



ARE YOUNG PEOPLE PLAGIARIZING OR REMIXING?

A SOCIAL LOOK AT TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

by Jim Parsons and Kelly Harding

Recent research suggests that students are cheating, i.e., plagiarizing, in epidemic proportions. If we were inclined, we could blame the blurring of right and wrong on a highly competitive culture or point to the many athletes, politicians and business leaders who regularly cut corners in their daily work to “get things done.” But let’s drop blame for a moment. Is there another way to consider how young people view information and approach the act of cutting and pasting from the Internet?

This article reviews the work of Lawrence Lessig in his book *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy* (2008) and suggests that what is called cheating might be contextually understood as a younger generation’s interaction with media—especially Internet media. Here we use Lessig to forward a different theory: perhaps plagiarism and copyright laws are remnants of another time and, rather than protect, these copyright laws stifle democratic creativity and protect the economic privilege corporations have over citizens. In this article, we suggest that plagiarism is more complicated than it might seem on the surface and we encourage an extended dialogue about what copyright might mean to a younger generation.

Young people have a different relationship with media than we older digital immigrants. They are especially “aggressive” with Internet media, and their understanding and manipulation of the Internet suggests they view information as a raw ingredient of creativity. According to Lessig, young people are creative in different ways and understand copyright differently than older generations. Lessig, a professor of law at Stanford Law School and the founder of the Center for Internet and Society, believes copyright was designed for a radically different technological age and, in today’s digital world, copyright inhibits the creation of art, culture and individual expression. As a parent, he saw “copyright wars” affect his children and came to believe that “criminalizing an entire generation” seemed a high a price to pay for a copyright system created a generation ago (2008, xviii).

To illustrate the difference, Lessig notes the two ways digital technology can be used: R/O (Read Only) and R/W (Read/Write). When Lessig describes how digital culture generates new activities and the economics of these activities, he is especially concerned with social activities such as playing, hobbies and conversations; and he asks how digital technology has changed them. R/O culture is professionally produced, hierarchical, and characterized by control. R/O allows amateurs to consume “tokens of culture” (music, movies) but not adapt them. R/W allows people to create, participate in, and “re-mix” products that become improvisations of other people’s work. R/W includes, for example, someone videoing herself singing a familiar melody with new lyrics and posting that video on YouTube.

Today’s youth are both technologically clever and anxious to share personal “re-mixes” with others. They are, according to R/O owners, plagiarizing thieves. But Lessig notes that, rather than stealing, an ever-creative youth population is simply shaping media for its own social purposes. Perhaps this seems to be splitting hairs, but

for Lessig the matter is one of efficacy and creativity. Older generations have accepted R/O culture for what producers say it should be—information to be consumed but not reshaped; in other words, without possibility of “dialogue.” We might aspire to create culture and own intellectual property, but basically such cultural forms (like movies or music) belong to those in the culture business, and we tend to see those “other” people as extremely talented—far more talented than we are.

Young people don’t share this deferential attitude. They shape R/W culture and think nothing of using another’s idea to fit their needs for immediately sharing—hence the growth of blogs and text-messaging.

In *Remix*, Lessig hopes 21st Century digital technologies will allow for playful remixing and appreciation for R/W culture. For him, remixing is a move towards a healthier grassroots democracy that grants voice to more people because it allows amateurs technological literacy once only available to professionals. Lessig further believes the Internet can democratize culture by allowing young people to interact with and connect to their world in inspired ways. But for now, Lessig asks why are we criminalizing a generation of youth for being innovative with new technologies? To him, a redefinition of copyright is only common sense and benefits both corporation and consumer. Legal applications of copyright are less important than knowing how a younger generation understands its own creative processes. Today’s “legal” should not be defined by owners of patents and machines created from past philosophies.

Why might Lessig’s perspective be important when we think about how our students write papers? Schools employ an earlier generation’s definition of plagiarism. But Lessig’s *Remix* suggests that this definition is archaic, one-sided and creatively limiting, and that two realities bump into each other to shape what intellectual property might mean to young people. First, new tools allow the improvisation of another’s work. Second, young people have grown up in a remix society and believe in and practise a remix philosophy. They do not cower to authority, have high expectations, and feel entitled to more than their parents and grandparents. Finally, they understand differences between original art and a copy—or remix—differently.

R/W culture offers us more than R/O culture, Lessig suggests, because it asks more of us. R/W culture invites dialogue between citizens and allows an empowering knowledge that both informs and entertains. Although Lessig’s work is more about entertainment, we cannot overlook that young people create knowledge by remixing. This knowledge creation is as true with school essays as with Internet music. When students write school essays, they might forage the Internet—cutting information from here and there, and reshaping/remixing that information into new ideas and thoughts. For Lessig, this process is more about improvisation, democracy, and innovation than cheating, and he notes that we become more active participants in the creation of our culture as we remix it.

Lessig implies that the Digital Age has transformed us all, but by “us” he means it has mostly transformed young people. At the very least, >> **continued on page 8**



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CRAWFORD BAY SCHOOL

LEADERSHIP IN ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

by Lorraine Roulston



Youth and adults alike of the East Shore rural communities that border Kootenay Lake in British Columbia, are enjoying the ambience of their newly re-designed eco-school located in the village of Crawford Bay. The new school was constructed after the original building was found to have mold problems and failed current health standards.

With government funding of \$12.7 million to build a “green” structure for students K – 12, a sustainable architectural design was put forward. Local residents then raised an astounding \$850,000 to include a pre-school, family fitness centre, and other community facilities. The Crawford Bay Elementary Secondary School opened in 2008 and is the first school in B.C. designed to LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) certification. Since the small rural community of Crawford Bay has no public water or sewage systems, the new school had to be almost completely self-sufficient.

Using wood from native trees, the building was engineered to allow local labour and expertise for both the architectural design and construction. Shaded by deciduous trees that filter sunlight in summer and allow solar penetration in the winter, the school features large expanses of glass to allow natural lighting for all occupied spaces as well as spectacular views of the surrounding country. Natural vegetation was preserved and landscaping strategies included the planting of native and drought resistant plant species.

Occupant comfort and a healthful learning environment were of paramount importance in the design of the school. As such, the primary considerations were identified to include the following:

- Preserve natural site features and vegetation
- Integrate school and community
- Create a healthy environment for learning, working, and recreation by maximizing access to daylight and views
- Design the school to maximize opportunities for local employment
- Incorporate energy and water efficiency
- Construct for longevity and economy of maintenance.

Furthermore, to allow ultimate flexibility for alternate future use, all interior partitions are non-load

bearing walls and can easily be modified and relocated. Bolted connections of timber superstructure allow the entire building skeleton to be disassembled and relocated or the components reused.

The water system was created to achieve at least a 20% reduction in use. This was achieved by including low-flush toilets and urinals and infrared water taps. Rainwater collected from the roof is directed onto landscaped catchments on the ground by a series of ornamental scuppers. During rainy periods these devices add delightful sounds as well as visual effects while directing water for landscape irrigation. Excess rainwater is collected by a sub-surface system and stored in a cistern to provide irrigation for the playing fields. General storm water is absorbed by a series of bioswales then filtered back into the ground to re-charge the aquifer that feeds the wells, thus completing the cycle. Likewise, energy is derived from a geo-exchange system that includes a heat pump and forced air heating. During hot weather, the school’s design allows passive cooling by means of cross-ventilation achieved by opening window vents throughout the school wings. As well, large roof overhangs shade exterior walls and reduce hot solar gain.

In developing programming for the future, staff and community members are exploring options for environmental-based projects, including a greenhouse and root cellar. Over the years, teachers and students have composted all of the school’s organic food scraps with a series of composting bins and a worm farm. The “Farm to School” hot lunch program serves made-from-scratch vegetarian meals four days per week and includes as much local and organic produce as possible.

Principal Dan Rude says, “With this incredible new site and building, we have the opportunity to focus many of the initiatives that we have been working on for years around environmental awareness and sustainability. Our community and staff have had significant input into the building design, and are now in great conversations about how to utilize our green school and site to its full capacity.”

For details, Google Crawford Bay School Sustainable Architecture.

Lorraine Roulston writes children’s adventure books that combine compost facts with literature. Visit www.castlecompost.com



continued from page 6 >> Lessig’s work makes us reconsider how the tools we use shape us, how we might build a stronger culture using these tools, and how our abilities to use these tools enable us to gain cultural power and control. Lessig implies that we might all become creators and suggests that those who sit in judgment of the activities of youth could, if they tried, come to better understand and embrace the logic of youth who imitate and remix as a high form of social flattery.

Lessig’s fusion of R/O and R/W into a hybrid culture asks us to rethink old rules—including rules of copyright. For him, what our young do with R/W culture levels the playing field. Could it be that plagiarism laws are hyper-sensitive responses meant to protect artists in financial but not ethical ways? Is plagiarism defined in a way that allows a small group of people to hold onto old ways of peddling and charging for its creations? Lessig argues that copyright has become a tool used to financially protect corporations who believe young people steal, re-mix, or “mash” products they should buy.

In fact, Lessig argues that the way young people break copyright laws actually helps enact the values society should prize—values that help our young become creative and collaborative people. Lessig the lawyer reminds us that no law prohibits a writer from quoting another work to make a new point and believes the same law should also work in the digital world. At the heart of Lessig’s *Remix* is a hybrid blending of a traditional commercial enterprise with an Internet-friendly ethos of a sharing community.

Copyright is at once both protective regulation and monopoly, meant to protect the “expression of ideas”—for example, the words and phrases in a student’s paper—but not ideas themselves. People cannot own ideas, but they do own their own creative expressions. R/O culture makes us all consumers of someone else’s culture; R/W culture allows participation. Current copyright law favors R/O culture, controls the right to make copies, and requires permission for every use. Thus, control trumps cultural creativity, smothering R/W culture progress. Might the same be true of plagiarism for school papers?

When students go to the Internet and cut and paste bits of other people’s papers, is there a chance they see themselves as remixing in the same way they might remix music or photos? Or are all these activities stealing? What role do educators play in helping students recognize the difference between constructing their own understandings and the theft of someone else’s? For Lessig the issue is complex, and he suggests that we should at least consider the complexity.

Lessig, L. (2008) *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*. New York: Penguin.



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