

10.1.2025

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Title

It's not fair: policy discourses and students' understandings of plagiarism in a New Zealand university
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Publication year

2017

Source/Footnote

In: Higher education. - 74 (2017) 1, S. 17 - 32

Inventory number

45639

Keywords

Ausland : Neuseeland : einzelne Hochschulen ; Ausland : Neuseeland : Studenten, Studium, Lehre ;
Wissenschaft : Ethik in der Wissenschaft

Abstract

Plagiarism is a concept that is difficult to define. Although most higher education institutions have policies aimed at minimising and addressing student plagiarism, little research has examined the ways in which plagiarism is discursively constructed in university policy documents, or the connections and disconnections between institutional and student understandings of plagiarism in higher education. This article reports on a study that explored students' understandings of plagiarism in relation to institutional plagiarism discourses at a New Zealand university. The qualitative study involved interviews with 21 undergraduate students, and analysis of University plagiarism policy documents. The University policy documents revealed moral and regulatory discourses. In the interviews, students predominantly drew on ethico-legal discourses, which reflected the discourses in the policy documents. However, the students also drew on (un)fairness discourses, confusion discourses, and, to a lesser extent, learning discourses. Notably, learning discourses were absent in the University policy.

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Our findings revealed tensions between the ways plagiarism was framed in institutional policy documents, and students' understandings of plagiarism and academic writing. We suggest that, in order to support students' acquisition of academic writing skills, plagiarism should be framed in relation to 'learning to write', rather than as a moral issue.(HRK / Abstract übernommen)