Herpes for the Information Age: Plagiarism and the Infection of Universities

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It is always disconcerting to see our former employers featured in local newspapers. It is worse when their name is mentioned under the headline, "Unis crack down on student cheats" (Hiatt 2006:2). In the article, Murdoch University reported 157 cases of "cheating" in assignments, and "most students caught cheating were studying social sciences or humanities courses." The Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic) Jan Thomas stated that, "Most of our cases occur in first semester with new students … Once they learn it's not the right thing to do, and [they have] sufficient writing and management skills, they don't do it again" (Thomas in Hiatt 2006a:2). As I sat reading this article on an otherwise peaceful Saturday morning, I pondered why no cases of plagiarism, cheating or collusion had emerged in my first year courses—located in the social sciences and humanities—through my eight years at the same University mentioned in the article. It was not good luck. Considered curricula planning, intense contact with students and the annual updating of materials to avoid the resubmission of older papers are proactive and positive strategies. Yet these strategies, that require professional development, time and teacher reflexivity, are not validated methods for educational managers to counter plagiarism. Instead, "mandatory electronic screening of student assignments" is the future of curricula planning (Hiatt 2006a:2).

There is an alternative trajectory to ponder. It is very easy to blame students for plagiarism. It is much more difficult to recognize how staff and academic managers are both implicated in—and facilitating—this behavior. Uploading PowerPoint slides to the internet, i-lectures and the use of textbooks rather than wider reading of scholarly monographs all encourage simple and rehearsed answers to difficult questions. The decline in the reading of scholarly monographs and refereed articles—and the reduction in our expectations and hopes for students—has created a context requiring minimal reading, poor writing and sloppy standards of scholarship. It is too convenient for academic managers to administratively slap students for plagiarism, rather than proactively encourage higher standards in teaching and learning. J.V. Bolkan revealed the importance of this positive, proactive and interventionist agenda.

> Many educators blame the internet for what they perceive as the rise of plagiarism. Although the Internet certainly enables more efficient plagiarism, blaming it for widespread copying is akin to blaming a bank robbery on the presence of cash in the building. It is a factor, of course, but not the root cause of the behavior. Just as with bank robbery, the solutions to plagiarism must be multifaceted. Efforts must be directed at prevention as well as detection and punishment. Banks don't leave piles of cash stacked by the front door. Educators should take care to make assignments that hinder plagiarists. It is also important to remember that it isn't just vaults and security guards stopping bank robberies. The vast majority of people wouldn't rob a bank even if they could (Bolkan 2006:4).

The goal of this article is to validate Bolkan's challenge and present alternate strategies to manage plagiarism in the contemporary university. The aim is not to use the 'stick' of administrative regulations or staunch software programmes, which instills fear, confusion, blame and retribution, but to access the more intricate potentials of curricula development and the expertise of librarians and information managers.

While academics and librarians have 'accepted' the administrative and managerial 'takeover' of universities,

there are ways to 'manage' plagiarism beyond more meetings, agendas, resolutions, checklists, censure and blame. In this piece, a presentation of the ambiguous and conflictual nature of plagiarism is followed by two interventions—through librarian information management and curricula development. I conclude with the complexity and confusion that emerges through the change in educational expectations and literacies. As participation rates at universities have widened, those of us interested in education must make a choice between 'blaming' the internet for plagiarism and establishing a system of retribution to manage it, or recognizing that our current students are facing a range of complex social, economic and technological challenges that require more precise tools to address their concerns (Rhodes 2002).

The treatment of students as clients who consume education and are served by their teachers is transforming how these students/clients consider their assessment. Instead of being examined, they are being supported. Instead of being taught, they are facilitated. Librarians have been critical of the consequences of reducing semesters and compressing learning into segments that render impossible the development of research methods. As Nicole Auer and Ellen Krupar confirm,

> Universities have also fallen prey to the consumer mentality, this time directed at students. With the proliferation of 'Maymesters,' which contrive to give the illusion that you can condense a semester's worth of learning into a short few weeks, universities have given up some of the pretence that learning is the purpose of classes ... With students cut off by time constraints from interlibrary loan, retrieval or articles, or even the time to analyze information, what exact message are the students receiving on the value of any knowledge they may accidentally glean from their frantically paced class (Auer and Krupar 2001:421).

If universities are charging students for courses, course materials, maintenance fees, car parks and library cards, then it is a continuance of this ideology that money can also buy an essay. Consumers (students) are buying a service (education). Nancy Girard confirmed that "students today pay a lot of money to attend college or university so many of them feel that any and all ways they find to excel are acceptable, including plagiarism" (2004:14). By making the primary goal of education to attain a job, there is little time or recognition for meta-learning skills or a discussion of the intrinsic values of scholarship and thinking. Through the use of language like graduate attributes, generic skills, flexibility and team building, the point of transformative and transgressive education is displaced. These speculations about the future of work are creating endless chatter about how students negotiate a post-education future. The goal is to consume facts, not control, interpret and manage information. The academy models good and bad behavior, and students watch how we handle and manage ethical questions (Kuther 2003:159). Before educational administrators judge and condemn plagiarising students, University structures must be assessed and reassessed for their standards, value and quality.

Cut, Paste and Think

Plagiarism is a complex cultural formation. In a binarized, digitized discourse, intellectual theft is framed as definitive, trackable and clear. Shelley Angelil-Carter confirmed three modes of plagiarism: cheating (deliberate fraud), nonattribution (through ignorance of referencing models) and paraphrasing that is simply too close to the original source. (Angelil-Carter 2000) Yet Edward Winter realized the consequences to scholars and scholarship of 'self-plagiarism.'

> This occurs when an author uses his or her work that has been published previously elsewhere. Among other aspects, infringement of copyright enters the frame. Before a high-horse is mounted, consider the challenges faced when describing methods. If a particular technique is used repeatedly in one's work, it soon becomes taxing to describe that technique in a different form of words. Attempts to get round the problem by using the expression, 'The technique has been described in full elsewhere so only a brief outline is presented here' means that a reader has to go to another source with the attendant inconvenience that this brings. Often, reviewers challenge this approach (Winter 2006: 113).

Clearly, the determination of (self) plagiarism and citation is not as precise as the software-evangelist administrators may wish. Similarly, there is the messy and complicated issue of senior academics 'claiming' or being named as an author for other's intellectual work. In my postgraduate career, several supervisors claimed a right to 'co-author' my articles, even though they did not read the work. In response, I published the articles after the doctorate had passed through the examination process. Senior academics are 'claiming' the work of 'their' research assistants

and doctoral candidates as a matter of course. As a media historian who uses archival sources—both analogue and digital—I am reticent to rely on or 'use' other scholars' research without actually reading the materials. This claiming/appropriation of the work of subordinates can be called 'institutional plagiarism.' Roger Logue describes this term as,

> a feature of systems of formal hierarchy in which credit for intellectual work is more a consequence than a cause of unequal power and position ... In other words, it occurs when a superior, because of his or her position, gets the credit for the work of a subordinate ... This includes ghostwriting, when the actual writing is done by someone else; 'honorary authorship,' where a supervisor who has done little or no research is listed as a co-author of an article; or where work done by junior workers is commonly signed by more senior academics ... The practice of putting your name to a piece of work when you have had little or no input is so extensive in academic and research communities that it is often regarded as the norm. Looking at the number of multi-authored articles published in journals, many claim to be written by more than 15 authors (2005:40-41).

This was an important issue that I had to sort out before taking on a large number of postgraduate supervisions. Once clear, I could communicate my position to students. My rule was 'their work is theirs. My work is mine. When we write it together, it is ours.' I also moderate and monitor my role in the writing at all times, to ensure that I am—at least—pulling my scholarly weight. It is not my right to claim their project or research. Yet if students have seen senior scholars who have little contribution in an article adding their name to research, what lessons are being learnt about intellectual integrity?

As these examples suggest, the internet did not invent plagiarism. Instead, it made it easier to accomplish and easier to detect. This 'problem' has also fed the managerial appetite to solve academic challenges by administrative means. Patrick Scanlon has confirmed that,

> The adoption of increasingly popular electronic plagiarism checkers, although probably effective in the near term as deterrents, could actually prevent faculty from addressing the problem before the fact, as a critical matter of students' intellectual and ethical development. Faculty and administrators should seek ways to attend to Internet plagiarism; however, they should do so as educators, rather than as detectives (2006:161).

The tools of teachers are different from the strategies of software designers. Also, the statistics of plagiarism need to be placed in context. McCabe and Trevino's two multicampus surveys found that 30% of students admitted to academic dishonesty in 1963, compared to 26% in 1993 (McCabe and Trevino 1996:29-33). Updating the surveys to 2002, Scanlon and Neumann discovered that only 2.3% of students admitted to frequently buying papers from the paper 'mills.' Six percent admitted to the purchase of the papers 'sometimes' (Scanlon and Neumann 2002:374-385). Yet there are also other sources of information about student behavior and source material to consider. The Joint Information System Committee (JISC) investigated British further education institutions. The respondents to their survey believed that 74% of plagiarism came from textbooks and theses, with 24% derived from the internet (Large 2001: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/plagiarism_notes.rtf). Similarly, John Royce discovered no Turnitin matches with usenet discussion groups or lists, online encyclopedias or subscribed databases (Royce 2003:28). These results confirm that there is no internet-caused recent 'epidemic' and similar levels of plagiarism were reported in the analogue age. Yet the plagiarism from textbooks and theses is an unaddressed issue through the software panacea.

Librarians and Fighting (for) the Future.

> As librarians, we know that detection is not the main objective in a campaign against plagiarism (2004:4).
> —Margaret Burke

Librarians have often predicted a problem in information management years before policy makers and teachers. As new platforms and databases have entered the curriculum, librarians are increasingly being required to teach, evaluate and present the strengths and problems of the information scaffold for staff. Nicole Auer and Ellen Krupar realized that

> Librarians are in a unique position to help prevent and detect plagiarism by forming partnerships with faculty to re-examine assignments and instructional sessions and by informing them of Internet paper mills and useful Internet search strategies (Auer and Krupar 2001: 415).

In addressing not only plagiarism but how data moves through space and time, librarians have understood the complexity and political consequences of this debate. Yet besides these wider concerns, they also must handle more immediate needs from academics. As C. Brian Smith reports.

> A professor approaches the reference desk and hands me a recent student paper. 'I think this has been plagiarized,' she says. 'Can you help me prove that the content has not been lifted?' Skimming the text, I note a few unique phrases and type the word combination into Google's search box. I click on the link to the first hit—I'm feeling lucky—and see that the web document matches the student's paper verbatim. This scenario is not unusual. More and more my role as an academic reference librarian involves helping professors track down evidence of digital plagiarism (2003: http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA304092.html).

There are many responses to Smith's story. An obvious one is why the academic did not have the skill, expertise and awareness—within her own subject area—to be aware of particular phrases and input them into Google (McCullough and Holmberg 2005). There are far more complex searches that are often required to track the cuts and pastes and lifts. The idea that such a basic strategy would take a librarian's time demonstrates that the training of academics in information management needs to increase.

While there is a focus on students intentionally 'taking' material, there is no doubt that there is also confusion about referencing styles and modes. Obviously, the notion that students can arrive at a university and be unable to reference is a concern. Yet this remedial work is required in almost all first year papers that are submitted to me at university. Librarians have the expertise and experience to fulfill this role much more effectively than academics. Therefore it is crucial that librarians not only be valued for their work, but be given a proactive space to redefine their role in an information age where footnotes are optional. Auer and Krupar hypothesized about the nature of this function.

> The librarian's role on campus has been somewhat limited in the past. Access to students has been through point-of-use aides, reference interviews, and instructional classes. Librarians must now actively seek out new roles on campus that will create open and regular dialogues with students about information and its ethical use (Auer and Krupar 2001:424).

Through the integration of information literacy into curriculum—via the presentation of the information scaffold through assessment—such a project can be enacted. Pivotally, librarians can prevent plagiarism, rather than punish it.

One of the finest examples of this goal, and the original inspiration for the writing of this paper, was the ILIP (Information Literacies Introductory Program) at the University of Wollongong in Australia. There are many reasons that make this scheme noteworthy. Firstly, it is a compulsory course to be completed by all undergraduates and coursework postgraduates at the University. Further it must be completed by the end of the first enrolled semester. If it is not, then the student's grades are withheld (http://www.uow.edu.au/student/attributes/ilip/). The aim of ILIP is to overtly teach information literacy which is defined as "the ability to locate, critically analyze, interpret, evaluate, and use information" (http://www.uow.edu.au/student/attributes/ilip/). There are a series of training modules and an online ILIP test. Each module provides information on a particular topic, such as how to use the library catalogue and how to access various databases. There is also a special topic on plagiarism. These modules are strong and effective use of the online learning environment. As a skill-based programme, it can repeat information continually and use drill-based assessment.

The first module introduces the range of information sources, and how to commence the research process (http://www.uow.edu.au/student/attributes/ilip/module_01-starting.html). The difference between journal articles, (http://www.library.uow.edu.au/helptraining/tutorials/resedge/journals.html) newspaper articles, books (http://www.library.uow.edu.au/helptraining/tutorials/resedge/books.html) and the internet is explained. The type of information found—from public opinion to new research—is also discussed, along with the difference between "Fact tools" like dictionaries and encyclopedias, and "Finding tools," like print indexes and databases. The second module applies this preliminary discussion of the types and forms of information for the materials the students will access through university reading lists (http://www.uow.edu.au/student/attributes/ilip/module_02-readinglist.html). The site teaches how to reference a book, book chapter, article and website and how these sources appear within the library catalogue. As each source is introduced, an online interactive activity asks the students to identify the title, authors, publishers, date and place of publications. From the second module, the 'how' of referencing is introduced. Significantly, web-based referencing is discussed in the same way as other analogue and print-based information, thereby naturalizing the ideology that digital sources must be referenced identically to all other types of

data. After establishing this information literacy in referencing styles, this module then teaches students how to find items on a reading list, either electronically or in print, and how to access those sources.

Module three logically builds from this preliminary introduction in referencing and searching. Titled "Finding more information," it demonstrates for students how to locate keywords and phrases to deploy in a search, (http://www.uow.edu.au/student/attributes/ilip/printbook_aust.html) and how to assess relevance and importance. Pivotally, there is also a discussion of how to evaluate the search, so that the student can continue to improve their skills and vocabulary. The stress on keywords is important, as is the desire to discover synonyms (http://www.uow.edu.au/student/attributes/ilip/identify.html) and use connectors between keywords. (http://www.uow.edu.au/student/attributes/ilip/connectors.html) Weaker students have a limited vocabulary, but they rarely connect their weaknesses in language with their weakness in research effectiveness. There is also a discussion of choice in library databases. (http://www.uow.edu.au/student/attributes/ilip/module_03-findjrnals.html) What makes this module important is that it does not stop research at the 'finding' of information, but demonstrates how to assess, rank and evaluate the value of the found material.

Once the students have gained a sense of the diversity of information, how it is evaluated and referenced, the fourth module on plagiarism is presented (http://uow.edu.au/student/attributes/ilip/module_04-plagiarism.html). The accidental and deliberate forms of plagiarism—on and offline—are presented through photographs as much as the written word. A clear and rational description of why plagiarism should be avoided by students is conveyed.

> Avoiding plagiarism requires you to master the art of knowing how to reference the wisdom of others and still be able to create your own original work (http://uow.edu.au/student/attributes/ilip/module_04-plagiarism.html).

There are concrete examples that ask students to locate the plagiarism in featured paragraphs and a quiz to ensure that students precisely determine the definition of plagiarism (http://www.uow.edu.au/student/attributes/ilip/module_04-answer2.html). The issue is enmeshed into a palette of study skills, including time management, effective note taking and understanding the conventions of referencing. University guidelines are also discussed, (http://www.uow.edu.au/handbook/courserules/plagiarism.html) along with the use of 'Turnitin.'

Plagiarism is not the frightening and overwhelming conclusion to ILIP, being the warning beacon of what happens to those who fail in university. Instead, the final module focuses on the evaluation and use of information (http://www.uow.edu.au/student/attributes/ilip/module_05-evalinf.html). Importantly, the section confirms that locating and accessing information is only a first step in developing scholarship. Confirming that "all information is not of equal value," (http://www.uow.edu.au/student/attributes/ilip/module_05-evalinf.html) the importance of evaluation is confirmed, particularly because of the multiple providers of digital data. A four tiered checklist for the assessment of information is constructed: purpose, audience, value and appropriateness. The goal is to ensure that students question and check the cited material for both quality and accuracy. The ability to frame and ask relevant questions in determining the purpose of the information is modeled, and there is a concrete demonstration of how data is shaped and written for specific audiences.

Perhaps the key strength of ILIP is that it places information, searching, plagiarism and evaluation in context. Anita McAnear realized that

> Helping students become information seekers, synthesizers, analyzers, evaluators, innovative thinkers, problem solvers, decision makers, producers of knowledge, communicators, and collaborators is one way to create an environment that minimizes cheating, plagiarism, and copyright violations (2005:4).

The ILIP scheme is important and an effective model for all universities because it is compulsory. There is a skill-based test that students must pass, even through repeated sittings, before grades are released. Such a strategy means that ignorance about plagiarism is not an excuse for student breaches. Also, the modules are extremely well thought out, logically developed and provide numerous examples. Such a process is effective and efficient. Planning for searches creates electronic and intellectual expectations, and a capacity to find the right information beyond the wayward and misleading. It also commences critical thinking and interpretation before slamming into an information glut. This rational and ordered approach to information management is distinct from the random, emotive and conversational mode of searching through Google. The key is not how many hits are returned from a search, but how many are relevant, current and live sites.

While web use for academic research is increasing, the quality of sources varies tremendously. Teachers can build informed curriculum, but we need help. Libraries and librarians are so important because they punctuate the

information landscape, controlling and managing student enthusiasm and confusion. No search engine is an intrinsic purveyor of truth and ILIP's great strength is the smooth movement between on and offline, digital and analogue. Yet Cerise Oberman realized that

> In today's libraries ... the real problems seem to centre around what is almost an ideological commitment to the computer. Today it is not unusual to have students assert, to teacher and librarian alike, that the computer has given them all the information they need. There is something subtle at work here. The nature of the computer has convinced students that all relevant information on any topic can be retrieved solely through this medium (1996:fulltext).

Students are confusing quality and quantity information. The triviality of the material found means that searchers too often become enthused with access to information and do not ask why we needed access to information in the first place. The key skill that most of us need to learn—which is facilitated by the expertise of librarians—is how to manage and balance print and electronic resources. Unfortunately, these challenges emerge in a time when libraries are struggling to maintain their collection. Tim Coates recognized that,

> Only 20 years ago the library was one of the most vibrant of civic facilities. It survived the arrival of cheap paperbacks, radio, television, VCRs and the first generation of human computers. Use was increasing. Even if libraries were slightly dull they were a family and community institution playing an essential role in lifelong learning, social cohesion and pleasurable reading. They lent 600 million books a year and provided information and study facilities that were used widely. But senior managers became enthralled by computers. They anticipated that all information could be organized in an accessible way. Not only was the electronic future technically innovative but it was also attractive to young people. Computers were introduced to libraries and book collections were allowed to fall into neglect. As a consequence, demand dwindled. Libraries found a role instead as free internet cafes (2005:4).

Actually, collection management of print-based sources is even more important in this internet-mediated environment than it was before digitization. Libraries are not internet cafes. They are places to not only find books, but to discover a way of ordering and organizing knowledge. Richard Sayers realized that "our challenge is to convince the techno-faddists and economic rationalists that Google is still not yet one of the seven wonders of the modern world" (2003:410). Google will only be one stop in a long journey through research and scholarship. Significantly, ILIP places Google into a much wider architecture of data and information.

The internet is not a library. Google is not a library catalogue. These are dangerous metaphors. The characteristic of a library—the organization of knowledge into preservable categories—has left few traces on the internet. A catalogue of accessible holdings is not a collection of numbers, but a sequence of ideas. This ordering is not an archaic relic of the analogue age, but holds a social function: to allow users to search and assess information and build larger relationships to broader subjects, theories and ideas. While the web may appear to remove the physicality of information, we are yet to make this leap conceptually. The digital library is determined as much by research training, database instruction, computer support and document delivery as the availability of search engines. Information literacy integrates documents, media, form, content, literacy and learning. The expertise of librarians and teachers must—overtly rather than implicitly—support new modes of reading, writing and communicating, integrating and connecting discovery, searches, navigation and the appropriateness of diverse resources.

The lessons of ILIP are clear for educators and education. Students require time, care, energy and good assessment to improve their digitized academic research. Teachers require professional development in library studies, internet studies and literary theory to create a worthwhile intellectual journey through this new research landscape. Most importantly Universities must value their libraries and librarians. We need to find structural ways to push our students back into libraries to discover the value of wandering up the corridors of journal stacks. Also, with library budgets declining, we need to remember and value the knowledge, professionalism and training of librarians. Librarians do not provide information, but a path through information.

Where the Curriculum Goes, Students Follow

> Solid assessment and good teaching ... can't be over emphasized ... Motivation, of course, is the key. Motivated and engaged learners are much less likely to take shortcuts. If they're only in your classroom to get a grade and move on the potential for plagiarism will be greater (2006:5).
> —J.V. Bolkan

The transformation of assessment in the last twenty years, with a decline in closed-book examinations and an increase in coursework-based assessment, means that formal invigilation has declined and plagiarism has increased (Ashworth, Freewood, and Macdonald 2003:258). Yet while such realizations may trigger hand wringing and cliché slappings about 'dumbing down,' actually there are more complex causalities and consequences of the transformations in the student cohort and student learning. Before demonstrating how effective curriculum can counter plagiarism, there needs to be a discussion of the new student culture that we are 'managing' in our universities.

Really, plagiarism is the least of a teacher's worries. A UK study reported that "nearly half the national workforce is virtually innumerate and more than a third is practically illiterate" (Kingston 2006:9). Therefore, hoping that learners will be able to find and evaluate information when they cannot read this information in the first place demonstrates an ignorance of literacy theory and pedagogy. What I am seeing in my classroom is approximately half of each year's cohort placing education, research and scholarship very low on their list of important tasks. Ironically, in the midst of the knowledge economy, students are being less creative, innovative and dynamic. They are writing Fordist essays, mass produced papers with standardized search engines. This is an ironic and disturbing realization. Supposedly, an education geared for an assembly line is inappropriate for these New Times. When Tony Blair stressed the changes to the economy in his 1997 election campaign, he concurrently stressed education (education education) as his three top priorities. The reason was clear: knowledge is not only something to create or share, but exploit. Amid his emphasis, and while fighting his third election in 2005, he battled screaming headlines in The Times: "Schools still cannot teach pupils to read by age of 11" (Halpin 2005:1). Yet, this critique is not the ahistorical disaster it appears. Allan Luke confirmed that literacies operate within socially-situated practices (1998:305-313). As contexts change, so must the definition and pedagogies encircling literacy. If the knowledge economy is to be more than a slogan of the Third Way political agenda, then a negotiation of critical literacies will require primary attention and scholarly priority. Plagiarism is a smokescreen, an invented crisis to mask the pivotal discussion about educational standards at schools and universities, and the transformation of literacies.

A concern for theorists is that the endless discussion of the pervasive nature of plagiarism is damaging and warping the learning culture for students. As Charles McLafferty and Karen Foust confirmed,

> Incidents such as these indicate the presence of a new student ethos in which plagiarism and other forms of cheating are common and even acceptable. As professors, we have confronted situations of blatant plagiarism and have received responses such as the following: 'I have completed these types of assignments for several ... instructors in the same manner and have never been questioned or accused of plagiarism before' (2004:186).

Students love this sort of statement. If one class does not demand reading and scholarship, then it assumed that the academics demanding high standards hold misplaced expectations. Yet McLafferty and Foust confirm that "when students are instructed appropriately and given certain types of assignments, plagiarism is minimized or rendered virtually impossible" (2004:186). They note particular 'red flags' including dead web links and incongruence in the argument.

The 'problem' of information management at university is not caused by Google or the Internet, but it is framed by a loose and unspecified rendering of the 'project' and 'outcomes' of education. John Battelle asked,

> Let's break down Google's mission further. What is 'information' anyway? In the end, it is data that describes something ... The first years of Google's rise have taught us that if something is of value, it needs to be in Google's index. What if the world becomes the index? ... In other words, Google has, in its seven short years, become a canvas upon which we project every application or service we can imagine. Google as phone company? As cable provider? As university (2005:2)?

It is important to be completely honest about the internet—let alone the web—that is being searched by Google and used by students. The web is large, occasionally irrelevant, filled with advertising, outdated ghost sites and is increasingly corporatized. It seems appropriate that Google is ubiquitous at the moment when teachers and librarians are overworked and less available to see students. Plagiarism in such an environment must thrive. David Loertscher confirmed that

> Search engines such as Google are so easy and immediate that many young people, faced with a research assignment, just 'google' their way through the internet rather than struggle through the hoops of a more traditional library environment (2003:14).

Google standardizes searching at the time when there is a great diversity of both information and users. In a fast food, fast data environment, the web transforms into an information drive-through. It encourages a 'type in-

download-cut-paste-submit' educational culture. A 2001 study reported that 71% of American students relied mostly on the internet for major assignments at school. In this same study, 24% relied mostly on the library and only 4% used both the internet and the library (http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Schools_Report.pdf). My aim in the last five years of teaching has been the building an information scaffold and to lift that 4% figure so that students are actively moving between the digital and the analogue, the unrefereed web and scholarly databases. We need to teach—overtly—the meaning and purpose of refereeing. Content and context must be aligned. Further, we must ensure, through curricula choices, that these tools are actually used, rather than taught and ignored.

There is a fine body of literature presenting case studies of remarkable curriculum and effective assignment strategies that not only lessen plagiarism, but increase student motivation. Doug Johnson revealed,

> Educators expend much effort trying to 'catch' plagiarism in student work. Teachers and library media specialists use various Web services and Internet search techniques to detect student work that is lifted from online sources. While such tools are necessary and can be effective, our time as educators would be better spent creating assignments that require original, thoughtful research and, therefore, minimize the likelihood of plagiarism in the first place (2004:549).

Writing fresh and specific assessment tasks is the primary way to make plagiarism not only less likely, but close to impossible. The advantage of not using a textbook is that small, quirky and local articles and extracts can be deployed. Also students have to manage the diverse modality of sources.

I have used two curricula strategies in my first year courses to increase their information literacy and reduce the likelihood of plagiarism. One method is to insist upon an annotated bibliography with very precise modes of sources, determined by media and systems of review (http://idater.lboro.ac.uk/upload/BrabazonPDF.pdf). In this way, the 'problems' of Google and online sources, creating a glut of information of low quality, is solved through teaching students the skills of sorting, sifting and evaluation.

1. Essay Justification and Annotated Bibliography

This assignment prepares students for writing their main essay. All students are free to choose the topic of this paper, but it must sit within the following model.

The form of the question will read –

Evaluate the relationship between text. readership and politics in

Students may fill in the gap with a site of their choice. Here are some options to start you thinking about your own interests.

- Evaluate the relationship between text, readership and politics in David Beckham.
- Evaluate the relationship between text, readership and politics in Nike footwear.
- Evaluate the relationship between text, readership and politics in KILL BILL VOL. 2.
- Evaluate the relationship between text, readership and politics in Bob Marley's hair.
- Evaluate the relationship between text, readership and politics in James Bond's dinner suit.
- Evaluate the relationship between text, readership and politics in drum 'n' bass.
- Evaluate the relationship between text, readership and politics in Who Weekly.
- Evaluate the relationship between text, readership and politics in a football.
- Evaluate the relationship between text, readership and politics in a university tutorial.
- Evaluate the relationship between text, readership and politics in Microsoft Windows.

Students are only limited in choice by their own imagination. The key is to ensure that your topic is supported by material in the course reader.

Please note: It is expected that students will use between 10 and 20 sources from the course reader to write the main essay. This level of research and scholarship is nonnegotiable and must be visible in the bibliography of the submitted main essay.

This first assignment prepares you for the writing of this important main assignment. You must do the following.

STAGE ONE. Present your chosen question, justifying your choice and identifying any problems—in terms of material, interpretation or argument—that you foresee. Outline who will be the primary theorists you will use and the major argument of the essay—the point you are trying to prove. This section will be between 400-600 words in length.

STAGE TWO.   Students will use between 10 and 20 sources from the Reader for the Main Essay. Therefore this second stage for your first assignment focuses on students finding sources OUTSIDE THE READER. Students are required to locate TEN FURTHER SOURCES and write between 20 and 40 words on each source, explaining their relevance to the project. This explanatory paragraph creates an 'annotated bibliography,' rather than simply 'bibliography.'

The ten sources must be of the following type:

- Two scholarly monographs. (Please note: a monograph is a book. Ensure that the text is produced by a recognized scholarly publisher, such as a University Press.)
- Two print-based refereed articles. (Refereeing is the process whereby a journal sends out an article to scholars in the field to assess if it is of international quality and rigour. Students know that articles are refereed because on the inside cover of the journals an editorial board is listed and the process of review outlined. Examples include the Cultural Studies Review, The International Journal of Cultural Studies, Media International Australia and Cultural Studies.)
- One web-based refereed article. (Students must ensure that the site they use—such as M/C or First Monday—is a refereed online journal.)
- One web-site that is non-refereed (that is an online article from publications such as Online Opinion, a blog or fan club site).
- One magazine or newspaper article.
- One track or album of popular music
- One advertisement (from radio, television, magazines or the online environment)
- One television programme or film.

Remember—after each source is listed—students must then write 20-40 words about the text, including why it was selected for the project.

The aim of this exercise is to teach students how to find information and assess its relevance for a project. Once completed, this material becomes the further reading for the main assignment. At that stage, students simply intertwine these sources with the set course reading. Your research for the main essay is done!

Please do not be worried about this assignment. Tara is happy to help in any way, explaining the nature of information and source material. Do not hesitate: come and see her—or email her—with any queries.

The word length for both parts of this project is a combined maximum of 1000 words.

While there were problems with how I structured this assignment in 2004, it did address the problems that have worried me in the last decade. Expectations about reading and research were revealed, and the 'unspoken assumptions' about university education were presented. Further, for those students without this knowledge about finding research material, I constructed an information scaffold so that they knew what was required, and if they did not, then they must ask.

This process aimed to make students think about the quality of information and how it is structured. It slowed their research process. The second part of this assignment enabled the development of this critical literacy by asking why sources were chosen, and what they offered to the project. Attention was placed on theories of knowledge and how they were built on mechanisms of classifying, organizing and storing information. The broader lesson students learnt was that while there is an abundance of information, what is scarce is the right information in an appropriate time and place. Often forgotten—or never even realized—is the rigorous refereeing process that formulates the production process for books and articles. While some material on the web is refereed, generally the pieces are short and the arguments less developed. The proliferation of blogs, where banal individual details have a potentially wide digital audience, transforms our ability to judge, rank and assess relevance and significance. This assignment attempted to (re)teach and (re)value the capacity to sift, sort and evaluate information.

Through this type of assessment, students approach web searching with thought and consideration. As my course moved from the second semester to the first, and I was managing far more inexperienced and younger students, my curricula strategy also changed. I restricted their reading choices to only those materials that I provided for them. In other words, I blocked any further reading from their assessments. All that was required and assessed was given to them in a printed 'Reader.' This structurally blocked the need for any searching through banal and irrelevant sources, while also ensuring that plagiarism is almost impossible. My goal was not the development of research skills at this stage, but the confirmation of reading level, writing competency and interpretative capacity. The careful selection of rare and up-to-date sources, many published in the two months before the Reader was

printed, meant that it was impossible to 'buy' an essay online, as it would be irrelevant. Also, by basing the content on Australian case studies, American and British paper mills are redundant.

1. Analytical Paper

Due Date: Wednesday of Week Seven (April 12, 2006)
Weighting: 30% of the course
Length: 1500 words

Explore the meaning of Charles Leadbeater's phrase 'Living on thin air.' How does this phrase track the changes to work, leisure and lifestyle?
Evaluative Criteria: (That is, what we are looking for when marking your paper.)

- Accurate use of terminology
  Ensure that the terms deployed in your analytical assessment are accurate, clear and correct.

- Effective writing, referencing and clarity of expression
  Your writing must be evocative and well drafted. Full sentences and paragraphing are required. Do not use bullet points. Also, there must be at least ten references from course material—that is articles from the reader—included in your paper. Referencing style is also assessed.

- Strong and convincing engagement with the primary phrase and a capacity to interpret it through course readings.
  You must demonstrate an engagement with Leadbeater's phrase. Do not restate his argument or paraphrase his book extract. You are exploring it in a creative, critical and interpretative fashion. Situate your argument into the ideas of other writers in the course reader.

- Evidence that the course readings have been understood.
  The level of understanding, comprehension and analysis will be assessed.

2. Policy Submission

Due Date: End of week twelve (May 26, 2006)
Weighting: 40% of the course
Length: 2000-2500 words

You have been given the task of writing a policy submission to the Premier of Western Australia. You must assess the Creative WA document and recommend whether or not Western Australia is an appropriate site for the development of creative industries policies and initiatives. You can either write a general submission, or assume the perspective of a particular interest group or community. Remember: assume a position and argue your case, using the materials in the Reader to provide the evidence to verify your case.
Evaluative Criteria:

- Capacity to evaluate the core document.
- Exhibition of wide-ranging reading from the course, demonstrating correct referencing.
- Effective writing, style, structure and tone.
- Level of interpretation and analysis

The second assignment was based on an unpublished policy document, so the students had no option but to use the course readings to interpret and assess this work. There is no other course in the world that has had access to Creative WA. So while plagiarism is never impossible—someone can always be paid to write the work of others—there is no generic paper that has any relevance to these assignments, with their specified band of required reading.

The key in such an assessment strategy is to enforce that students use this provided material, or else they do not pass the course. Marks are determined through the use of the required readings that I choose with great care. This material is not only incredibly recent, but locally specific and in many cases, incredibly rare. The combination of these references also ensures that students must construct an original interpretation to link these readings together to answer the question. In specifying the minimum number of references that are required, I established clear parameters for their submitted bibliographies. The overt statement of expectations is important to first year

university students. I was staunch in the compliance to this number, and student continually probed my commitment to this scale of citation.

> From: Katherine
> Sent: Wednesday, 12 April 2006 10:43 AM
> To: Tara Brabazon
> Subject: assignment
>
> Hey Tara
>
> I know this is last- minute but unfortunately i'm a last minute girl. I need help with my assignment. I'm getting confused with the topic and I can't seem to find good references, or enough references for the topic. When are your consulting hours? Because I desperately need help.
>
> Love Kate

Yes, this email was sent on the day of submission of this paper, only five hours before it was due. Even with a provided list of readings, she still could not find 'good references.' Plagiarism was not my concern with Kate. The issue was time management.

> From: Matt
> Sent: Friday, 24 March 2006 5:11 PM
> To: Tara Brabazon
> Subject: RE: Creative Industries HELP!
>
> Hi Tara,
> Sorry to be painful but this should be my last question. Do we really need to have ten references from the readers?
> It's just that by coincidence (my parents bought me a subscription to Time) I have found a couple of articles, one regarding obesity in America and one about everyday people creating wealth through the internet (with blogs, short films etc). I'd like to use these but I feel that I am getting too wound up on having ten references from the unit material,
>
> Have a good weekend,
>
> Matt
>
> --------------------------
>
> From: Tara Brabazon
> Sent: Saturday, 25 March 2006 7:40 AM
> To: Matt
> Subject: RE: Creative Industries HELP!
>
> Hi Matt -
>
> Hope you are well. Thanks for your message.
>
> Matt—the assignments in creative industries—they have been written to use that reading. We do not want any further reading at all. And remember there are many more articles than 10 in these relevant sections of the course, so students can choose what suits them. But they must choose from the quality material that we have gathered from around the world. That is the relevant stuff. That is what we are testing is being used.
>
> The reason that we want these references is to confirm that students have done the reading and are working at a level where they can interpret that material.
>
> So Time magazine is not at a high enough level for University work. It's interesting and great to read, but we are asking a precise question, using a precise body of knowledge. Remember too, the quotes may be four or five words in length, that's all. But you need to confirm that you can read and use them.
>
> Also—one of the criteria by which we're assessing your work is the use of reading. So you need to position yourself to get the marks from that part of the marking mix, O.K?
>
> Let me know if I can do anything else...
>
> T

It is extraordinary that a student is complaining about the use of ten references in a university-level assignment. I had collected and printed thirty eight separate extracts for students to use in the first six weeks of the course. Asking students to select ten from this list is neither excessive nor inflated. Obviously many more references were required for a distinction grade. But it is remarkable that by placing a (quite low) minimum level of compliance, students still have a difficulty reaching this figure. Fascinatingly, Matt attempted to argue that Time magazine would be an adequate substitute for the carefully selected international scholarship. The key in avoiding plagiarism is to not only make expectations of scholarship overt and clear, but to ensure that these standards are met. For this student to think that Time is equivalent to higher levels of scholarship is part of the scholarly problem that needs to be corrected and addressed.

The necessity for intervention and ensuring that every student is aware of their responsibilities is a way to not only inspire students with overt statements of expectations, but to transform a student culture of mediocrity. Such standards are based on a teacher's expertise, not the student's options to cut and paste. As David Loertscher confirmed, "The clever teacher … designs assignments and projects for which cheating or plagiarism is not an issue and really cannot be done" (2006:40). Indeed, if curriculum can be improved and outcomes clearly specified, then plagiarism and collusion are much more time consuming—and expensive—than actually completing the assignment.

The oddity for me was that students—even when told that a minimum of ten references were required—did not manage this number of citations.

List of references

Leadbeater, C. Creative Industries MCC106 READER, '*Living On Thin Air*' 1999 Viking, London

Toynbee P. Creative Industries MCC106 READER, '*Nickel and Dimed*' 2002 Granta London

Plonka L.
'The workaholic universe'
http://laviniaplonka.com/Workaholic.html

Maycroft N. Creative Industries MCC106 READER, 'Cultural consumption and the myth of life-style' *Capital and Class,* No. 84, Winter, 2004

You needed many more readings from the course. You worked well with those, but greater complexity + detail was required.

The internet does not cause plagiarism and cannot solve it. The internet did not create this low level of student reading and cannot solve it. There is money to be made in scanning systems like Turnitin (http://www.turnitin.com/), IntegriGuard (http://www.integriguard.com/) and EVE2 (http://www.canexus.com/eve/). Yet the difficulty with this software is that it creates a culture that punishes the outcome of plagiarism, rather than understands and contextualizes the cause of it. In many ways, students are only repeating the ideology of the last decade of higher education, where universities and governments have placed faith in technology to solve issues of social inclusion. As Selwyn realized,

> Yet seven years on from the first announcements of New Labour's technology assisted 'renaissance' of adult learning it is beginning to be acknowledged that ICT may not be having the wholly 'transformatory' impact on adult education that many of its proponents would have had us believe. For example, levels of participation in ICT-based education remain relatively modest (2004:270).

Also, such software creates an environment of self-satisfaction and overconfidence from university managers when—obviously—it does not search the entire internet. Some only trawl the World Wide Web. Web pages are also unstable, and past issues of journals may be lost. Even the Google search engine does not index Google Answers (Royce 2003:27). Certainly programmes like Turnitin have advantages. They are able to search in a more methodical

fashion than an academic or librarian. Yet they cannot search for the 'custom written' essays. Anti-plagiarism software does not detect ghost-authored papers. Sites such as EssayRelief.com and Essay-Help.com.au charge approximately US$10 per page to write these assignments. When the tabloid West Australian newspaper, revealed the shock-horror news that "Uni essays bought on internet for $119," the Pro Vice Chancellor of Murdoch University, the same administrator whose headline comment commenced this paper, stated that "Murdoch planned to introduce new plagiarism detection software next year. But Professor Thomas admitted anti-plagiarism software could detect only essays that were already available on line, not a commissioned essay" (Thomas in Hiatt 2006b:7). While demonstrating the flaws in Thomas's policy, The West Australian demeaned university educators by buying a ghost-written paper and then submitting it to "a university tutor," who said that "the essay would probably pass, though it was of a low standard" (Hiatt 2006b:7). The marker was unnamed, and there was no justification for why a tutor was chosen over a lecturer or professor, or why writing of 'low standard' would actually pass.

Cheating, plagiarism and copying the work of others has always been a part of scholarship. The internet has only created a customized, post-Fordist, digitized, trans-national market for these Fordist papers. Matthew Wilson, managing director of Essaywriter.co.uk, stated that the prices for his 'services' vary from £128 for a 2,000 word history essay to £4,674 for a Masters dissertation. He also confirmed than the bulk of his 'business' is derived from overseas students (Wilson in Bowcott and Johnson 2005:9). Therefore, the logical response to his admission would be to monitor the entry level, expectations and assessment standards of international students. In a 'business university' there can be no mention that actually the plagiarism 'problem' is not widespread through the student body, but targeted to a particular population, one that is integral to the financial survival of the institutions. What is rarely discussed is the uneven—at best—and low quality—at worst—standard of these downloadable papers. They are far too general and dated for the specific studies required in the contemporary academy. They should fail in any well configured assessment strategy.

And Once More to Literacy

> The future requires no footnotes (2003:280).
> —Heather-Jane Robertson

Critical literacy is a phrase we hear a lot at universities these days. Indeed, critical literacy and plagiarism have been dueling with mission statements and generic competencies on the metaphoric pop chart of higher education vocabulary for the 2000s. Yet concise definitions of these terms remain elusive and assumed. Mary Macken-Horarik's work is important because she clarifies these terms, arguing critical literacy is not an 'add on' to literacy debates but requires the initial development of more instrumental modes of encoding and decoding. An everyday literacy with spoken language—when we talk to our friends and family—does not automatically mean that we are literate at and in school and university. She argues that we cannot learn to read and then concurrently critique or question what we are reading. Educators must be considered and thoughtful in how we move our students through the stages of literacy. The goal is to transfer and transform student thinking from understanding daily life through to understanding the inequalities and injustices of our daily life. In this process, Mary Macken-Horarik described critical literacy as "dependent on students' prior engagement with mainstream/specialized literacy practices" (1998: 78). She confirms that "it is not fair to invite our students to critique texts before they have learnt to analyze them and still less fair to those who cannot yet even process their meanings" (1998:78). Such a realization places the plagiarism 'crisis' in context. Without students being taught the most basic of information literacies, any hope of critical literacies is a structural impossibility. Plagiarized work fills the student breach between desire and results.

Teachers cannot make students literate. We can only move students from their current words and worlds so that they can align and negotatiate a new context and environment. There is much subterfuge and semiotic smoke for these students to manage. The stick with which university administrators are hitting inexperienced students, and the deployment of technology to track technology, is part of a wider culture of surveillance. For example, George W. Bush wanted to monitor what searchers were looking up on the search engine. The privacy lawyer Thomas Burke, realized that,

> Search engines now play such an important part in our daily lives that many people probably contact Google more often than they do their own mother. Just as most people would be upset if the Government wanted to know how much you called

your mother and what you talked about, they should be upset about this too (2006:30).

While plagiarism policy focuses on software detection and 'cheating,' this surveillance of information and use must be placed in context. There is a politics to information, and a politics to how it is managed. For example, the FBI is frightened of librarians. The iconography and ideology of benign, bespectacled, quiet and solitary librarians has never been an accurate archetype, but those in power, wishing to survey the reading habits of terrorists and the rest of us, 'requested' that librarians release information about searching and borrowing habits. A confidential email obtained by the Electronic Privacy Information Center from the FBI stated that,

> While radical militant librarians kick us around, true terrorists benefit from [the Office of Intelligence Policy and Review's] failure to let us use the tools given to us ("Frontdesk" 2006:15).

After September 11, the governments of both John Howard and George W. Bush summoned 'back to basics' literacy programmes. Their entire focus was on encoding and decoding print: reading and writing. The most cursory glance at our environment confirms that the world is not filled with signs in English that tell us the truth about our lives. We 'read' facial expressions, architecture, sounds and power structures. The focus on print by these governments means that reading and writing becomes an endpoint rather than the start of another stage or mode of literacy. Higher levels of literacy competence are then locked away from the disempowered as they 'master the basics,' perpetuating the distribution of knowledge and power in society. Discussions of plagiarism snuggly fit into this agenda. The goal is to track ownership of words, rather than explore the broader values being distributed in education.

Too often, we just read. We do not ask why we are reading. We do not ask why our students are not reading. Cultural values are maintained. Elite understandings of literacy are perpetuated. High culture is naturalized as quality culture. The radical change to our campuses, students, regulatory policies and curriculum after September 11, the second Iraq War, the South Asian Tsunami and the bombing of the London Underground are vast. It is tougher to teach, and it is tougher to learn. Neo-Conservative morality tempers the range and mode of our ethical questions. Neo-Liberal market agendas sell our knowledge to the highest corporate bidder. University research is funded by corporations, often impacting on its effectiveness. This is the culture that our students are observing: exhausted academics rarely updating curriculum because of time constraints, rarely holding teaching qualifications, and only being valued for research funding, not research quality. Yet our time—and through the history we are writing around us—demands more.

Plagiarism is like herpes. It can be treated and managed, but never cured. The problem is that I am teaching a cohort of students many of whom are the first generation in their family to attend University, are in part-time work, and do not have either the experience or expectations about the requirements of advanced and internationally-aware scholarship. Crucially the proliferation and popularity of the internet and the World Wide Web in education has confirmed that literacy is not an endpoint, a skill to be achieved, but a process of ongoing development and change. Colin Lankshear has shown how reading and writing remain social practices that require context to grant meaning. He stated that "literacies are inseparable from practices in which they are embedded and the effects of these practices" (1998:44). The ability to decode and interpret—or plagiarize—text on a screen does not always create an understanding of the process through which information becomes knowledge. In creating a "New word order," (1998:44) there is need to facilitate the participation, building and transformation of information platforms to create conditions conducive to learning and teaching. Searching, reading and writing must be placed in context. New 'basics' are forming, via the changes to capitalism and the nation state. The older forms of literacy, based on encoding and decoding, must be grafted and translated for a mixed media environment. Because 'use' of digitized information refers to the movement of text between documents, there is an awkward conflation between finding, reading and interpreting material. This seamless passage/confusion between finding and using information is one explanation of why plagiarism is a major problem in digitized educational settings.

If this article has offered an intervention in plagiarism debates, it is the importance of techno-skepticism. The skill and techniques of well trained teachers and librarians are required in the information age to block students from googling their way through a degree. Students, when made aware of the plurality of sources, searches, words and ideas, again became excited by learning. Teaching and learning is a negotiation of meaning, opening students to opportunities for interaction and reflection. The best of scholarship requires a flexibility of the mind, built on a disciplined mobilization of academic protocols, scholarship and verifiable interpretation. It may be sacrilege

in societies saturated with markets, branding and neo-liberalism, but perhaps education is not meant to be cost-effective. Money has been removed from all levels of the educational sector. Investing in people—teachers, librarians and students—will produce the required response. The most important question to ask at this time is how we will help our students in the postindustrial information age, and ponder the choices and the commitments that actually matter. Our lives are shaped—and actively transformed—by small events and few people. Yet these moments of intervention are revelatory and transcendent.

One more story of teaching concludes this article. In the fifth week of semester, having just finished an 8:30 A.M. lecture and the tutorial that follows it, I was walking back to my office tired, but satisfied at the morning's work and ready to start my 'second job' supervising the honours and postgraduate candidates. Yet as I left the tutorial block, a solitary figure sat like a thrown rag doll on a chair. She was looking down and completely disconnected from her environment. She was enrolled in my course Creative Industries, so I walked over and crouched beside her. She seemed tiny, impossibly young and deeply lost. I asked how she was going. Her reply was disturbing but honest. She expressed how much she was enjoying this course, but how the rest of university life was nothing like she thought it would be. She intended to finish the semester and get a job. I tried to support her as best I could, and said I was happy to help in any way. Two days later, an email arrived in my inbox.

> From:
> Sent: Tuesday, 28 March 2006 2:26 PM
> To: Tara Brabazon
> Subject: argh!
>
> Hey Tboz,
>
> Soz bout the nickname, i thought of it the other day and i can't stop associating you with it. Just thought I'd let you know what I'm upto, seeing as you seemed interested and sad that I wasn't very 'enthused' on Monday. It's gonna be long so prepare.
>
> At the end of last year I got offered a job at this place which is several shops away from my mother's salon, It's called xxxxx Marketing, Design and Print, which was cool cos I was thinking of heading in that direction. However I turned it down as I had it in my head that I had to go to uni. All through school I was always like top of the class and stuff so it was always expected that I would go to uni, get rich and make everyone green with envy.
>
> Come yr 12 I had no idea what to study, but I knew I was good at sciences, so applied for Biomedical science (what the f%&k is that!?), got accepted and deferred. Then came crunch time and so I though media would be interesting. It so is not. So far anyway.
>
> So yeah I'm thinking I may go back to the guy at xxxxxxxx (his name is xxxxxxx, bless him!), and see if either the job is still there, or if theres any specific training I could do for any jobs in the future. I hopefully will do that either tomorrow or on Friday. If a job happens to be available (they will train me and stuff), I might consider doing it, or if luck is on my side, there will be no job now, but in June. That way I could finish this semester.
>
> So, I figured, I could finish the semester, pass, get my points for my units, deffer again and see what happens. Maybe if I can't get a job there, there may be some units that are relevant to that type of thing, like marketing or something. It's just I'm a real hands-on sort of person, and classrooms bore me to tears.
>
> Let me know what you think, I've spoken to some other people that are older and wiser, and they think it sounds like a wise thing to do(finish the semster that is). If you think it's crap and I'm insane, tell me. It would be the first time someone has brought me gback down to planet Earth. My boyfriend calls me a sasquatch (bless his LITTLE heart) and my mum tells me I have a heart of stone (semi-true, maybe). My friends just call me a nut, especially when I get drunk and dance like an asshole! Be brutal!
>
> Scoob XX

This is one of those emails that arrive each semester that makes me question why I teach students. It is always difficult to ascertain in emails such as this if students cannot write with clarity and accuracy, or choose not to. Clearly, she should not be at university. Indeed, why she chose to attend when "classrooms bore me to tears" is a mystery. Yet most of us who have taught first years long enough can predict her future. She is 'bored' by education, but assumes that the workplace will be filled with excitement and challenge. A young woman without qualifications, intellectual discipline or the capacity to write with clarity and skill does not have a bright future in front of her, particularly in

design and marketing.

One week after sending this email, she saw me again to say that she had decided to leave university. The design firm did not offer her employment, but an afternoon a week in unpaid 'training.' When I suggested that she could do this 'training' and finish the semester, she replied that she did not have time. I raised an eyebrow. She corrected herself. 'O.K. I have time, but I just don't want to study.'

No librarian or teacher can 'solve' Scoob's life choices. While we frighten students with talk of plagiarism, the gifts derived from transformative reading, evocative writing and dissenting thinking are undiscussed. Plagiarism is a symptom of a 'crisis of positionality,' a reconfiguration of the role of academics, students, libraries and information in our contemporary universities. Yet, discussions of plagiarism also reveal the relationship between knowledge and society. Muller described this movement as a transitional capitalism.

> The crisis of positionality comes down to this: that there are no more bona fide utopias, no more great solutions, and therefore no more enviable grand-gesture tilts against capitalism, against the system, against domination in general. The gesture of refusal itself can, in and of itself, no longer be considered radical. Such gestures must today be seen for what they are, the repetitive reconceptualizations of capitalism and the system, for what else could they be in the absence of any conceivable alternative (1997:205).

The purpose and point of education is implicated in this crisis of positionality, pulled between cut and pasting and reading, collusion and collaboration, funded 'research' and independent scholarship, plagiarism and politics. With no 'grand gestures' left, our choices are clear: be grateful for plagiarism software or dig in, be better and aim higher.

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