Retiring the mechanical approach: (re)conceptualising plagiarism through cultural artefacts

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Abstract

Student anxiety and uncertainty around the conventions of academic integrity remain an ongoing issue within higher education today. To date, punitive approaches have been the primary strategy in addressing this issue, alongside efforts to teach paraphrasing and citation practice. Yet, these latter approaches can be misleading in suggesting understanding plagiarism is simply a mechanical operation devoid of critical engagement with the underlying arguments of the text. Less emphasis has been given to the underlying principles of academic integrity and why these conventions are relevant in academic work. In this paper, based on reflections of my own practice, described within, I offer an opinion piece on how cultural artefacts can be used alongside a philosophical dialogue technique to help students advance beyond a simplistic mechanical understanding of avoiding plagiarism in their conceptualisation of academic integrity. I argue that this approach can help students to conceptualise the ethical principles underlying the use of sources, to consider the differing cultural perceptions of ownership of ideas, and to understand approaches to identifying plagiarism. I discuss how students (re)conceptualising the values of academic integrity is consistent with potential for new and innovative ways to promote student engagement.

Introduction

Plagiarism persists in higher education today as “the problem that won’t go away” (Paldy, 1996, p.4). The primary strategy in averting this form of misconduct has been to warn students out of the practice by detailing the penalties it incurs. A brief survey of the definitions of plagiarism provides a taste of the moralistic tone in which this practice is framed in academia (Park, 2003), e.g. the “evil of plagiarism” (Reilly et al., 2007, p. 275). This punitory position is typically supported by the deployment of electronic plagiarism detection software, assumed to be sufficiently effective deterrents against plagiarism (Barrett & Malcolm, 2006). These have not however proven to be the silver bullet in ‘solving’ the problem and, in many cases, simply fail to detect whether in fact plagiarism has occurred at all (e.g. Perkins et al., 2020).

Not only is the penalty-based approach failing, but the anxiety caused by an emphasis on the detection of plagiarism is well-documented (e.g. Gullifer & Tyson, 2010). Students are often perplexed and nervous about what is 'officially' permitted and report fear of being found guilty of plagiarism despite consciously trying to avoid it (Ashworth et al., 1997). Taking a purely punitive approach to avoiding plagiarism, whereby institutions position themselves primarily as gatekeepers of academic integrity rather than facilitating the acquisition of skills to mitigate against such conduct, is counter to the core values of student engagement. Firstly, such an approach assumes that students simply need to be told the rules to follow and, as such, fails to acknowledge the incremental development of a skill set in handling source material as a challenging academic activity, which, as in all cases of learning, takes place through the actions

of the student rather than the instructions of the teacher (Tyler, 2013). Additionally, the dependence on the anxiety inducing penalty-based approach is hardly consistent with "…enriching educational experiences and feeling legitimated and supported by university learning communities" (Coates, 2007, p. 122), nor does it promote student engagement as defined by encouraging students to feel connected to their institutions (Axelson & Flick, 2010, p. 38).

Strategies raising awareness of the 'avoidance of plagiarism' that are more supportive in tone tend to focus on referencing conventions or paraphrasing and summarising skills (e.g. Gunnarsson et al., 2014). However, a focus on the citation conventions as a formatting issue alone reduces the avoidance of plagiarism to a fundamentally mechanical practice when it is in fact the more conceptual aspects of authorship and ownership of text that seem to be central to the confusion reported by students (Pecorari, 2008). As Buckley (2015) points out, referencing as a mechanical process is not difficult in itself, but the hurdle is to get students to embrace the arguments behind academic discourse rather than obsess about the individual words that build the arguments. Fundamentally, there remains a conceptualisation and application issue: critical to avoiding plagiarism is for students to develop an understanding of what plagiarism means, i.e. how they mentally process the construct of plagiarism by defining, identifying and relating it to their appropriate existing knowledge (Powell & Singh, 2016).

Moreover, with the increasing adoption of online modes of assessment (García-Peñalvo, 2021) not only are there greater opportunities for plagiarism than in the traditional in-person exam paper, but plagiarism in this form of assessment is perceived by students as a less blatant contravention of regulations than 'cheating' in exams (Ashworth et al., 1997, p.193). This leaves practitioners having to think ever more creatively about how to effectively communicate and encourage into students' work the ethics and practice of academic integrity. Additionally, with emerging technologies such as ChatGPT, it is timely that renewed efforts are made to ensure students understand the values that underpin ethical academic work.

The context

As part of my role in providing academic skills support, I run workshops to facilitate students' understanding and application of academic writing conventions. Here I describe an 'avoiding plagiarism' workshop that I have run for several years across disciplines for both undergraduate and graduate HE students. I offer a discussion of how the approach to this workshop can help students conceptualise the underlying principles of academic integrity and encourage greater engagement with academic ideas.

The incentive for the workshop discussed here was students' feedback over several years indicating uncertainty around the principles of citation conventions alongside considerable anxiety about the potential for accidental plagiarism. In general, they viewed paraphrasing almost as a 'linguistic game' in which there is an optimal number of lexical or phrasal synonyms and/or clause restructurings that would render the text sufficiently 'original'. For this reason, the aim of the workshop is to move away from the mechanical approach and to conceptualise sources as ideas to talk about in the context of a wider research conversation rather than the regurgitation of a single

decontextualised theoretical idea or piece of empirical evidence. A secondary aim was to encourage students to consider the broader relevance of integrity in the use of others' work, consistent with Burns et al.'s (2004) ideas of student engagement extending beyond learning behaviours and beyond the classroom.

In reflecting on running this workshop over several years and on the student feedback, I present here my opinion that it is possible to use cultural artefacts to improve students' understanding of plagiarism through sense-making of the unfamiliar in relation to the familiar. I argue that in doing so, students can relate notions of academic integrity into existing knowledge of ownership of cultural artefacts through reflection on their perceptions of ownership and the notion of 'value' of commodities in society. (Re-)examining cultural artefacts, starting from a position of the familiar, in order to gain new insights in academic work can promote student engagement. Here I refer to student engagement as a multi-dimensional construct combining behavioural, emotional and cognitive dimensions of engagement (Pedler et al., 2020) in a range of educational activities that are likely to lead to high-quality learning (Coates, 2005).

These tasks apply a discovery learning method, based on constructivism, a theory of learning with its historical roots in the ideas of Piaget, Vygotsky and Dewey, which emphasises the active role of learners in constructing knowledge (rather than being passive recipients of information) and constructing meaning from their experiences. Through their experiences and their reflections upon those experiences, the learner builds representations of the world as new information is incorporated into their pre-existing knowledge. The activities discussed here adapt Gregory's (2007) framework for facilitating philosophical dialogue in seminars, drawn from the theories of John Dewey and Matthew Lipman. The facilitator's role is to model and to call for good dialogue moves (e.g. identifying assumptions overlooked by the group and alternative views that they fail to raise, with the expectation that the learner will internalise these moves and come to reproduce them in their own turns) while intervention is limited to nudging the dialogue for challenge, encouraging clarification, and moving the participants to the next stage. The student's role is to participate in the discussion by sharing ideas, questioning their own and peers' perceptions, and problem solving, all of which increase motivation and learning (e.g. Hake, 1998). Our combined roles in the dialogue technique promote students' active involvement with their learning, their peers and their instructor (e.g. Dixson, 2015).

Are perceptions of plagiarism culturally specific?

Cultural artefacts are tangible and intangible items created by humans which provide information about the culture and society in which they are created, e.g. music, film, texts, clothing, technology, art and so on. Such artefacts document everyday familiar aspects of our lives and cultures (Shuh, 1999); thus, they can serve as a catalyst for discussion, and potentially bring to the fore differing cultural approaches to ownership underpinning perceptions of plagiarism. In adopting a philosophical dialogue, at the first stage, students are presented with text, visuals and recordings of cultural artefacts that have all been subject to accusations of plagiarism: from political speeches (e.g. Melania Trump's speech at the Republican National Convention (RNC) in 2016 vs Michelle Obamas speech at the Democrat National Convention (DNC) in 2008); music (e.g. Mark Ronson/Bruno Mars' 'Uptown funk' vs. Collage's 'Young Girls' (2016); art (e.g. Shepard Fairey's 'Obama Hope' poster vs Associated Press' photograph of

Barack Obama); architecture (e.g. the Eiffel Tower in Tianducheng, China); literature (e.g. extracts from Alex Haley's 'Roots' vs. Harold Courlander's 'The African'); academia (e.g. extracts from Martin Luther King Jr.'s dissertation vs. various sermons and academic publications). The students are asked to decide which of these artefacts are cases of plagiarism, how plagiarism can be measured in each case, and how each case relates to the concept of plagiarism in academic work.

This task involves students being encouraged to consider how to conceptualise plagiarism/integrity in creative enterprises along with the difficulty in establishing clear boundaries. Groccia and Hunter (2012) argue educational practices that offer opportunities to apply course content to tackling real problems across disciplinary boundaries encourage intellectual growth and a heightened personal responsibility. In thinking about real world cases of plagiarism from different creative domains, students are encouraged to engage with notions of (academic) integrity beyond the classroom, consistent with these scholars' model of a more multidimensional notion of student engagement. In applying Groccia and Hunter's proposal further, in another version of this task, students are asked to research a case of plagiarism and to present a deconstruction of the case in class.

The initial aim of the dialogue is (i) to encourage students to recognise the distinction between plagiarism and influence, and (ii) to raise their awareness of differing views on what constitutes plagiarism as a form of misconduct within different cultures and within different creative fields. This allows the discussion to bring differing cultural perceptions to the fore in considering ideas as commodities of value and to be able to examine "the notion of plagiarism within the particular cultural and historical context of its development" (Pennycook, 1996, p. 218). For example, in some cases, students argue that all art borrows from elsewhere or is inspired by other work, and thus it is 'fair game' to 'poach' ideas or be influenced by others' work. Some students feel that ideas as belonging to someone does not resonate with their cultural beliefs about the notion of ownership, with some committed to the view that all cultural artefacts could be copied – 'what does it matter?'. Such perspectives are consistent with Pennycook's (1996) view that:

> *"The notion of plagiarism needs to be understood within the particular cultural and historical context of its development, it also needs to be understood relative to alternative cultural practices"* (p. 218).

Pennycook further points out that plagiarism, in terms of the notions of ownership, authorship and intellectual property have developed in the Western context and thus include distinctive cultural and historical specificities. He sees the influences of these notions manifest in students' work in culturally distinct ways in their learning. Similarly, Blaut (1993) argues that it is important instead to raise awareness and appreciation of such differences and the nature of the challenges of an idealized cultural exchange this creates in a context that biases a western tradition of creativity. This aspect of the discussion also provides opportunities for peer learning. It does so by highlighting the culturally distinct ways of perceiving ownership and encourages reflections on one's own cultural norms that may influence their approach to academic work, but also encourages students to articulate that relationship to others from cultures with divergent norms/views. Additionally, it challenges them to reflect on any potential emotional connection they may have to those norms.

Despite the diverging cultural perceptions of ownership of ideas, the discussion elicits the important concept that ideas rarely exist in a vacuum. This addresses students' tendency to see ideas within an academic text as being decontextualised from a community of enquiry. Transitioning in the discussion to the idea of contextualising academic ideas within a wider discussion allows the students to see that regardless of their cultural beliefs about the notion of ownership of ideas, an important feature of academic work is that research is primarily a contribution to a larger research discussion and needs to be contextualised as such within the broader conversation. This encourages students to view the conventions of citation not simply being about the ownership of ideas but also as being motivated by an attempt to report a research story.

An interesting illustration of cultural attitudes to plagiarism exists in the case of Martin Luther King Jr.'s academic work. In 1985, during the King Papers Project at Stanford University, researchers uncovered extensive passages taken from other sources without attribution throughout Dr King's writings as a theology student. This workshop advances the topic of ownership by asking the students to examine examples of Dr King's writings and sermons that were shown to be copied without attributing sources. A sample extract can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. extracts comparing Dr King's writings and sermons with Jack Boozer's doctoral dissertation.

1a. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s doctoral thesis entitled "A comparison of the conceptions of God in the thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman":	**cf. 1b. Jack Boozer's doctoral dissertation entitled "The place of reason in Paul Tillich's concept of God" submitted in 1942.**
Tillich insists that a symbol is more than a merely technical sign. The basic characteristic of the symbol is its innate power. A symbol possesses a necessary character. It cannot be exchanged. A sign, on the contrary, is impotent and can be changed at will. A religious symbol is not the creation of a subjective desire or work. If the symbol loses it ontological grounding, it declines and becomes a mere "thing", a sign impotent in itself.	Tillich distinguishes between a sign and a symbol. A characteristic of the symbol is its innate power. A symbol possesses a necessary character. It cannot be exchanged. On the other hand a sign is impotent in itself and can be exchanged at will […] The religious symbol is not the creation of a subjective desire or work. If the symbol loses its ontological grounding, it declines and becomes a mere "thing", a sign impotent in itself.

The students are first asked to identify the impact of the changes made by King copying a large part of the first paragraph from Boozer's dissertation with only minor changes.[i] We then move to considering if King wished to challenge Boozer's emphasis in the original text, which conventions he could have applied to remedy the plagiarism. This provides the students with practice in collaborative detailed analysis of the semantic impact of plagiarism and raises their awareness of the important distinction between extracting text from a source and extracting ideas from a text.

The critical question however in regard to cultural practices is why a scholar of King's intellect would have plagiarized the work of others. This leads us to explore an idea

put forward by Luker (1993) that King seemed determined to produce the kind of work he believed to be expected of him and perhaps misunderstood the expectations of academia, instead relying on sources suggested by authorities on the subject. Luker argues that King may have seen the task as requiring the synthesis of those sources into:

> *"a seamless construct of his own creation and told his professors almost exactly what they, themselves, believed about a subject"* (p. 152).

This often resonates with students' own perceptions and experiences of attempting to 'please the audience'. It thus provides an opportunity to address their common misconception about academic writing that lecturers are most likely to reward students with good grades when the content of their essays agree with the lecturer's own views on the subject. Fisher et al. (2022, p.199) point out that this 'instructor-as-examiner' approach (Russell, 2002), where students simply uncritically regurgitate information can fuel the belief that there is no scope for original thinking, a perception found in a number of research studies on students' attitudes towards academic writing (e.g. Ashworth et al. 1997; Girard, 2004).

It has been proposed that King's borrowings and 'recombinations' were not deliberate attempts to deceive, but simply adherence to the standard practice in the folk pulpit and the assumption that language is always shared not owned (Miller, 1998). Pertinent to the focus of this workshop is that it highlights students' difficulty in judging what can be considered assumed knowledge on the part of the audience. King spoke to an audience he believed to be aware of the origin of the work he cited, consistent with the oral tradition of sermons. However, he overestimated the academic audience's ability to contextualise his work in the broader discussion. The relevance of King's error is that it is similar to students' confusion in how to write for an academic audience: they erroneously expect lecturers to be familiar with all the ideas/work discussed in their essays, which in turn leads them to believe this limits their responsibility to explain, elaborate or even cite the source of the ideas to whom they consider an informed audience. Clearly, such a perception of an institution's primary means of evaluating learning is one where assessment is inherently restrictive and disengaging.

This provides an opportunity to discuss the written conventions of academic work as distinct from spoken conventions. It also returns us to the idea of academia as a collaborative enterprise, where published work contributes to a conversation. This allows students to see the importance of engagement with the wider literature and considering academic writing as primarily reporting a critical account of a collaborative research 'story' (Mlynarczyk, 2014) to which various researchers and scholars have contributed, and of which their work is also part. This places emphasis on recognising characters, work, achievements, breakthroughs, etc. in a research narrative in order to achieve an accurate record of events. However, most importantly, it emphasises that students should report their engagement with the literature as their own research journeys rather than prioritising the needs of the audience.

What is the point of essay writing?

The discussion then advances to considering plagiarism in the context of a liberal education, the values associated with which are typically, according to Halstead (2005, p. 23), "personal autonomy, critical openness, the autonomy of academic disciplines, equality of opportunity, rational morality, the celebration of diversity, the avoidance of indoctrination, and the refusal to side with any definitive conception of the good". The question is asked: if the aim of a liberal education is not to develop skills in the regurgitation of information, but rather to produce "a person able to make independent decisions, and participate effectively in public decisions that affect him" (Burke, 1980, p. 354), then does plagiarism indicate failure in developing reasoned thinking that would facilitate good decisions about how to act in the world? This encourages students to explore the idea that since a liberal education aims to bring about the ability to facilitate good decision making, it then follows that an essay is a primary means of training in how to reach decisions through reasoning. Additionally, those decisions are assessed on the strength of the rationale in which they are presented. As obvious as this idea is to lecturers, it is not to students. This demystifies for students the purpose of essays and the relevance of academic integrity: that it is not simply about mechanically following academic conventions, but more critically involves engagement with the literature and an expression of one's comprehension of it and thoughts about it in one's own words. This places a particular emphasis on engagement at the cognitive level as having long-term application beyond the period of education.

An interesting case study for examination of this concept is the case of third Iraq dossier, "*Iraq – Its Infrastructure of Concealment, Deception and Intimidation*". This was released by the British Foreign Office in January 2003 and served to provide the case for Britain's involvement in the invasion of Iraq on 18 March 2003 in the face of mass anti-war protests. The opening paragraph of this dossier states:

> *This report draws upon a number of sources, including intelligence material, and shows how the Iraqi regime is constructed to have, and to keep, WMD, and is now engaged in a campaign of obstruction of the United Nations Weapons Inspectors.*

Students are asked: given that the report does not include references, what might the audience assume from this statement in a report published by the government? With some nudging, the students conclude that it would be reasonable to assume that all intelligence material included in the report were obtained by means of primary research conducted by the British intelligence services. They are then shown a report of 6th February 2003 revealing that large sections of the dossier were copied from a doctoral student, Ibrahim Al-Marashi's work published in September 2002 (Al-Marashi, 2002). Three days prior to this news report, in a statement to Parliament, Tony Blair stated:

> *We issued further information over the weekend about the infrastructure of concealment. It is obviously difficult when we publish intelligence reports, but I hope people have some sense of integrity of our security services. They are not publishing this or giving us information and making it up. It is the*

intelligence that they are receiving, and we are passing on to people (HC Debate Feb 2003).

The question of interest is: in light of the UK news report on 6th February 2003, why might Tony Blair's statement be considered misleading? The aim is for students to recognise that the report is stated as being produced by the British intelligence services, (e.g. by stating "…when we publish intelligence reports" and "integrity of our security services"), rather than stating it was a product of what was essentially Number 10's media liaison team, with large amounts of data copied from three published sources. In doing so, Tony Blair misled his audience into believing the government was reporting its own primary research findings. This question serves to establish the opacity with which the origin of the data sources was presented and the erroneous assumption of it being original research. Moreover, it provides students with an opportunity to discuss whether the British government displayed the hallmarks of a liberal education in the production of this report, the ability to make independent decisions and participate effectively in public decisions that affect us. Although admittedly an extreme example, it illustrates the assumptions the reader makes about the writer's words reflecting the writer's thinking and the consequent responsibility required in one's use of source materials, but also that ultimately, an essay should reflect the writer's true perceptions of the world if stating their position on acting within it.

Is it possible to say anything original?

Here we first consider differences in measuring plagiarism in written or spoken text compared to non-textual artefacts. For example, in order to win a music copyright infringement claim, the plaintiff needs to show 'substantial similarity'. This is established through the 'ordinary observer test', which asks whether a non-music expert, i.e. ordinary observer, would perceive the songs to have substantial similarity. What this means is that there is no definitive means of determining whether infringement has occurred (Kaminsky, 2017). In trying to address the question of how to measure musical similarity, the students' discussion typically centres on demonstrating the 'ordinary observer test', a test which evidently holds intuitive appeal for them in measuring similarity across the cultural artefacts.

We then consider the extent that written text might allow for greater precision in measuring plagiarism. Numerous well-known cases of textual plagiarism exist for examination. One such case is Melania Trump's speech at the Republican National Convention in 2016, which mirrored elements of a speech that Michelle Obama had delivered at the Democratic National Convention in 2008 (see Table 2).

Table 2 Melania Trump's speech at the Republican National Convention in 2016 (left) and Michelle Obama speech at the Democratic National Convention in 2008 (right).

"[My parents] taught me to show the values and morals in my daily life. That is the lesson that I continue to pass along to our son. And we need to pass those lessons on to the many	"And Barack Obama and I set out to build lives guided by these values and pass them on to the next generations. Because we want our children, and all children in this nation, to know that the

generations to follow, because we want our children in this nation to know that the only limit to your achievements is the strength of your dreams and your willingness to work for them." – Melania Trump (2016)	only limit to the height of your achievement is the reach of your dreams and your willingness to work for them." - Michelle Obama (2008)

The defence of Melania's Trump's authorship involved the claim that her use of 'common words' to discuss the same topic as Michelle Obama's speech gave her own speech the 'illusion of plagiarism'. From this claim emerges a critical question: what is the likelihood that two people might use the same linguistic structures and words to describe the same topic on two different occasions? The relevance of this question is that students frequently report that in academic writing it is not possible to say anything original (Ashworth et al., 1997, p. 202). This is coupled with concerns of an unconscious assimilation of knowledge erroneously thought to be original ideas (Girard, 2004). Though typically the result of a poor system of documenting sources, there is some legitimacy to these concerns in that studies in psychology demonstrate the phenomenon of cryptomnesia, where a person retrieves from memory a previously encountered idea or thought while believing it be a newly generated idea (e.g. Marsh & Landau, 1995). We examine the likelihood of this occurring through examples of cultural artefacts.

Within forensic linguistics, the practice of identifying authorship is based on the assumptions that all language users have an 'idiolect', i.e. a unique linguistic style, with a relatively stable frequency of features in their linguistic output (Coulthard et al., 2004). Coulthard explains that two authors writing on the same topic, even if attempting to express similar meanings, will inevitably reveal different linguistic decisions in their output. Chomsky (1965) refers to this as the 'Uniqueness of Utterance' Principle.

To illustrate this, I ask students to (i) record their own retelling of a short radio broadcast prior to the session, and (ii) report it 'verbatim' to another student (who is later asked to repeat it). On repeating their partners' accounts of the broadcast, consistent with the 'Uniqueness of Utterance' Principle, students tend to only remember the gist of their partner's statements but not the actual words or grammatical structures. This is because when recalling a statement, we don't repeat it verbatim, but express the gist of the idea through new linguistic form (Potter & Lombardi, 1998). Similarly, when asked to repeat their own recording verbatim (without relistening to it), students find that they are unlikely to repeat the same linguistics forms in their retelling of the event on the second occasion (i.e. it differs significantly to their original recording). This shows students the unlikelihood of inadvertent self-plagiarism.

We can then return to the claim that Melania Trump did not copy expressions from speeches she had previously heard, but rather, because she shared the ideas presented in those speeches, she recalled the same linguistic expression of those ideas when constructing her own speech. The students tend to logically conclude that according to the 'Uniqueness of Utterance' Principle, it is unlikely that the second speech, almost identical in the choice of words, phrases and sentences structures and ideas, was composed independently. This informal experiment attempts to help

students discover how the avoidance of plagiarism is not simply a language game where people change linguistic elements of the original text, but rather that the writer's voice runs through every linguistic choice made in the expression of that idea. Two writers may come to similar conclusions based on the weight of evidence at hand, but their expression of the information will be marked by their own stylistic expression. Subjects are not "comprehensively exhausted" (Ashworth et al., 1997, p. 202) and it is not the case that "there are no original ideas anymore" (Girard, 2004, p. 13): what we select from the available data and the relaying of our thoughts about them contributes to the originality of our work, or our 'academic voice'. This focuses students' attention on the way in which assessment is primarily concerned with their engagement with the literature. This reanalysis of claims in this case of plagiarism also returns us to Groccia and Hunter's (2012) argument that learning requires opportunities for application to real problems.

Discussion

In this brief commentary of my efforts to navigate students away from the perception of avoiding plagiarism as a purely mechanical practice, I have presented an idea for using cultural artefacts to facilitate sense-making of academic plagiarism and differing cultural views of ownership of ideas by bringing notions of academic integrity into existing frameworks of ownership. I have suggested that the problems of plagiarism are tied up with students' misconceptions about their engagement in academic practice and a lacking sense of ownership of their work. These discussions described here demonstrate the potential to use the analysis of plagiarism in cultural artefacts to address these well-documented misconceptions about the use of academic sources through activities that promote student engagement at multiple levels (cognitive, affective, and behavioural) (Groccia and Hunter, 2012) with real world application outside of the classroom.

I have suggested that the use of cultural artefacts can help students reconceptualise the adherence to academic integrity as the demonstration of a broader skill set. These skills involve the ability to engage openly and respectfully with academic work, to develop one's own views and ideas, and to articulate them with confidence though reasoned logic in the effort to persuade an informed audience of their validity.

Demystifying the purpose of assessment as a technique designed not only to test but promote the discipline and development of the mind is critical to facilitating an "enriching educational experience" (Coates, 2007, p. 122). During these workshops, students often initially express the belief that they are meant to produce 'the correct answer' consistent with the views of an authority on the topic, be that the lecturer or other prominent scholars. This expectation that a measure of academic 'success' is simply a 'skill' in the reproduction of acquired knowledge (Maclellan, 2001) and the reformulation of text is the antithesis of student engagement because it imposes constraints never intended for academic scholarship.

Students' analysis of the artefacts in the ways described here debunks the misconception of the impossibility of producing original work (Ashworth et al., 1997, p. 202; Girard, 2004, p. 13) and instead highlights the authentic expression of one's

engagement with text as overwhelming likely to result in the production of unique output. This realisation tends to reduce the immense anxiety a primarily punitive approach can cause, in particular, in regard to self-plagiarism. Moreover, in shifting the importance from what the teacher does to what the students do (Biggs, 1999) by acknowledging that student voices can offer valuable ideas to the discussion promotes student engagement in terms of a connectedness to their institutions and the research community.

The use of cultural artefacts facilitates the conceptualisation of the universal principles underlying avoiding plagiarism in academia as similar to those that exist for commodities in the marketplace, reinforcing the connection between academia and the world outside and extending student engagement beyond the classroom (Burns et al., 2004). While the actual structure of an essay is one that is rarely used outside academia, the ability to make and express reasoned decisions has wide application in our critical engagement in the world, an obvious point perhaps, but one that is often absent in explanations of the role of assessment, and one that prior to the workshop is often not apparent to many attendees.

It is important to note that students' ability to reconceptualise avoiding plagiarism is relatively straightforward; the development of the skills underlying its application however is a more complex matter; it requires concerted efforts on the part of the student, but also for institutions to facilitate the conditions that encourage such efforts. What the workshop does provide students with is a richer understanding of what they are working towards in the advancement of a range of skills and a more desirable learning experience while achieving this. Most importantly, as a starting point, it appears to provide students with greater confidence in engaging with academic work, with an enthusiasm in taking these concepts forward, and a sense of greater value of their own ideas as they move away from the mechanical approach.

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Endnotes

[i] The modifications in the first paragraph have minimal impact on the meaning of the idea but do create a shift of emphasis in places: (i) while Boozer begins by stating that a distinction between a sign and a symbol exists, (creating an expectation on the part of the reader that an explanation of that distinction will follow), King offers a concluding comment in the first statement, i.e. that a symbol is not merely a technical sign; (ii) Boozer states "a characteristic of the symbol is its innate power" while King shifts the emphasis to the innate power being "the (only) basic characteristic…" of the symbol; and (iii) King changes the discourse marker in the third line from "on the other hand" used by Boozer to express a contrast between a sign and a symbol, on the basis of exchangeability, to "on the contrary", which serves to intensify the denial that a sign cannot be exchanged.