Embracing the Educational Value of Imitation

Amy Burger
Dalton State College, aburger1@daltonstate.edu
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Social cognitive theory

Observational learning based on the actions of models (Bandura)

Pedagogical popularity: Antiquity to Renaissance

The instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood – Aristotle

• Quintilian: learn from others’ work to have a base knowledge for use later and to build on
• Other supporters include Isocrates and Cicero
• Later used by Augustine and Erasmus
Pedagogical doubt: Enlightenment

Learning is nothing but imitation
– Kant

• Locke: concerns about authenticity
• Rousseau: concerns about artifice
Pedagogical decline: 19th century to present

All good things which exist are the fruits of originality
– John Stuart Mill

It is better to fail in originality than to succeed in imitation
– Herman Melville
In disciplines

• Art
  • Homage, pastiche, remix
• Computer science
  • Collaboration, open source
• Law
  • Precedent

Calls for revival


When it matters

*[The student] has to learn to speak our language*

– Bartholomae

• Entrance to college
• Transition to specific discipline
• Entrance to the workplace
Patchwriting ≠ Plagiarism

• Moore Howard: Patchwriting represents a necessary and productive step in students’ entrée into academic discourse

• Call for “decriminalization” has gained broader support

• Shared vocabulary
• Entrée to disciplinary communities
Artifacts, vocabulary, moves

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Additional references

