



INTERACTIVE CASES WORKSHOP

Sunday 26 March 2017

Beijing Room, Kempinski Hotel Beijing Lufthansa Center, Beijing, China

Workshop feedback and/or advice from COPE Forum

AUTHORSHIP CASES

Case 1: Author disagreement blocks submission

(based on case 15-02 <http://publicationethics.org/case/author-disagreement-blocks-submission>)

The Forum advised contacting the institution directly. COPE advice would normally be that author disputes should be resolved by the institution. In addition, the Forum advised that the editor should consider contacting author A directly, and asking for his explanation of the events. The Forum advised against publishing the paper in the absence of author A's agreement, unless the authorship issue is resolved by the institution. There may also be legal issues to consider if the editor were to go ahead and publish, as author A may have issues related to their intellectual property.

Papers are sometimes held hostage by authors and COPE's advice would always be to ask the institution to resolve the issue. However, sometimes the editor has to make a judgement call. One way forward, if the editor really wants to publish the paper, is to have a clear statement on the published paper.

Follow up: Following the advice from the Forum, the editor contacted the disputing author and convinced him to participate in the publication. He promptly provided feedback on the manuscript, which was submitted.

Case 2: Requesting authorship after publication?

(based on case 15-17 <http://publicationethics.org/case/requesting-authorship-after-publication>)

The case raises the issue of the role of contributorship. One solution in such cases is for journals to list the contributions of each author. When contributions are clearly listed on a paper, it sometimes becomes clear that some of the contributors do not in fact qualify for authorship.

The Forum agreed that institutions need to take responsibility for these types of decisions and should have robust mechanisms in place. It is almost impossible for journals and editors to sort out these issues on their own. Unfortunately, many institutions fail to arbitrate in these situations. The Forum advised going back to the institution and asking them to address the issue.

The editor may like to look up CRediT (contributor roles taxonomy) which is a CASRAI activity that brings together a diverse set of stakeholders with a common interest in better understanding and communicating different types of contributor roles in research. The Forum also noted that the

ICMJE guidelines state that acknowledgements require written permission from the person who is being acknowledged.

Follow-up: To support a recommendation to publish a correction listing Dr H in an acknowledgment (not as an author), the editors sent the institution a post from Retraction Watch which described a similar situation. The institution agreed with this course of action. Although the institution included an apology in their draft correction, the journal opted not to include it in the final correction. The correction will appear in an upcoming volume (in print and online). Before publication, the final correction was emailed to Dr H, the corresponding author and the institution. The editor pointed out that it is the responsibility of the corresponding author to share the final correction, as well as explain the situation as a whole, with all of the coauthors (if he had not already done so). The editor also encouraged the authors to use this experience as a learning opportunity to begin discussions of authorship and acknowledgments at the stage of study conception.

PEER REVIEW CASES

Case 3: Compromised peer review system in published papers

(based on case 12-12 <http://publicationethics.org/case/compromised-peer-review-system-published-papers>)

The Forum agreed that there are many issues involved here, not least a serious form of misconduct which may even be criminal, as the author was impersonating the reviewers and committing fraud by using colleagues as false reviewers and, possibly impersonating other reviewers. In addition, as the author has admitted fraud, can the editor trust the validity of any of the papers?

The advice was to contact the author's institution and inform them of the situation, explaining the author's inappropriate and possibly criminal behaviour. The editor should also contact the reviewers who were the associates of the author who provided favourable reviews and contact their institutions.

The Forum advised re-reviewing the remaining published papers to which author A has not admitted influencing the peer review process. If the journal wishes to stand by these papers, then it is essential that all of the papers are re-reviewed. In the meantime, an expression of concern should be issued for all of these papers. One suggestion was to inform the author of the course of action that the journal is going to undertake and see if he wishes to retract all of these papers.

The Forum noted that the journal should take some responsibility for failure of their peer review system. Good practice is always to check the names, addresses and email contacts of reviewers, and especially those that are recommended by authors. Editors should never use only the preferred reviewer.

Follow up: The journal published retraction notices for all of the papers that the corresponding author agreed to retract. The journal has accepted the suggestion from the Forum of 're-doing' the peer review process for the other papers and are planning on doing this. The institution contacted the journal and wants to discuss the details of the case.

Case 4: Author requests permission to publish review comments

(based on case 16-13 <http://publicationethics.org/case/author-requests-permission-publish-review-comments>)

An update to the Forum was that the author has submitted a complaint to COPE directly. He is ready to go live with a public website, with a copy of his paper along with the reviews.

The Forum agreed that the journal is acting within its current guidelines. However, they could indicate to the author they will consider this issue for future papers, but they cannot go back and retrospectively change what was in place when this paper was reviewed. Hence the Forum agreed that the journal has done all it can and no further action is needed here. A suggestion was to review the journal's instructions to authors and instructions to reviewers to ensure the guidance regarding publishing reviews is very clear.

The Forum discussed the wider issue of who owns the peer reviews. Copyright is with the reviewer unless it is formally transferred to the author. However, if all parties consent (journal, author, reviewers) then the reviews can be made public. The Forum also discussed transferring reviewer reports to another journal when a manuscript has been rejected. Some journals advocate this but no names are attached to the review. The Forum warned against confusing open peer review and confidentiality.

Follow-up: After the editor contacted the author with an update on the outcome of the COPE Forum discussion, the author informed the journal that he had decided to publish the reviews on his own personal website. The journal notified the reviewers and editors involved with the case, and emailed the author to remind him that the publishing of reviews had been done without the journal's consent. The journal decided not to pursue the matter further.

PLAGIARISM CASES

Case 5: Self-plagiarism

(based on case 09-21 <http://publicationethics.org/case/self-plagiarism>)

Although there was some sympathy for the author, the article was submitted as original work (not solicited by the journal) and the author failed to mention the other papers in his covering letter. It may be legitimate to present the same material for different audiences and both articles may therefore have a place under some circumstances. However, there is the question of transparency. Authors should declare if they have published previous papers, as well as citing them in the text. There may be a question of breach of copyright and the editor might want to remind the author of copyright law. Otherwise, the Forum agreed that the editor has done all he can but he should ensure that his instructions to authors are very clear regarding this matter.

Follow-up: The editor wrote to the head of research governance at the author's institution saying that the case was taken to the COPE Forum and the Forum disagreed with the author's opinion that self-plagiarism is acceptable in the context of a review paper. It is not sufficient that "an author who submits ... work similar to work already published, must disclose this at the time of submission". The important issue is not disclosure, but that publication of such work would be redundant. The previously published material remains in the public domain and is generally subject to copyright. Discussion of the work is, of course, acceptable, but not replication of whole

sentences or paragraphs. No further action is contemplated, but the editor strongly suggested that the institution reconsider their policy in relation to this issue.

Case 6: What extent of plagiarism demands a retraction vs correction?

(based on case 16-11 <http://publicationethics.org/case/what-extent-plagiarism-demands-retraction-vs-correction>)

Both a correction and a retraction would protect the student's rights and correct the record. The question then arises—what is the purpose of a correction or retraction? If it is primarily to correct and benefit the literature, then a correction does that. However, the Forum acknowledged that this will probably not satisfy the student and his supervisor.

The Forum discussed blogs as a source of the scientific literature. Blogs are often not cited because they are not seen as permanent. But is there a difference between a blog as “grey literature” and an article as “published literature”? The Forum agreed that the blog should be considered as published content and although websites change and the blog does not have a DOI, it should still have been cited in the original article.

A suggestion was that for the original blog post, the student could ensure that the blog has a DOI or it could be written up for a journal, particularly if there is more work done by the student.

The majority of the Forum agreed that a correction seems to be the appropriate (non-punitive) action (compared with a handful who favoured retraction); a correction also serves the student's rights by indicating clearly where the ideas originated, and maintaining in the literature the work that validates those ideas. The Forum believed that the editors were correct in the course of action they took, and about the requirement that the blog concept be clearly recognized.

There was certainly plagiarism of ideas and the Forum noted that there should be awareness of “ownership of ideas”. Transparency is key in these scenarios and ideas need to be properly credited. Some argued that the article adds something new (validation) and major correction (to address the unattributed copying via proper reference and attribution) undoes the “harm” done by the absence of attribution. However, others were concerned about the apparent deception—the authors did present the method as their own. They recommended that the journal contact the author's institution. However, it is a judgment call for the editor as to whether the institution is contacted. The institution might appreciate knowing so they can build guidance on citing grey literature into their teaching/training.

Follow up: The editorial team took the feedback from the COPE Forum on board and notified the corresponding author's institution of the allegations; the case is still being considered by the research integrity team at the institution. In addition, an editorial note has been added to the article to alert readers that concerns had been raised about the overlap between the original article and the student's blog (and that the case has been referred to the author's institution).