If these skills are indeed relevant to the students’ future careers, these students seemed to have no understanding of how they were relevant, and some expressed confusion as to why they were expected to learn them.

It also became apparent through my analysis of the research interviews that many of the students viewed assessment tasks as tests (see Chapter Seven) rather than as opportunities to learn. It was also apparent that they viewed their citation and referencing practices in their written assignments as something they were being tested on, rather than something they were learning to do. The University policy and information on plagiarism further emphasises this view through ethico-legal language and the tacit message that students are solely responsible for ensuring they cite and reference correctly (see Chapter Six). The University policy and information on plagiarism does not convey a view of learning to cite as integral to learning to write. Rather, it implies that students should already be able to cite and write to the required standard. One way of addressing the disjuncture between students’ and institutional views of learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education could be to ensure that
students are fully inducted into the academic culture (e.g., Murray & Nallaya, 2014), including being provided with explicit explanations regarding the relevance of the assessment tasks they are required to undertake. Furthermore, it would be helpful if information given to students regarding writing and citation conveyed a message that these are skills students are expected to develop as they progress through their studies.

An ethico-legal framing of plagiarism, which perpetuates a view of assessment tasks as tests of students’ knowledge and writing skills, places a focus on catching or eliminating cheaters. The University of Otago Graduate Outcomes, however, do not focus on ensuring graduates are not cheats. Rather, as I explained in Chapter One, the Graduate Outcomes state: “All University of Otago graduates will possess a deep, coherent and extensive knowledge of at least one discipline, coupled with knowledge of the fundamental contribution of research to this discipline” (University of Otago, 2013). The focus of the Graduate Outcomes is learning, and plagiarism policy and practices at the University need to be aligned with this. If we require our students to learn good scholarship practices, as is indicated by the intended Graduate Outcomes, then we need to be drawing on scholarship and learning discourses in all institutional policies, including policies that relate to students’ writing processes and practices.

**Emphasising learning**

It was clear in this study that, from the students’ perspective, the dominant ethico-legal framing of plagiarism hinders learning. In the research interviews,
some of the students spoke about the links between plagiarism and learning. Some of the students expressed a view that plagiarism is a result of the student not having done the learning or not understanding the subject content. Similarly, other researchers have suggested that not understanding may be a reason why students plagiarise (e.g., Roig, 1997). Poor time management is also viewed as a causal factor in plagiarism, and students in this study reported lack of time as a reason for students’ plagiarism. One way to address this is to ensure that students have enough time and resources to adequately source and understand the material they are expected to write about in their assignments. As discussed in Chapter Six, some of the students expressed a desire for more resources and opportunities to learn about academic writing, in particular correct citation practices and avoiding plagiarism.

Although re-conceptualising assessment is beyond the scope of this thesis, I suggest that one way of responding to students’ desire for more information and support in the area of academic writing might be to reduce the number of high stakes written assessment tasks students are required to complete, and to introduce more low-stakes or formative assessment tasks. This would enable early instances of plagiarism (unattributed citation) to be treated as an inevitable part of learning to write. Increasing the formative nature of assessments may decrease some students’ temptation to submit work they have not written themselves out of fear that their own work is not good enough. Increasing the number of (low-stakes) assessment tasks will also allow for more formative feedback to students on their developing writing and citation skills and encourage assessments to be framed within scholarship and learning discourses as discussed above. Ultimately
this would work to ensure that the focus is placed on student learning. I do, however, acknowledge the difficulty of introducing more low-stakes or formative assessments in light of broader institutional constraints. For example, at the University of Otago, the academic year consists of two 13-week semesters, plus a summer school, thus placing time constraints on teaching and assessing students’ learning. In addition, some first year classes attract large numbers of students, which equates to a large amount of assignment marking for teachers. I am not necessarily suggesting increasing the total number of assessments. Rather, I am suggesting increasing the number of assessments that are formative, which may mean decreasing the number of summative assessments.

The suggestion to increase formative assessment processes contradicts other research findings at the University of Otago that indicate students do not take any notice of formative feedback, even though they request it (Harland et al., 2014). In order to embed a focus on learning to write in university teaching, a change in the culture surrounding assessment practices at the University may be necessary. For example, each discipline might establish a compulsory first year paper designed specifically to teach students how to write and create knowledge within that discipline. Within these papers, assessments could be formative. For example, if students are required to write an essay, they might first be required to submit an essay outline for feedback. Subsequent to this they might be required to submit a (formative) assignment in which they have sourced literature and practiced critically assessing texts, summarising and paraphrasing. Following feedback on their outline and literature notes, students might be required to write and submit the final essay. In this way, students are scaffolded through the
assignment process, and any areas in which a student’s writing needs improvement (such as poor citation) can be identified and attended to before submission of the final assignment. Notably, Harland et al. (2014) present a model of integrated assessment that advocates formative evaluation and the provision of feedback on assignments that can then be re-worked by the student before being submitted for summative assessment.

**Separating poor citation from plagiarism**

Throughout this study I have struggled with the idea of how we might separate unintentional plagiarism from the term ‘plagiarism’. Early on in the study journey I came to realise that in the existing plagiarism literature researchers rarely explicitly stated whether they were writing about intentional plagiarism, unintentional plagiarism, or both, and each reader would no doubt interpret their meaning differently. In the research interviews, I asked the students about plagiarism without specifying if I was asking about deliberate or unintentional behaviours, or both. The students’ responses indicated that most students understood plagiarism to be an intentional cheating behaviour. However, the students’ responses also showed they were troubled by the concept of unintentional plagiarism. Through my analysis of their responses, it became clear that the students viewed unintentional plagiarism as bearing no resemblance to intentional plagiarism, despite their textual appearance often being indistinguishable. The students’ confusion came from not understanding why two such different behaviours are treated as a unitary phenomenon within the
dishonest practice procedures, when one is dishonesty and the other is not. The students expressed anxiety regarding the possibility that they might be positioned as dishonest when they had no intention of cheating.

It is clear from my research that one of the main issues with plagiarism is the lack of a clear and unified definition of what plagiarism is. In particular, both the plagiarism literature (e.g. Bond et al., 2013; Borg, 2009; Howard, 1999; Kuiper, 2005) and the students in this study questioned whether unintentional plagiarism should be considered plagiarism, since by definition, it is not dishonest. A common argument in the plagiarism literature that focuses on plagiarism as an aspect of students’ development as academic writers is that the term ‘plagiarism’ should be applied only when the student’s intention is to deliberately claim authorship for work they did not produce. As I discussed in Chapter Two, a number of alternative terms have been suggested that separate unintentional textual transgressions from cheating behaviour. In particular, Howard (1999, p. 166) strongly advocates the removal of unintentional behaviours from the label ‘plagiarism’, and calls to:

Let the word plagiarism describe the intentional representation of others’ words and ideas as one’s own, and let it continue to be classified as a subset of academic dishonesty. Let “failure to cite” describe the act of ignorance committed by students who do not know academic citation conventions.

Similarly, Bond et al. (2013) argue for the removal of unintentional plagiarism from the University of Otago Dishonest Practice Procedures on the basis that responses to plagiarism as a result of poor academic practice should be educative rather than punitive.
Whilst policy is necessary to allow for appropriate responses to intentional dishonesty (e.g., Bond et al., 2013; Grigg, 2010), separating unintentional plagiarism from a policy that deals with intentional plagiarism would enable a move away from a predominantly moral response to accidental plagiarism. In addition, removing unintentional plagiarism from policies associated with cheating would enable the emergence of educative discourses around unintentional plagiarism. Educative discourses will allow responses to unintentional plagiarism that foster students’ development of correct citation practices as they learn to become academic writers. However, in order to be effective, separating unintentional plagiarism from dishonest practice policies also necessitates separating unintentional plagiarism from definitions of plagiarism. As discussed in Chapter Two and above, the term ‘plagiarism’ lacks a unified and shared meaning. Separating unintentional plagiarism from plagiarism, an undefined concept, poses a number of difficulties. Most obviously, separating unintentional plagiarism from intentional plagiarism places the onus on determining whether the student intended to misrepresent someone else’s work as his or her own. Therefore, the emphasis remains on determining the student’s intent in order to assign an incident as either ‘plagiarism’ or ‘not plagiarism’. In other words, separating unintentional plagiarism from plagiarism policy still requires “prejud[ing] the case before it has been fully explored” (Grigg, 2010, p. 194). Because of the prevalent ethico-legal framing of the term ‘plagiarism’, dishonesty is assumed in the first instance, and the student’s honesty has to be proven. The course of procedures following a suspected incidence of plagiarism is already predetermined, because if plagiarism is suspected, then invariably some form of investigation follows. Even if honesty is determined, the dishonest stigma of the word ‘plagiarism’ remains. Therefore,
separating unintentional plagiarism from deliberate plagiarism on the basis of intent serves little purpose.

**An alternative to ‘plagiarism’**

As discussed throughout this thesis, the word ‘plagiarism’ is problematic because it is predominantly discussed from within ethico-legal discourses. In the academic literature, there is a call to rename policies that deal with plagiarism as academic integrity policies. However, the term ‘integrity’ also draws on ethico-legal discourses, as it continues to position students who plagiarise as not having integrity. One way to address the ethico-legal framing of plagiarism is to discontinue using the word ‘plagiarism’ altogether. If we were to call instances of what we currently call plagiarism a descriptive (rather than moral) term, like ‘matching text’, we could respond without the implicit assumption that that the matching text is an attempt to deceive the reader. Although there would still be a need to determine why there is matching text in the student’s work, we would be able to proceed without an accusation of dishonesty. In this way, teacher and student could work together to determine why there is matching text, and respond appropriately. Issues such as insufficient citation skills, poor time management, or lack of understanding of course content can be responded to in a pertinent manner. The responsibility for ensuring that students learn acceptable academic practice would thus be shared between the student and the institution.

Removing the use of the word ‘plagiarism’ from our teaching vocabulary does not completely eliminate the murky areas of what is acceptable practice, or
how proficient an academic writer a student can be expected to be. However, it does allow for a broader range of responses to matching text, thus addressing many of the multiple practices that lead to the appearance of what we currently call plagiarism (see Chapter Two). By moving outside of the ethico-legal discourse associated with the use of the word ‘plagiarism’, we are more likely to assume students’ writings are honest attempts at creating and displaying knowledge and scholarship. We are therefore more likely to convey to students the relevance, to them and their learning, of learning academic writing skills.

**Viewing writing as a ‘process’**

Some of the students in this research expressed a view that what constitutes good academic writing is discipline-specific, but that these disciplinary differences are not made explicit to them. Some students also indicated that they struggled with the language and conventions of their discipline(s). Many of the students expressed the view that referencing and learning to write in an academic way takes practice and that they need the opportunity to get feedback and improve their practice without sanctions such as losing marks or more severe punishment. It is possible that such feedback is already available in many classes and courses, however it was the students’ perception that it is not. In their requests for mentoring and practice, the students were unknowingly echoing the Academic Literacies and Composition Studies literature which positions plagiarism within students’ development as academic writers, and acknowledges the discipline-specific nature of academic writing. The degree structure at the University of Otago is modular, therefore undergraduate students are often taking papers from
two or more different disciplines, and this was clearly a cause of confusion for the students. Within the University, each discipline or subject has its own culture and cultural norms and practices. What is considered appropriate writing practice in one discipline may not be considered appropriate in others (Lea & Street, 1998). Students can only come to understand appropriate disciplinary practices through learning how knowledge is constructed within their particular discipline. This can only happen through “repeated, mentored practice” (Howard, 2008, p. 93).

Writing and scholarship can therefore only be taught from within each discipline (Lea & Street, 1998; Murray & Nallaya, 2014; Wingate, 2006).

Howard (1993) argues that when students are not adequately scaffolded through the process of learning to become an academic writer in their discipline, many find the scaffolding themselves through the practice of what she termed ‘patchwriting’. Patchwriting occurs when writers use source materials as a scaffold by patching words or phrases from various authors together to create an original text that draws heavily on the language of the original texts. This practice enables students to write correctly for the discipline. Patchwriting is a way to ensure that the vernacular of the discipline is used when the writer does not have enough of an understanding of the topic to sufficiently paraphrase or summarise the material (Abasi, 2008). Patchwriting is an example of matching text that is an honest attempt to create original text, however it is an indication that the writer lacks the necessary skills or knowledge to synthesise others’ ideas, or to express ideas or information in their own words.
In order to reframe practices such as patchwriting as a legitimate part of students’ learning to become academic writers, writing needs to be viewed as a process. Assessing students’ writing on the basis of a finished assignment frames writing as a product. This is illustrated in Figure 3.

Positioning writing as a product perpetuates an ethico-legal framing of plagiarism, as the process, and therefore the intent, of the writing is not visible. If we view students’ writing as a process, then when we see examples of practices such as patchwriting, we can work with students to enable them to learn how to take their patchwritten text and re-work it into original, correctly-cited text. We also need to acknowledge that learning to draw on sources in the production of knowledge, and learning to write in our own discipline takes a lifetime of practice. As highlighted by Roig (2001), even practiced professors patchwrite when they are
working with unfamiliar material. Valentine (2006, p. 93) likens learning to draw on sources in our writing to learning to dance, and states:

In the same way that dancers repeat dance steps in preparation for a performance until they can perform without consciously thinking about those steps, writers need to cite repeatedly and correctly (figuring out the how, when, and why for each situation) before they can perform that citation without thinking about it.

Notably, because of the modular degree structure at the University of Otago, many students at undergraduate level are simultaneously learning to write in more than one discipline, and this could potentially add to their confusion.

In order to illustrate writing as a process, I draw on my own research journey. When I commenced writing this thesis I did not have the immediate capacity to complete it. Writing the thesis has been a process which, as I explained in Chapter One, I have illustrated on the title page of each chapter. Over the course of almost three years, I learned to design a research project, write an ethics application, review and critically analyse the literature, draw on the literature to present an argument, conduct interviews, use HyperResearch, analyse data using discourse analysis, and ultimately complete this thesis. Throughout the process I received consistent mentoring from my supervisors who carefully guided me and suggested possible ways of proceeding. They let me make mistakes and then guided me through the process of correcting those mistakes, or trying again. Each of the chapters in this thesis was revised numerous times throughout the process of writing. Without guidance, mentoring, and subsequent revision, this thesis would not have come into being.
Although it is not possible to provide thousands of undergraduate students with the same level of guidance and mentoring that is provided to graduate research students, it is possible to provide opportunities for undergraduate students to practise their skills without fear of being sanctioned for making mistakes. It is possible to view undergraduate students’ writing as a process rather than as a product. Instead of sanctioning students when they have not quite got it right, we need to provide adequate scaffolding to allow students to develop their skills (for example using a system of formative assessment as discussed above). In this way we will be promoting learning, and we will be guiding students towards developing the outcomes we have promised them as graduates.

Conclusion

In this study I explored university students’ understandings of plagiarism. Specifically, I explored the research questions:

- What are higher education students’ understandings and experiences of plagiarism policy and practices?
- What discourses inform or shape plagiarism policies and students’ understandings of plagiarism?

In order to answer the research questions, I considered:

- What are students’ understandings and experiences of plagiarism?
• Is there a link between students’ beliefs about learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education, and their understandings of plagiarism?

In this study I highlighted four main discourses that the students drew on when discussing plagiarism; ethico-legal, fairness, confusion, and learning discourses. I found that plagiarism policy and information at the University of Otago draws predominantly on ethico-legal discourses. Ethico-legal discourses also dominated the students’ interview conversations about plagiarism. Most of the students viewed plagiarism as a deliberate and immoral behaviour. Most of the students displayed confusion when they considered unintentional plagiarism. When the students’ understandings of plagiarism were considered alongside their views on learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education, most students indicated a view of university as a gateway to employment. Many of the students stated that they did not see the relevance to their future employment of academic skills such as learning to reference or avoid (unintentional) plagiarism.

In this thesis I have troubled existing plagiarism policy and practice and suggested how both might be revised in response to this research. If we consider the ideas that the students in this study expressed in relation to the plagiarism literature, it is evident that we need to remove the ethico-legal framing of plagiarism and instead emphasise students’ learning. One way to do this is to discontinue use of the word ‘plagiarism’ in regards to students’ writing. I have sketched out a model of how this might work in practice, specifically that using a neutral phrase such as ‘matching text’ would allow for multiple responses to what
are multiple and complex practices. Removing the ethico-legal framing by using the term ‘matching text’ would also allow for the assumption that, in most instances, the matching text is the consequence of a student’s honest attempt to display or create knowledge. Assuming honesty rather than dishonesty would allow the emphasis to be placed on mentoring students’ development as academic writers, and this would work towards aligning assessment practices with the desired graduate outcomes. Written assessment tasks could thus be framed in relation to teaching students how to source quality information for their written assignments, how to critically evaluate that information, and how to present their arguments and conclusions with authority.

Directions for future research

Through reflecting on the ways in which my own understandings of plagiarism have changed throughout this research project, I believe a longitudinal study of students’ understandings of plagiarism would be interesting and informative. Such a study, gathering students’ understandings of plagiarism at various points throughout their study journey, would allow the researcher to trace if and how students’ understandings of plagiarism change over time. In addition, it would allow the researcher to explore if and how students’ understandings of learning, assessment, and the purpose of a university education change over time, and if changes in how students understand these concepts link with changes in how they understand plagiarism.
Although the purpose of this research was to present students’ understandings of plagiarism, it would be useful to also collect staff understandings of plagiarism. An examination of students’ understandings of plagiarism alongside staff understandings of plagiarism may further highlight any disjuncture between students and staff understandings, and allow further insights into how plagiarism might be (re)framed.

Further research could also be conducted in the areas of academic writing and assessment. In this chapter I have suggested that increasing the emphasis on formative assessment could be beneficial to students’ development as academic writers. Following up on this suggestion, it would be useful to develop and trial some alternative assessment approaches aimed at fostering an educative approach to discipline-specific academic writing at undergraduate level. It would be particularly useful to explore how formative assessment practices could be used in large undergraduate classes without impacting negatively on teachers’ workloads.

Finally, it would be useful to analyse students’ written assignments alongside their expressed understandings of plagiarism. In this research I highlighted various understandings of plagiarism that indicated the students who held these understandings might be at risk of plagiarising unintentionally. It would be informative to research if and how students’ understandings of plagiarism impact on what they view as acceptable academic practice (as measured by their completed assignments). An examination of students’ written work alongside their understandings of plagiarism would provide valuable insights into how university writing policies and practices could be enhanced.
Chapter Seven: Contextualising students’ plagiarism discourses

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Appendices


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Appendices


Appendices


Appendices


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Appendices


Appendices


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Appendices
Appendix A: Information Sheet for Participants

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted in 2012 and 2013.

**What is the project about?**
I am a PhD student at the Higher Education Development Centre, University of Otago, and this project will form the basis for my PhD thesis. This research project is investigating University of Otago students’ perceptions and knowledge of plagiarism in order to:

- Better understand what students know about plagiarism policy, detection and penalties.
- Explore what students believe plagiarism to be.
- Examine if students’ perceptions of plagiarism and beliefs about learning and higher education affect their academic practices.
- Help inform plagiarism policies and practices at the University of Otago.

**Who is being asked to participate?**
I will be interviewing 20 to 30 first year University of Otago students.

**What will I be asked to do if I agree to take part?**
If you agree to be interviewed you will be invited to meet with me at a time and place negotiated with you. The interview will probably last about an hour, depending on how much time you have, and how much information you want to share. You will be asked to provide some basic information, such as gender, age range, year of study, and ethnicity. During the interview you will be asked about what you understand plagiarism to be, how prevalent you think plagiarism is, why you think students plagiarise, and what you know and think about the consequences of plagiarism at the University of Otago. I will also ask you some general questions about your own studying and learning. You will be given some basic interview questions beforehand but the interview will involve an open-ended questioning approach. This means that the precise nature of the questions cannot be determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. Consequently, although the University of Otago Human
Ethics Committee is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interview, the Committee has not been able to review the precise questions to be used.

In the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you can decline to answer or choose to end the interview. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form, which we will each keep a copy of. Can I change my mind and withdraw from the project?

Yes! You may withdraw from the project at any time without being asked for a reason, and without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

What data or information will be collected and what use will be made of it?
The interview will be audio recorded, and what is said during the interview will be typed up and made available for you to check and comment on before it is analysed and written up.

Once the interview has been analysed, it will be written up and used as data for my doctoral thesis. The information gathered may also be used in other publications, such as conference presentations or journal articles. Your name and any comments that might identify you will not be used in any publication. You will be invited to choose a codename. This will be used in any written publication from the research (including my thesis) so that you are not identifiable.

You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project if you are interested (see contact details at the end of this sheet).

Will I be identifiable from the audio recording, transcription or any subsequent report?
No. You will not be personally identifiable in the typed interview transcription (since you will either choose or be given a codename) or in any subsequent verbal or written account. The audio recording will not be heard by anyone other than myself and an independent transcriber, and your name will not appear in the printed copy. All audio files will be stored securely in locked premises and electronic material will be password protected. Audio files and transcripts will be destroyed confidentially five years following completion of the study, as per University of Otago policy. Only my supervisors and myself will have access to your full interview.

What are the potential risks or disadvantages of taking part?
This study involves discussing your perceptions of plagiarism and is unlikely to involve any risks or disadvantage. If you choose to disclose intentional plagiarism, this will not be reported beyond the research project, and your anonymity will continue to be maintained.
What if I have any questions?
If you have any questions about the project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact:

Lee Adam (Researcher)                        Associate Professor Rachel Spronken-Smith
(Supervisor)                                  (Supervisor)
Ph 471 6056 (work)                            Ph 479 8929 (work)
lee.adam@otago.ac.nz                          rachel.spronken-smith@otago.ac.nz

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479 8256. Please quote reference code 12/148). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix B: Consent form for participants

Consent form for participants
I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request more information at any stage.

I know that:
1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
3. Audio recordings will be destroyed immediately after transcription, and interview transcripts will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which they will be destroyed confidentially;
4. The interview will be about my perceptions of plagiarism. It will be more like a conversation than set questions and if I don’t want to answer any particular questions, I don’t have to. I may close the interview at any stage if I want to.
5. If I disclose intentional plagiarism, this will not be reported beyond the research project and my anonymity will continue to be maintained.
6. The results of the project will be written up and submitted as a PhD thesis. Results may also be used in other publications resulting from the research, but every attempt will be made to make sure I am not individually identifiable. I can request a copy of the results if I wish.

I agree to take part in this project.

..............................................................
(Name)

.............................................................. ......................................................
(Signature) (Date)
Appendix C: Demographic information survey

Students’ understandings of plagiarism: Demographic information

Name

Gender

☐ male
☐ female

Age

☐ 19 or under
☐ 20-24
☐ 25-34
☐ 35-44
☐ 45-54
☐ 55-64
☐ 65+

Ethnicity:

Briefly list your previous education and fulltime work experience:

Has anyone else in your immediate family attended university (for example, your parents, grandparents, brothers or sisters)?

YES/NO

If yes, please give details:

In what country/countries did you attend secondary school?
Appendices

If you have a codename you would like to be used in any written material resulting from this research, please indicate it here (if you do not have a preference, a codename will be chosen for you)

...........................................................................................................................................................................
Appendix D: Interview questions

1. Why did you decide to come to University?
   - What do you think is the purpose of a university education?
2. Can you tell me about something you have learned recently.
   - Can you tell me more?
   - Why was this meaningful to you?
   - How did you feel about it?
3. What do you actually mean by learning?
   - Can you explain (word they used) a little more?
   - Tell me more
   - Why do you think that?
   - How do you know when you’ve learned something?
4. How do you go about learning?
   - Tell me more
   - Can you give me an example?
   - Why do you go about it that way?
5. What sorts of assessment tasks have you been asked to do at university?
   - In a course, when you have an assessment, how do you go about it?
   - How soon do you begin working on a particular assessment?
   - Why do you think universities use assessment tasks?
6. Can you give me an example of what you think plagiarism is?
   - Tell me more
   - Why is that plagiarism?
   - What do you think the word plagiarism means?
   - What specific behaviours do you think the word plagiarism covers?
   - Why do you think there is so much concern about plagiarism?
   - What do you know about the uni policy on plagiarism?
• How much information have you received or had access to?

7. Why do you think students plagiarise?
   • Can you explain that?
   • Tell me more?
   • What do you think happens to students who plagiarise?
   • How do you know this?
   • What do you think about this?

8. Do you know of any plagiarism occurring in your course?
   • Can you tell me about it?
   • Why do you think that was an example of plagiarism?

9. Have you heard of SafeAssign?
   • What do you think it does?
   • Why do you think lecturers use it?
   • Have you used it? How was it?
   • What did you think of the report?
   • What did you learn by using it?

10. Do you have any questions about plagiarism or anything about plagiarism you’d like to find out?

11. Is there anything else you would like to know about this research or about what we’ve talked about?