

Review

Cheating in school: What we know and what we can do

Stephen F. Davis, Patrick F. Drinan and Tricia Bertram Gallant
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Tracey Bretag

School of Management, University of South Australia

tracey.bretag@unisa.edu.au

Cheating in school: What we know and what we can do, is perhaps the most comprehensive and accessible text on the topic of academic integrity that I have read. Readers in the Asia-Pacific region who think the title is indicative of an interest in student cheating in the pre-tertiary sector, will be pleased to know that this book covers student cheating across the range of educational institutions, from primary (grade) school, through to the middle years, high school and post-secondary colleges and universities. I spent three days of valuable professional development reading and noting the book, often going to the numerous websites referred to, and generally refreshing my understandings of the academic integrity research and best practice from the last 15 years. It does not seem adequate to say that Davis, Drinan and Bertram Gallant should be congratulated on this carefully and elegantly constructed presentation of the field.

Cheating in school goes well beyond most other books on student cheating. Many of these texts are underpinned by an 'us versus them' mentality which pits teachers against students in the fight against academic misconduct. Others are busy blaming the teacher for everything from poor assessment practices to disengaged students. Very few take on the difficult but necessary work of demonstrating how the research can be translated into change in both practice and policy. In my opinion, what makes this book special is the clear intention of the authors to look beyond the individual to the broader institutional and societal milieu within which student cheating occurs, but always with clearly articulated optimism. Davis, Drinan and Bertram Gallant take a unique stance by suggesting that dealing with student cheating provides an opportunity "to make education stronger, assessment more meaningful, and the relationships between students and teachers more collegial and less adversarial" (p. 2). They are also unequivocal about the seriousness of the issue, arguing persuasively that "student cheating is actually the most critical problem facing education today" (p. 5).

In addition to providing coherent discussions, accessible summaries and simply presented graphics, one of the book's key strengths is the juxtaposition of research with everyday situations, often in the form of 'conversations' or excerpts from recent media coverage. These snippets alone made reading the book feel like a delightful forage through engaging and useful information, rather than the usual struggle through dense prose which too often characterises academic writing. Another helpful strategy used by the authors is the provision of a short summary of preceding arguments at the beginning of every chapter to allow easy 'dipping' into the book at any point.

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As internationally recognised experts, extensively published researchers and experienced practitioners, the authors of *Cheating in school* provide a text which will appeal to a range of stakeholders. For those just beginning to explore the topic, and also those who have been researching and writing about the issue for some time, the first three chapters provide invaluable context and a very useful summary of the key research. While avoiding the sensationalism of media reports which invariably usurp the issue by suggesting that student cheating is an 'epidemic', the authors quite rightly describe it as 'endemic' to education. Although not a new problem, the authors aptly contextualise student cheating in the 21st century – the information revolution, changing values, corruption in society (including education), and not least of all, the commercialisation of education. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 provide insights into the many and varied strategies that students use to cheat, along with short and long-term deterrents that can immediately be put into practice. But it was Chapters 7, 8 and 9 which provided genuine inspiration.

In addition to providing clear and practical guidelines to reduce student cheating through the process of institutionalising academic integrity, Davis, Drinan and Bertram Gallant call for both 'action and wisdom' at every level. They invite a "new rhetorical framework for what could be a grand new conversation in higher education that will trickle down to K-12 education" (p. 185). The authors also provocatively suggest that part of that conversation should involve honest self-examination "of our own personal history with cheating" which will result in a "very special empathy for those who cheat, those who don't and those responsible for education in our society" (p. 186). It is this sort of rare and thoughtful insight which characterises the whole book and sets it apart from other texts which describe academic dishonesty as "an enforcement issue". Although much of the specific advice in the book is U.S. focused, the genuine and broad-ranging vision offered by the authors make the lessons applicable internationally.

But *Cheating in school* goes even further. This book ultimately demands that we all demonstrate political courage, which will involve "politicising the issue, mobilising sustained public pressure on it, and demanding accountability from the educational establishment" (p. 193). It is impossible not to agree with the innumerable "teachable moments" that spring from nearly every page and this final exhortation is no exception. At every step of what is ultimately a very serious discussion, Davis, Drinan and Bertram Gallant provide optimistic reassurance based on solid research and experience. Yes, this is serious; yes, there are answers. It is my belief that those answers can be found in this deceptively humble volume.

Reviewer

Tracey Bretag, BA (Hons), MA, Ed.D, teaches a range of communication and ethics courses in the School of Management at the University of South Australia. She is the Editor of the *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, and the Chair of the *Asia-Pacific Forum on Educational Integrity*. Her research interests include academic integrity, internationalisation of higher education, teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), developing learning communities, new technologies, computer mediated and intercultural communication. Her most recent research has focussed on academics' self-plagiarism in research publishing.