"It wasn't me, was it?" Plagiarism and the Web

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Abstract

Issues of plagiarism are complex, and made all the more complicated by students' increasing use of the World Wide Web as a research space. In this article, we describe several situations we faced as teachers in writing-intensive classrooms—experiences common to most teachers of writing. We share these examples to explore how issues related to plagiarism and its effects are both reproduced *and* change in new research spaces. We also share these stories to discuss how we can best handle plagiarism in first-year writing classrooms and how we can best equip students with the tools necessary to do appropriate research—both online and offline.
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1. Sharing our stories

1.1. It wasn't me, was it?

Having experienced plagiarism in her classes, Annette has adopted a twofold approach to avoiding it: First, early in a class, she engages students in discussions of plagiarism, talking with them about what plagiarism is, why it's wrong, and how they can avoid it. Secondly, she designs assignments that deter students from plagiarizing by encouraging original ideas, a focus on process, and multiple drafts.

In a recent introduction-to-literature course she taught, students read *King Lear*. After reading the first papers that students in her class submitted, out of curiosity, she went to an online paper mill[1] just to see what sort of papers were available on the topic of *King Lear*. As she skimmed the papers available for download, she realized that several seemed quite familiar.

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Without intentionally looking for any one student's paper, she inadvertently found that three students in her class had plagiarized—had downloaded papers from the Web and turned them in as their own. In class the next day, she castigated the act and invited all of the students to visit her during her office hours, but noted that if the three people who plagiarized (she didn't point them out publicly) didn't come to speak with her, they would fail the class.

At her office hours the following week, a student shuffled in. She was surprised to see him, as he wasn't one of the plagiarists. He was nervous and asked, "It wasn't me, was it?" Annette asked why he felt he had plagiarized, and he admitted that he used a Cliff's Notes version of *King Lear* to better understand the text and write his paper. Annette explained why this wasn't plagiarism and sent him on his way. The same story played out with three more students, all worried that they had plagiarized. Finally, when Annette looked in the hallway, was shocked to see a line of students still waiting to see her. A total of 14 students visited her office. The three plagiarists were among the fourteen, but the remaining eleven students weren't sure if they had plagiarized or not.

1.2. You have to do all that?

Dànielle always arranges for a library tour with students in her first-year composition courses. Last fall, one of the students in her course didn't show up for the tour. He was an older student, with a bit more academic experience, and she was willing to give him the benefit of the doubt. When she looked over the first draft of his paper, however, it was evident he would have benefited from the tour. All of his sources were web sites, and a few of them were really shaky—not credible at all.

Dànielle met with the student at the library and she provided a quick run through of their services, then together they headed to a computer to search the library databases for material. They did a search on a service called Infoseek and he found a couple of articles he wanted. Dànielle explained the steps to receive them: You copy or print the author's name, title, magazine name, volume, and issue. Then you go to the library holdings area of the library web site. You look to see if the library carries the magazine, and, if so, you copy the library code you need to find the magazine on the stacks. Then you go look up the volume you're looking for, find the article, and photocopy it. He balked. He stared at Dànielle, mouth open, and asked, "You mean I have to do ALL THAT?" Research, to him, was going to YAHOO! (a commonly used search engine on the Web), doing a simple search, and using the first 10 or 20 hits.

1.3. No... I didn't write the paper

The first paper that an international student submitted in a first-year composition course Dànielle recently taught was engaging and smart—he was a good writer and had incredibly interesting ideas. The paper had quite a few of the problems typical of students who learn and speak English as a second language, and, during Dànielle's office hours, they walked through these and talked about them, about American style conventions, and about how he could read for and identify these differences. The second paper he turned in was flawless but flat—it was lacking the spark of imagination in the first paper. Dànielle knew right away that he hadn't written the paper. She asked him to stop by her office to talk about the paper, and she asked

him about the research he had done preparing for the paper and also asked to see his earlier drafts of the paper.

During their meeting, the student was clearly uncomfortable, and his answers were short. Finally, she asked if he had plagiarized the paper. He said, "No." She asked if he wrote the paper himself. He said, "Yes." She paused for a moment, while he stared at the floor, and asked again if he had written the paper. He said "No. . . I didn't write the paper." He admitted that he had found it on the Internet and decided to turn it in. This was a tough moment—he had wanted to please Dànielle, he was shy about his writing, and he knew he had done something wrong. They talked about typical writing practices taught in schools in his country, and he explained that it was more acceptable in his country to quote extensively from other sources and that giving credit wasn't as formal as in American schools. But he did admit that he understood that—both in his home country and the United States—it was unacceptable for students to copy another person's paper in its entirety and turn it in as their own.

1.4. *What these stories tell us*

These stories remind us that issues of research and issues of plagiarism are complex and often interconnected. Stories about papers stored in the basements of fraternity houses and available for students to plagiarize have circulated among composition teachers for quite some time, but the virtual space of the Web and the download and cutting-and-pasting techniques available pose new questions related to issues of plagiarism, questions that we, as composition instructors, must address to be best equipped to better understand plagiarism, deter students from plagiarism, and encourage students to be thoughtful and critical researchers.

Two beliefs scaffold this article: First, we are witnessing students adapting their literacy, research, reading, and writing skills and processes to the virtual space—and complexity—of the World Wide Web. Second, first-year composition teachers have a key role in helping students adapt to this space, and encouraging students' critical research and writing skills in this space. Although students enter our classrooms well versed in writing-related values and ideas relayed to them in their past school experiences, often this instruction does not address—or does not go far enough in addressing—issues of online research and writing. First-year composition seems, to us, to be the ideal place to initiate discussions related to such issues; first-year composition courses tackle (among many other functions) the task of acculturating students into academic writing. Because academic writing now relies so heavily on the reading, writing, and research accessed via virtual spaces, it is necessary for first-year composition courses to address research and writing in electronic realms and to help students develop techniques that will aid them to best use these systems. From this perspective, we address the intersections of online research and plagiarism, discuss how we can best handle plagiarism in our first-year classrooms, and how we can best equip students with the tools necessary to do appropriate research—both online and offline.

2. Why plagiarism? Disciplinary functions and rethinking plagiarism

A.E. Malloch (1976) asked a question in 1976 that is still relevant today: "Why plagiarism?" (p. 165). Why do we penalize and punish, discipline and drill where plagiarism is concerned,

especially when, as Malloch noted, there are other worthy vices in academia (for example, laziness, carelessness)? Malloch argued that part of the reason we punish plagiarism is that, frankly, plagiarism makes us look—and feel—bad. We preach process, we teach approaches, and we scour student work, commenting, suggesting, and exclaiming—to find that some of the students in our classes have downloaded their papers from the Internet.

It is not surprising that plagiarism is still a common subject of discussion and research as plagiarism is a fairly contemporary notion—individualistic authorship is a relatively new idea. Prior to our Modernist notions of author and authorship, most work was collaborative in a larger sense (Barthes, 1985; Foucault, 1984; Howard, 1995). Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault both noted that the author figure came into being as we know it today when the value of the individual became prestigious and our notions of subjectivity shifted.

Many of us are well read in contemporary composition theory and have adopted a process approach—and even an approach that both addresses and somewhat dismisses the romantic, modernist notion of Author (writing in isolation, suffering, the tortured artist at *his* craft)—most of us at the same time still focus on a polished, final product by an author whose name appears (alone) at the top of the first page. And our institutions hold these same values.

Most academic institutions offer definitions of academic honesty for students and recommended actions for teachers to deal with situations of academic dishonesty. Embedded within these policies are language and attitudes toward plagiarism typical of the rhetoric of crime and punishment regarding plagiarism. Generally, instructors are expected to report, in writing, all students who break or even bend policy. Reported students face punishment ranging from failing a class, being put on academic probation, and/or facing suspension or expulsion from the university. Malloch (1976) compellingly argued, however, that policies such as these have little or no impact until and unless we convince students that their written work is valuable *and* valued—a small, but potent gesture (Selfe, 1999) toward encouraging students' writing, thinking, and development.

Although institutional policies are broad and totalizing, alternative approaches to understanding plagiarism have been proposed. Rebecca Moore Howard (1993), for example, noted that most policies define plagiarism only in negative terms. Howard suggested that students engaging in the sort of work often attacked as plagiarism are often engaging in a positive activity she called *patchwriting*, which allows students a place to borrow from text, manipulate it, and work through new concepts by piecing their writing with the original work. Malloch (1976) characterized plagiarism as *kidnapping*,[2] rather than theft, and referred to this type of borrowing, weaving writing as *impersonation*—writing as experimentation, as mimic. This sort of writing—clearly a *stage* in writing development—allows students to test new approaches, process new ideas, and learn new writing strategies. These patchwriters, rather than "being unethical plagiarists, often strive to observe proper academic conventions" (Howard, 1993; p. 236).

3. Why students plagiarize

Equally as interesting as how teachers and their institutions define plagiarism is *why* students plagiarize. Reasons for plagiarizing are as diverse and complex as definitions of plagiarism.

Students may plagiarize because they feel that assembling sources, citations, and quotes is the primary goal of writing a paper—and that their original ideas are secondary (Whitaker, 1993). Students may stumble toward plagiarism when they fail to cite properly because they don't entirely understand the point or argument of a primary work, or in a struggle to define what "common knowledge" means, they struggle to identify which information merits a citation (Whitaker, 1993). Plagiarism might emerge because students have a poor understanding of an assignment or of the rhetorical aspects of an assignment—that is, a weak understanding of situation, audience, and their purpose in completing an assignment (1990). Students may plagiarize because they feel pressured to privilege a project or paper for another course or to free up time to put in more hours at work. Students may plagiarize to get the work done; as Augustus Kolich (1983) noted, "the stolen essay serves a practical purpose; it is a finished product that fits into a specific slot and that completes an assignment" (p. 146). Finally, students may plagiarize because of the often-appearing-unconscious cultural principles of written work. Cultures vary in how writing, authorship, identity, individualism, ownership rights, and personal relationships are perceived, and these variances in values and approaches to text affect student writing (Fox, 1994).

Although we regularly tell students that plagiarism is wrong, a variety of factors and temptations beyond those listed above complicate this generic warning. American academic writing is full of often conflicting complications, the most obvious of which is expecting students to come up with and develop an original idea, while requiring them to find plenty of material to back up their supposedly new and original idea or perspective on a subject. Those of us indoctrinated into academic writing traverse this complication quite easily—that is, we can explain new ideas and complement them with existing research and theory—but it should still be clear to most of us that this complication poses a challenge to students in our classes.

Further complicating students' negotiations of both comfortable and new ideas is the fact that although many seasoned academic writers can often negotiate the original ideas/supporting work paradox a bit more easily, this seemingly contradictory task leaves many high school and college-level composition students in an intellectual lurch. Common questions may include: Where does one person's work leave off and another's begin? What can be considered "common knowledge?" Does *everything* have to be cited? Is it cheating or plagiarizing to use resources like Web sites offering summaries or Cliff's Notes, as the nervous students in Annette's class did?

We can tell students that plagiarism is an academic crime, but we often assume they understand what that means and that they hold academic honesty policies in as high esteem as we do. Asking a student to create original ideas encourages plagiarism in the sense that students often feel the need to consult sources for help. How many new insights are readily available for readers of *King Lear*, for example? We ask students not just for their insights, but for their original ideas, ideas that must also—in some instances—be "correct." For example, it would not be correct for a student to write an essay describing how King Lear loved Goneril more than he loved Cordelia. Such ideas are certainly original, but not correct within acceptable, intellectual, shared discourse *on Lear*. This need to be correct that motivated the students in Annette's class to seek additional sources for originality. They searched to meet the demand imposed upon them—to conjure up their own perspectives on *King* Lear. In other classes, however, the line defining what is "correct" is quite blurry. Courses that focus with a broad

cultural lens or ask students to consider social issues, for example, may have a body of related work suggesting "correct" stances, but many of us may, in fact, discourage students from a final, fixed belief about an issue. Students often have classes that encourage them to learn a fixed, correct approach to an idea or theory, *and* classes that encourage them to retain a broad, critical, "gray-area" approach to a subject.

Online plagiarism is just as, if not more, complicated as any other form of plagiarism, and these same—and different—complications apply to research and writing in online realms. Students may plagiarize from online research spaces because it's easy to do so; cutting and pasting is a common virtual text manipulation trick. Students may plagiarize from online research spaces because there is no review, publication, and catalogue process for most Web pages, and, on top of that, authors aren't always privileged the way they are in print texts. Students may plagiarize from virtual realms because they lack sophistication in searching and evaluating sources within this realm and, frustrated, resort to stealing texts. Students may plagiarize from web pages because they are refocusing their literacy, research, and writing skills to online spaces, and they are adapting to the rhetorically and technologically complicated demands of the web.

One of these complicated demands is the evolving idea of what a *text* is. What we consider to be texts have shifted due to online realms (see, for example, Bolter, 1991; Joyce, 1995; Landow, 1992; Lanham, 1993). Texts now include sound and integrate visuals in ways that allow for more complex and fragmented presentations of connections, topics, and representations within richly layered systems. Thus, the tools that we and the students in our classes need to write, read, and understand new variations of composing have also changed. One such tool is understanding the complicated interfaces of machines—what is seen on the screen. The virtual–visual interface of the operating system (for example, WINDOWS 95, *Macintosh* O/S 8.5) is sophisticated and complex. The other software installed on the machine presents an equally complex literacy challenge, with sophisticated error messages, complex toolbars, elaborate menu bars, and incredibly detailed and embedded help features. Users have to negotiate both a textual ("File," "Edit," and so on.) and a graphical (icons that represent "open file" or "paintbrush") interface.

Through these interfaces and with this software, students go online, and face yet another layer of complexity. On the Web, students must learn to navigate complex and layered hypertexts, texts that often have embedded and complex graphical content, audio, and rich visual textures. For students who have typically been asked to negotiate traditional texts, navigating and interacting within these new realms is a strange and often quite difficult, frustrating task.

4. Addressing plagiarism in changing research spaces

4.1. Finding a foothold

A variety of scholars have offered grounded, practical approaches to addressing issues of plagiarism, ranging from the suggestion that writing teachers develop a stronger understanding of students' approaches to tasks and the invitation that we trust students' understandings of responsibility and authorship (Kolich, 1983). Likewise, we should share with students definitions of academic honesty and cases of plagiarism to enable students to read, analyze, and

understand institutional approaches to academic dishonesty (Hawley, 1984; Whitaker, 1993; Wilhoit, 1994). In our classrooms and curricula, building strong rhetorical purpose into our assignments allows students to have a much more clear focus when they begin their work, and as they work through a writing activity (Kantz, 1990). Focusing on microtasks and task management is another approach to encouraging students to better understand and manage a complex assignment and to deter them from plagiarism (Kantz, 1990; Kloss, 1996).

All of these suggestions are helpful for dealing with issues of plagiarism and provide a crucial foundation for better understanding plagiarism, online or offline. None of them, however, directly addresses issues of Internet plagiarism. In the rest of this article, we explore available remedies for us and for the students in our classrooms as we attempt to bolster our approaches to reading, writing, and research in new realms.

4.2. Negotiating online spaces

The Web offers a current, vast, and rapidly expanding research and information-delivery system. The Web, however, exacerbates existing problems that we don't often enough address in writing-intensive classrooms, including the issue of plagiarism. In a realm where anyone with a computer, Internet access, and a basic knowledge of HTML and web publishing can be an electronically published "expert," information changes shape, as do our approaches to it. Information is also much easier to plagiarize from the Web. We might even go so far as to say that cutting and pasting is almost natural in this realm, as the Web is typically accessed through an interface where cutting and pasting are basic and often-used techniques.

There are few checks and balances in the electronic realm—no librarians, no one thoroughly checking the validity of information posted, and no one checking the validity of source material. In addition, savvy students are copying or downloading entire papers and industrious web designers are copying not only code, but also content from web sites. In this realm, it's almost surprising to imagine students *not* being tempted to follow suit.

Of course, most students buying a paper from a paper mill (online or physical) or borrowing a paper from the filing cabinet in the basement of their fraternity or sorority house probably know that they are doing something wrong. And, we would probably not rely on postmodern theories of authorship and shifting subjectivity to excuse their behavior. However, the vast majority of students who plagiarize might not even realize that they are plagiarizing, and others may even harbor a somewhat constant fear that they are possibly plagiarizing. We want to believe that many students aren't necessarily evil or unthinking, but instead they're learning to negotiate and do research in new spaces, in spaces that can offer fresh and exciting research possibilities, but also offer technical tricks like cutting and pasting and rhetorical complications like "eye candy," distracting gimmicks, and advertisements.

5. Recommendations for research and writing in online spaces

Although a variety of articles in the popular press have addressed online plagiarism (see, e.g., Chidley, 1997; Hickman, 1998; Innerst, 1998; Jones, 1997; Kleiner & Lord, 1999; Mooney, 1999; Plotz, 1999; Sanchez, 1998; Witherspoon, 1995), few scholarly resources offer specific

advice to teachers of writing. Vicki Tolar Burton and Scott Chadwick (2000) analyzed the Internet-oriented advice offered in a variety of handbooks for composition students and concluded that most handbooks that supposedly offer advice related to Internet research are merely supplemented by Internet source citation styles. Burton and Chadwick argued that

> even among the burgeoning supply of Internet how-to guides marketed for writing students, a number of authors who minutely document every move involved in an Internet search tend to gloss over the critical thinking processes involved in evaluating research sources on the Internet and assume students will intuitively know how to assess the sources they find. (p. 312)

Burton and Chadwick provide an excellent analysis of Internet research, but, like many other authors addressing issues of Internet research, do not discuss issues of plagiarism.

Here we offer two approaches[3] that apply to both offline and online research and writing—supplements crucial to our first-year composition classes if we are to successfully integrate web work into our curricula, a choice not up to us to make as more and more students rely on the Web as a research space and as more and more institutions adopt web-based teaching interfaces (like WEBCT, BLACKBOARD, and DAEDALUS Online).

5.1. Intellectual property as a lens

Karla Kitalong (1998) shared a cut-and-paste story, noting the ease with which one of students admitted to plagiarizing the design of a web page. The student—after the original web author contacted the student and his professor—admitted "I really didn't think I had done anything wrong," but later admitted to being "hasty and impulsive" (p. 254). The question Kitalong asked is the same we are still faced with: Did this student plagiarize? How does electronic publishing complicate our print-based assumptions about what plagiarism is and isn't? What is common practice on the Web? How do we separate code from design in online space? Design from content?

The student whose site was plagiarized in the instance Kitalong (1998) shared added a warning on his site after the incident. In doing so, he accepted some responsibility in deterring anyone from plagiarizing his online work. This is also a possible remedy to plagiarism, but a warning on one site might mean that an absence of a warning on another site is an invitation to plagiarize. Calling attention to copyright and authorship issues generally and on web sites specifically serves as one activity composition teachers can use for leverage in discussing issues of plagiarism.

At Michigan Technological University, the majority of students are engineers and are highly industry oriented (in fact, more and more majors at the university are requiring earlier co-operative experience, internships, and industry-led courses). A useful tactic to "sell" the notion of plagiarism to students is to introduce the topic of plagiarism embedded within a discussion of intellectual property. Students understand plagiarism as relating to school work, which often comes secondary to their industry focus. Intellectual property, however, allows for a broader discussion of ethics and responsibility. (Clearly, however, plagiarism as school related and intellectual property as industry related is a false dichotomy; in everyday academic work students come into contact with a variety of copyrighted works in their everyday academic work, such as textbooks, lab materials, equipment, and so on.)

The primary reason that we suggest focusing on issues of plagiarism through the lens of intellectual property is we sometimes find ourselves having to convince students why plagiarism is wrong. It is, as we argued earlier, not enough for us to just say, "Don't do it"; it is important to tell students why plagiarism is important and *why* and *how* it should be avoided. It's one thing to tell students that it is wrong to steal a few sentences of someone's work, but it's another thing entirely to demonstrate the importance of respecting another's work by using a "real-world" legal example of an intellectual property issue. An example Dànielle has used with her classes is the Vanilla Ice "Ice Ice, Baby" case. In the early 1990s, the wrapper of Vanilla Ice sampled an identifiable riff from an earlier Queen/David Bowie collaboration. Vanilla Ice did so without the explicit permission of the original artist, and a lawsuit ensued. Eventually, the case was dropped, but only after Vanilla Ice's label had invested tens (if not hundreds) of thousands of dollars in their legal defense. Likewise, another band—The Verve—slightly altered and reproduced a copy of a Rolling Stones' song ("Bittersweet Symphony") without the permission of the Rolling Stones or their corporate representation. The further reproduction and distribution of the album, after an initial run, was halted by the legal team representing the Rolling Stones, providing a grand set-back to The Verve and costing their recording company a good deal of money. And Napster is, obviously, an excellent example of intellectual property changing shape online, and a great topic to use to encourage discussion of the ownership of texts, ideas, and recordings.

Examples like these—embedded in a larger discussion of issues of copyright, fair use, and plagiarism—help solidify the importance of respecting the work of others. These discussions are particularly rich when focused on the shifting legal and ethical landscape of the Web and what intellectual property means in virtual space.

5.2. Encouraging critical online research

Believing that issues of research and plagiarism are often closely connected and believing that first-year writing instructors should support students as they negotiate new research spaces, we also suggest equipping students with the skills to be critical thinkers and critical researchers in all of the realms in which they do research, especially within online spaces. The first step is to help them be effective searchers of the Web and evaluators of the information they find. Doing online research, for many students, means connecting to the search engine they're used to; doing a basic, unnarrowed search; and then looking at the first hits that come up and using the material from those sites.

Madeleine Sorapure, Pamela Inglesby, and George Yatchisin (1998) also argued that the assessment and evaluation of online sources be taught in composition courses. These authors pointed out three of the challenges the Web poses: First, no universal cataloging or categorizing takes place on the Web (although at this point in time, search engines have become more and more sophisticated, changing at a fast pace in the years since the 1998 article by Sorapure, Inglesby, and Yatchisin. Second, the Web is rhetorically complex—web sites sell products, offer information, give data and statistics, and so on. And, finally, the design of web sites doesn't often reflect their purpose, and the interface of the Web is incredibly rich with text, images, animated images, video clips, and audio files. Discerning how the multimedia pieces of a web site come together to serve a specific purpose can be a daunting task. Sorapure, Inglesby,

and Yatchisin draw upon resources offered by university library sites and by web design and publication sites for guidance on evaluation.

To scaffold the activities listed below, we also adopted a web-page evaluation approach and generated the following categories of questions:

- *author/credibility* (for example, "What is the authority or expertise of the author of the page?" "With what organization or larger site is the web page connected/affiliated?")
- *reliability of information* (for example, "Who do you think is the expected audience?" "What is the primary purpose of the page?" "Does the information support or contradict what you know or what you already have learned from another source?")
- *interface design* (for example, "Is the site conceptually exciting? Does it do more than can be done with print?" "Do the graphics serve a rhetorical purpose, or are they decorative?")
- *navigation* (for example, "Can you find your way around the page to find the information you want?" "Do all of the links work?").

Clearly, most of these are questions we should encourage students to ask of all media and all texts, not just those gathered within online realms. However, although we—and the students in our classrooms—may be comfortable evaluating the credibility of paper texts, evaluating the credibility of online texts is a task that often feels foreign, mainly because of the lack of clear catalogue processes and the complicated nature of online, multimedia texts.

There are a variety of practical, critical, writing-rich ways to engage students in web-based research and evaluation. A few suggestions include:

- Have students write a short self-reflective paper analyzing their research methods and how they approach different types of sources.
- Have students bring to class a print source and a web source and analyze and critique each, then practice summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting from each.
- Have students create a handout for the class to use including recommendations for citing web sources in their papers.
- Have students search for information on evaluating sites on the Web. Have groups of students evaluate the information on evaluation, then have students present their findings and collaboratively create guidelines for evaluating online sources handout for the class.
- Have students choose a web page to revamp, drawing upon the evaluation criteria (how would they improve this page? What is this page missing? What new information is needed to make the page more effective?).
- Have students perform the same search—using the same key words and search criteria— on several different search engines and write a paper explaining the differences (and, if applicable, similarities) in the results and why they think such differences exist.
- Have students do a Web versus the library search—provide the students with five questions. Have half the students look up the answers in the library, and have half look up the answers on the Web. Then have them switch roles. Ask students to write a paper evaluating the strengths and limitations of each research space.
- Have students research and come up with their own definitions for and examples of plagiarism. Have students present their findings and collaboratively create a plagiarism guidelines handout for the class.

- Have students research the different approaches or guidelines different institutions or colleges suggest and enforce about plagiarism and intellectual property.
- Have students research the process for getting something copyrighted or trademarked and also research what copyright or trademark protection allows. Require that students include examples and, if possible, legal cases.
- Have students find something with a trademark or copyright symbol on it and research what the symbol means (using the object itself, information on intellectual property, the company's web page, and so on) and also research what the symbol allows or protects.

Each of these activities offers several rhetorically smart possibilities: Students hone their research skills; students write documents for a real audience (the other students in the class); students work collaboratively and engage in discussions about what plagiarism is and what it means; and students explore plagiarism and intellectual property issues, hopefully leading to a stronger realization that the rules of academia aren't entirely divorced from the "real-world" issues of industry.

6. Conclusion

To make the Web a better research space—a space where students will be doing critical, thoughtful, thorough research instead of searching for papers to plagiarize—we must engage students in tasks appropriate to the complexity of online space. At the same time, we should engage students in a complex understanding of what plagiarism is and why it's penalized in our institutions. We also have to reconcile our understanding of plagiarism, the author function, and what a text actually is and what purpose a textual product serves, especially in light of online text. This approach should enable students in our classes to be thoughtful online researchers and careful, critical writers.

Rather than approach plagiarism as an affront to our values and authority as teachers, issues of plagiarism can provide a scaffolding for discussions relating to appropriate research, good writing, similarities and differences in research spaces, intellectual property rights, and the pitfalls and potentials of electronic media. With broader and more intense information dispersion, teachers will have to help prepare students to do research in online spaces. This is incredibly exciting work because many of us are on the verge of a turning point in our teaching: We're currently moving from a more how-to approach (how to get on the Web, how to use a search engine, and so on) to a rhetorically savvy, complex, and critical approach to Internet research. This is also important work because of the function first-year writing serves.

Admittedly, most first-year writing courses and curricula are already packed, perhaps overloaded—testament to the importance of first-year writing. But as we work toward acculturating students into the processes and function of academic writing *and* engaging them in appropriate academic processes, we must make room for addressing new research and writing spaces. This does not mean we have to entirely shift our focus or replace much of our curricula. What this means is that we need to shift and adapt our curricula to include new research spaces and the promises and perils they pose. This sort of approach is what we need to further develop if we are going to better understand the temptations students face in online realms, and the

complications they face in adapting their literacy, research, and writing skills and processes to the virtual space—and complexity—of the Web.

Notes

1. An online paper mill is a site on the Web that allows—and encourages—students to download research papers to turn in as their own.
2. Kidnapping almost feels like a generous analogy in comparison to other authors' labels of plagiarism; for example, "abduction," "literary piracy" (Hawley, 1984, p. 35) and "virulent... disease" (Drum, 1986, p. 241).
3. One obvious route often suggested in much literature is a proof-of-process approach; that is, to require front matter from students—notes, drafts, sources, and so on. A proof-of-process approach can be integrated easily into the writing classroom, and obviously offers benefits that extend beyond the avoidance of plagiarism. Valuing students' on-going deliberations and the construction of their written work helps to create an environment for writing that discourages some of the reasons for defaulting to plagiarizing. A proof-of-process approach can compliment the approaches we suggest here.

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