Remixing the University

Authenticating Digital Learning
Matthew Pullen
Martha Bartels
Andrew Mara

All in the English Department.

Began our projects in English 275—Introduction to Writing Studies

Two of us are graduating soon.

We’ll be presenting this at the 2009 GPACW Conference.
✓ What University Policy on Intellectual Property Accomplishes
✓ Definition(s) of Plagiarism
✓ Reasons For/Against Teaching this Concept
✓ Short-Circuiting
✓ Question
What University Policy on Intellectual Property Accomplishes

- It defines what counts as production and what counts as consumption.
- It differentiates the "college educated" from the rest of the community.
Composition classes are also among the first college-level classes where the politics and mechanics of using and appropriating others’ work are points of focus. Composition classes routinely devote significant time and energy to teaching the proper use of quotations and scholarly citation practices. They are also the spaces within colleges and universities where instructors are most likely to devote more than a few minutes to the topic of plagiarism. For these reasons, composition classes have a profound influence on students’ sense of their own actions as writers and producers of creative work. Composition classes are often the spaces in which students cultivate an informed understanding of how to navigate the boundaries between their own work and the work of others. The principles embedded in the pedagogies of composition classrooms are likely at the heart of most college graduates’ perceptions of copyright and intellectual property.

Logie Peers, Pirates, and Persuasion
“composition classes have a profound influence on students’ sense of their own actions as writers and producers of creative work. Composition classes are often the spaces in which students cultivate an informed understanding of how to navigate the boundaries between their own work and the work of others.”
But what if we are teaching literacy/literate/literary notions of property boundaries in an electronic world (authorial citation)?

This is what Dennis Baron called “authentication”—a way that we certify ownership in the dominant communication medium.
“Authentication” tells others that we are who we purport to be.
How do we “Authenticate”?

- In oral cultures, it was done through roles, testimony, and stories.
- In literate cultures, it is done through signatures, letters, and seals.
- In print culture, it is done through certificates, identification documents, and authorship.
- In electronic cultures?
Definition(s) of Plagiarism

✓ Random House Compact Unabridged Dictionary
"use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's own original work."
How might authentication inform our sense of plagiarism?

1621, from L. *plagiarius* "kidnapper, seducer, plunderer," used in the sense of "literary thief" by Martial, from *plagium* "kidnapping," from plaga "snare, net," from PIE base *p(e)lag-* "flat, spread out." Plagiary is attested from 1597.
What does kidnapping have to do with theft?

- Nothing if not for the metonymic function of the dominant communication practices.
- We “steal” identity if we “steal” words that authenticate us.
- It matters if we either take something from others or if writers usurp authentication structures.
So what’s wrong with teaching literacy notions of property boundaries in an electronic world?

- authorial citation
- print documentation
- measurements of fair use involve comparisons against a complete text
Our definitions of plagiarism are inextricably bound up in definitions of authorship, which is a print-based authentication.

Plagiarism definitions don’t acknowledge the digital shift in electrate practices.

Plagiarism definitions don’t allow us to remediate university authentication structures.
What could be bad about that?

✓ It’s getting easier to fake print-based authentication.

✓ Electronic authentication are diverging from print-based authentication.

✓ Artistic creation is beginning to standardize what was formerly considered plagiarism as a legitimate form of expression.
So what are the strategies that are being offered?

- Turnitin.com
- Granular enforcement is driven down the food chain.
- Valuable curriculum time is being spent enforcing unenforcible rules.
- We are missing the chance to reimagine the ways universities authenticate students as college educated.
Border enforcement of the wrong country.

✓ “Flickering signifiers” change the economy from one of scarcity to one of attention.

✓ Use of media is a question of intent.

✓ Digital culture demands rapid reuse of often immensurably measurable information.

✓ Learn how to teach specific moves in specific contexts
So what can you do?

- Teach electrate genres like the remix and the mashup.
- Teach students to manage signification events and chains of events.
- Artifact-based authentication must give way to event-based authentication.
- Virtuosity is mediated and performance-based.
Reference

Questions?