might be administrators, specifically those who persist in the attitude that anyone who writes well is well equipped to teach writing, and that any practice in writing is academically valuable practice. Beaufort makes a convincing case that composition programs should more carefully consider what practices do and do not translate into writing beyond the composition classroom door. For those teachers and scholars searching for a unified purpose for composition, Beaufort offers an intriguing answer.

Kutztown, PA

Works Cited


Reviewed by Larken McCord, Georgia State University

From its title alone, Preventing Plagiarism appears to have an agenda. This is not the text to waste time interrogating the scope of plagiarism in all its forms or parsing any nuance concerning intellectual property or discourse conformity: Plagiarism has been identified as the problem, and this book will help instructors get rid of it. Speaking from a dual vantage point as a high school teacher and an adjunct professor at New York University, Laura Hennessey DeSena offers a wealth of experience from which to find solutions to the plagiarism problem. Upon reading the book, however, it appears that her project is bigger than plagiarism, if not adjacent to it altogether. The book DeSena wanted to write is actually about originality of expression and the use of freewriting exercises to engage this originality. The art of preventing plagiarism occupies an afterthought status throughout the book. Though it could well be argued that preventing plagiarism should not be foregrounded in the minds of writing instructors, the disconnect between DeSena’s argument and the argument expected by her readers obscures the book’s strongest ideas.

Chapter 1 (“The Rewards of Original Thinking”) announces DeSena’s purpose: moving students away from reductive, redundant writing to original critical thinking. The tone of the chapter borders on sanctimonious, particularly
when DeSena establishes the primary dichotomy of her book: book reports versus literary analysis. This introductory chapter is followed by the longest in the book (“First Things First: Emphasizing Primary over Secondary Sources”). DeSena devotes nearly a third of her text to describing her approach to literary research in the classroom. This approach emphasizes freewriting exercises as a means of exploring student reaction and interpretation to literature. Indeed, her emphasis is largely confined to writing about literature. Her extended discussion of privileging primary over secondary sources applies most directly to this arena of academic writing. When she attempts to relate the primary versus secondary source issue to other disciplines, the results feel forced. DeSena appears to think freewriting is a panacea for writing woes. She spends the better part of chapter 4 (“Strategies for Avoiding Plagiarism”) discussing student examples, identifying aspects of successful freewriting. Grounded firmly in expressionist pedagogy, she believes in the potential for this activity to engage the thinking of any student. Somewhat surprising, then, is the overall lack of emphasis on the student in chapter 4. DeSena points out that most instances of plagiarism are the result of weak assignments. While there might be some truth in this “blame the victim” mentality, the focus on the teacher feels unfair. Her first tip for avoiding plagiarism involves developing more precise topics. She reveals some of her own unorthodox topics and encourages her readers to open themselves to the myriad possibilities for innovative assignments. Absent from the discussion is any suggestion that students be involved in the development of topics for writing. For all the emphasis on freewriting, it seems that ultimately, the students will be asked to use their original insights in service to someone else’s project. Seen in this light, her earlier statement that teachers must “break down conventional thinking, which leads to tedious writing” (18) refers exclusively to teachers’ thinking, rather than that of our students.

The weakest moments in the text are the chapters most directly connected to plagiarism. These chapters feel stale and removed from the rest of DeSena’s project. Chapter 3 (“Working Definitions of Plagiarism”) delineates a concise understanding of plagiarism separated into two categories: source of information plagiarism and source of language plagiarism. This construction neatly presents the problem and makes it feel manageable. DeSena reassures the reader that most student plagiarism issues are source of language problems arising from boundary confusion between the student’s voice and those of the sources. Chapter 5 (“The Proper Integration of Sources”) promises to address the issues raised in chapter 3. Disappointingly, this five-page chapter punts the topic back to the MLA handbook after a brief but promising paragraph discussing voice in research. Chapter 6 (“Tools for Identifying Plagiarism”) offers very little original insight. DeSena admonishes her readers to read student essays carefully and thoroughly, for example. She goes into great detail about the efficacy of Boolean search engines to track down the sources of plagiarism. Tips about how to frame an Internet search seem geared to the most technophobic teachers. DeSena also endorses products such as Turnitin.
com without investigating any of its implications for classroom dynamics. Ironically, DeSena had previously presented thoughtful arguments for and against the practice of having students turn in copies of their sources including the air of distrust that such a practice can create. To ignore similar implications surrounding the use of tools such as Turnitin.com makes the chapter feel unconnected to the rest of the text. Indeed, each of these chapters feels suspiciously like an addendum tacked on to enhance the plagiarism angle of the book as a whole.

The gem of the book, the final chapter presents a wealth of information about multicultural students and plagiarism. Nowhere else in the book does DeSena suggest anything other than the monolithic Western idea that originality in writing is sacrosanct and that writers must use propriety in using sources. While her response to these differences involves making a more concerted effort to help non-native writers conform to Western ideals, this awareness of alternative perspectives illuminates an area for further research.

At the heart of DeSena’s text is an earnest hopefulness, a belief that all students have unique subjective voices and that they will want to share those voices in their own writing. As compelling as this vision is, DeSena’s practical techniques would likely meet significant resistance from all but the most adroit students. One of her examples of modeling, for example, uses the study of Joyce’s “Araby” as an exemplar of establishing voice and perspective (105). She admits that using fiction as a model for academic writing can be problematic, but asserts that the potential rewards are worth it. Lacking, however, is a discussion of how to make such a model accessible for students. Similarly, she admonishes teachers not to introduce secondary interpretations of literature too early as students are studying those texts. She avoids any discussion of how to prevent students from seeking such assistance on their own. Many of these weaknesses stem from DeSena’s enmeshment of the meaning-making tasks involved with interpreting texts and the generative, creative tasks involved in writing. In her cosmography, the English classroom must engage both sets of tasks simultaneously.

It would be unfortunate, of course, to dismiss the book simply as a result of this somewhat unrealistic construction. Many of DeSena’s classroom practices reveal fresh and promising angles which might apply to a variety of tasks. Her unusual approach to outlining emphasizes its creative potential. She describes an activity in which students cut up the outlines they’ve prepared and rearrange them, forcing them to look at different possibilities for organization (18). She also suggests having student create multiple outlines for the same topic, varying the presentation of ideas and considering their options as writers (84). These practices coincide nicely with pedagogies that seek to expand student awareness of their own power as writers. In her extensive discussions of freewriting exercises, DeSena mentions the practice of having students highlight their own freewriting to trace the development of ideas (78). This metacognitive step could demystify the generative process. DeSena provides a very useful set of questions to help students analyze scholarly writing, a daunting yet essential task (23). Sprinkled throughout
the text, these subtle practices—which may or may not have anything to do with plagiarism—reveal DeSena’s most provocative insights.

DeSena has taken on an unwieldy audience: high school teachers. With a foot presumably in both secondary and postsecondary camps, she has a unique vantage point and her perspective should be welcome. Unfortunately, her tone often suggests some condescension. When teachers talk to each other, most adopt a tone of collegiality, even employing self-deprecation and a “we’re all in this together” aura. DeSena’s tone, more often than not, is didactic, as if the reader is a student of sorts. She uses the imperative mood frequently to address her imagined audience of stagnant educators. She even breaks the formality of her prose to say, parenthetically, “I hope to convince you to stop assigning book reports.” Who is assigning this phantom book report, and by extension, whom does DeSena think she is convincing? In nearly a decade of teaching (and almost two decades of being a student), I have yet to see the kind of book report assignment vilified in this text. These lapses make DeSena feel removed from her audience, which is ironic since she is a practitioner.

Despite the chasm between the author and the reader, the book succeeds in presenting a good deal of information in a brisk, efficient manner. Instructors could easily glean some innovative ideas from the text in one reading. Those ideas, of course, are not as connected to plagiarism as one might hope given the title. Perhaps we should not be surprised at this. Academics have been wringing their hands about the plagiarism problem for the better part of a century yet the conversation remains largely unchanged. DeSena cleverly uses the current anti-plagiarism momentum to propose a particular philosophy of writing instruction. This connection is not misplaced; many of the classroom activities described would certainly curb academic dishonesty. To emphasize this connection, even at the expense of some of the book’s finer points, is misleading.

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Reviewed by Katherine Mack, University of California, Irvine

David Foster’s *Writing with Authority: Students’ Roles as Writers in Cross-National Perspective* speaks to two concerns that writing teachers and administrators share: first, how to foster autonomous, independent, and recursive thinking and writing practices in students, and, second, how to initiate them into a scholarly conversation based on the intersubjective, relational nature of knowledge-making. Foster offers the term “transformative writing” to describe this pedagogical process and goal, arguing that it “enable[s] students to write in the role of knowledge-