Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
From *YouthWorker Journal* and YouthWorker.com

Cheaters Never Prosper?
Plagiarism on the Rise in High School and College

By Paul Asay
Posted: Aug. 9, 2010

What Happened:
Plagiarism has ruined journalists, destroyed politicians and resulted in countless students getting Fs. Today, however, some experts believe students might not understand what the word means.

A professor from DePaul University reports that one of his students copied whole sections of one of his papers from the Internet—a ruse the professor caught when he noticed the sections were written in purple, not black. The student didn't apologize, according to *The New York Times*—he simply asked the professor how to change the type color.

Another student, this one from the University of Maryland, copied a Wikipedia article on the Great Depression and pasted it in his paper without citing it as a source. When the professor asked him about it, the student said he didn't think he needed to because Wikipedia entries are made up of "common knowledge" and collectively written.

While there's no excuse for plagiarism, some experts understand how this sort of thing happens these days. There's so much information available without obvious authorship, and it's so easy to gather.

"This generation always existed in a world where media and intellectual property don't have the same gravity," says student Sarah Brookover. "When you're sitting at your computer, it's the same machine you've downloaded music with—possibly illegally—the same machine you've streamed videos for free that showed on HBO last night."
Source: *The New York Times*

Still, that's not the complete answer. Some experts say youth are far less concerned about individual expression than their parents or grandparents were and are more likely to sample or borrow things that please them.

An example: Helene Hegemann "wrote" a best-selling novel about a Berlin club that included whole passages culled from other sources. Rather than apologize, Hegemann said, "There's no such thing as originality anyway, just authenticity."

Plagiarism has become such an issue that Notre Dame anthropologist Susan Blum wrote a book about it: *My Word! Plagiarism and College Culture*.

"If you are not so worried about presenting yourself as absolutely unique, then it's OK. If you say others' words, it's OK. If you say things you don't believe, it's OK. If you write papers you couldn't care less about because they accomplish the task, which is turning something in and getting a grade, it's OK" Blum said to the *Times*, voicing her students' attitude. "And it's OK if you put words out there without giving any credit."

Talk About It:
Have you ever plagiarized anything? Have you ever been tempted to steal someone else's work? Have any of your friends cheated?

Is it ever OK to take someone else's work and use it as your own? Has the definition of *cheating* changed through the years? If you wrote something and found someone else had used it, would you be upset and/or expect restitution?

Who gets hurt when someone plagiarizes? The original author? The person plagiarizing? *How* do they get hurt?

What's the difference between plagiarizing a paper and sampling a song? Or spoofing a movie or television show? Is there a difference between paying homage to something and stealing it?

What the Bible Says:
"You shall not steal" (Ex. 20:15).

"The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery'; 'Do not murder'; 'Do not steal'; 'Do not covet' and whatever other commandment there may be are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:8-9).

"Like a partridge that hatches eggs it did not lay is the man who gains riches by unjust means" (Jer. 17:11).

"A scoundrel and villain who goes about with a corrupt mouth…always stirs up dissension. Therefore disaster will overtake him in an instant" (Prov. 6:12, 14-15).