The Internet as a Challenge to HE: Implications for Plagiarism & Information Literacy

1. Online Plagiarism
   Plagiarism increasing (Dahl, 2007; Duggan, 2006)
   Internet allows “copy and paste” generation

2. Poor academic referencing
   Academically unreliable sources selected due to:
   1. easy access to the internet
   2. huge amounts of information available online

Why is this an Issue?

- Lack Awareness? (Park, 2003; Yeo & Chien, 2007)
- Cultural differences? E.g. Hayes & Introna, 2005
- Growth of Distance Learning? (Robinson-Zañartu et al., 2005)
- Difficulty distinguishing between reliable and unreliable sources? (Levin, 2004; Wiley et al., 2009)

Is this an issue at Staffordshire University?
Psychology department recognises it is an issue:
- Handbooks – section on referencing
- Level 4 seminars on plagiarism

Yet it continues to be an issue!

Can Turnitin Improve the Issue?
Turnitin is a plagiarism detection software that produces an Originality report

Originality Report:
- similarity (0-100%) between report and existing sources (internet, publications, student papers).

Part 1: Examining Turnitin Reports
115 students’ final year dissertations analysed using originality reports produced by Turnitin
- levels of plagiarism? Is plagiarism linked with academic performance?
- Is plagiarism more prevalent from internet sources?

Part 2: Student Perceptions
Examination of report produced by Psychology
- 88 students’ responses to a series of questions

Q. My knowledge of plagiarism has increased through using Turnitin

Summary and Evaluation of Findings
- Investigation useful in showing where students take information from
  - Plagiarism from internet sources more common than from more reliable sources
  - Difficultly accessing journals online?
- Students find it easy to use and can help their awareness of referencing

BUT
- Turnitin can’t help students decide what is a reliable source
- How do students search for information?
- Need to consider many factors!
  - E.g. Academic internet use related to gender & subject-specialism (Selwyn, 2008).

Solutions & Implications
Turnitin should be used not only to detect plagiarism but as a way of educating students
- increasing their knowledge of plagiarism
- highlighting their use of internet sources
- interim assessment?

Contemporary solution to solve contemporary problem? Or ‘back to basics’? i.e. Library sessions

Additional Support needed for academic referencing
- additional sessions needed at level 4
- literature searches incorporated into seminars – at all levels
- library sessions

Open university website - constructivist approach emphasising academic skills rather than focussing on plagiarism
References