

GETTING IT OUT ON THE NET: DECENTRALIZED E-LEARNING THROUGH ON-LINE PRE-PUBLICATION

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the personal and professional obstacles faced by Humanities and Social Science scholars contemplating pre-publication of their scholarly work in an on-line network. Borrowing a theoretical framework from the radical educational theorist Ivan Illich, it also develops the idea that pre-publication networks offer higher education a bottom-up, decentralized alternative to business-modeled e-learning. If learners would only embrace this more anarchical medium, appreciating writing for pre-publication as a process of open-ended discovery rather than product delivery, then the prospect of deinstitutionalizing e-learning could become an exciting new reality. The chapter's methodology is a combination of normative-theoretical analysis and small sample (n=2) case study based on the author's personal and professional experiences. While the generalizability (or external validity) of the conclusions is limited, the author hopes to motivate further inquiry into the connection between on-line pre-publication and e-learning.

Keywords: Research, writing, e-learning, scholarship, pre-publication, higher education, Ivan Illich.

INTRODUCTION

One of the major trends in tertiary education is the proliferation of electronic-supported, business-modeled teaching and learning (or e-learning) platforms. According to the business model, institutions of higher learning embrace a top-down approach to pedagogy, educating large groups of students with low overhead, high tuition and, as a consequence, increased revenues (Delanty, 2001; King, 2004; Preston, 2011; Wolfe and Wolfe, 2001). However, e-learning on the business model is not the only so-called 'game in town'. A bottom-up or grassroots approach has also gained momentum among graduate students and early-career faculty, especially in the Humanities and Social Sciences. An alternative to institutionalized e-learning is a decentralized model of information sharing that promotes dynamic patterns of learning and collaboration in a flexible, interactive on-line environment. The prospect of decentralizing e-learning offers hope of eventually resolving what has been called "the most severe political problem of the digital network paradigm": namely, the increasing centralization of digital forms (Vuković, 2011).

One sign of the growing interest in this alternative to institutionalized e-learning is the proliferation of on-line pre-publication networks. *Academia.edu*, *ResearchDataBox*, *ResearchGate*, *PhilPapers* and *Social Science Research Network* are just some of the sites offering new possibilities for e-learning in a low-cost, high-energy format. Rather than selling products or delivering lectures, these sites resemble works-in-progress meetings and informal colloquia held in department lobbies and lecture halls at colleges and universities around the world. They involve the sharing and discussion of recent scholarship between peers. Participation is typically free. The primary differences between them and their off-line equivalents are the digital environment and the timing of interaction (diachronic rather than synchronous). In spite of its promise, though, there are many challenges to this emerging model of e-learning. Some scholars struggle with the question of whether they should pre-publish their writing in these forums. Will others plagiarize their work? Is it reasonable for the authors submitting work to these networks to expect constructive feedback from other scholars?

This chapter begins with the presentation of a theoretical framework within which to understand why this alternative approach to e-learning is superior to the traditional top-down business model. The framework is inspired by Ivan Illich's alternative to dependence on schools, his vision of autonomous and anarchic learning, as well as his futuristic proposal for learning webs – all introduced in the book *Deschooling Society* (1970). Then, I offer a brief anecdote about my own experience with online pre-publication – almost entirely positive – posting works-in-progress to the *Social Science Research Network* (SSRN). In addition, I share a second story

of an earlier experience in which the core idea from a paper I wrote was creatively borrowed by an unnamed scholar reviewing it as part of a pre-doctoral fellowship application. Some readers may find it surprising that after such a negative experience I would eventually pre-publish online, where the risk of such creative borrowing is even greater. Overall, pre-publication has been a therapeutic and liberating experience, allowing me to discover my own reasons for being a productive scholar in the Humanities and Social Sciences. One of the more widely-shared reasons for pre-publishing, I argue, is the desire to participate in a wider dialogue about the scholarly topics that pique our ongoing interest. In this way, online pre-publishing bodes well for the dual prospect of, at a minimum, divorcing e-learning from the business model and, in the best of all possible worlds, de-institutionalizing virtual education altogether.

Many graduate and post-graduate students as well as early-career academics experience anxiety at the prospect of pre-publishing their scholarly work online. They fear that students will download their papers and turn them in for class assignments. They also fear that other scholars will stealthily plagiarize their papers, either outright stealing the core idea or creatively borrowing a novel insight. What I will not consider are the legal ramifications of plagiarism, stealing and creative borrowing, other than to gesture at the possibility of copyrighting pre-published work through Creative Commons. Instead, the primary concern I have is with the motivations graduate and post-graduate students might have for participating in these forums? Should they take the initial leap of faith and share their scholarly work as part of an online pre-publication network? If they decide to, will pre-publishing reap sufficient rewards to offset the associated risks?

In the first section, I sketch the theoretical framework for the project, conceptualizing pre-publishing networks bottom-up alternatives to institutionalized e-learning on the order of Ivan Illich's learning webs. Then I address the question often asked by scholars unaware of this avenue: What is pre-publication? The third section of the piece relates two stories, one positive and the other negative, about the dangers of sharing your unpublished work with other scholars and, potentially, undergraduate students in an open-access environment. In the fourth section, I offer three strong reasons to pre-publish despite the risk of creative borrowing. Finally, the piece concludes by raising some further questions about the possibilities and dangers that pre-publishing one's work could have for a humanities scholar wishing to have a long and productive academic career.

A BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

The extant literature on on-line pre-publication is extremely limited. Most of what has been written on the topic falls under the more general heading of *digital scholarship*. Digital

scholarship encompasses not only pre-publication, but also scholarly work found on independent websites, blogs and electronic media (PowerPoint presentations, CD-ROMs and reality simulations). Deborah Lines Andersen's (2003) *Digital Scholarship in the Tenure, Promotion, and Review Process* assembles a series of scholarly articles addressing how this new form of scholarship should be evaluated by tenure and promotion committees. Another major work on the topic is Christine L. Borgman's (2007) *Scholarship in the Digital Age: Information, Infrastructure, and the Internet*. She investigates the bounty of digital research resources now available for scholars in multiple disciplines, including the mass of stored data – what she calls the “data deluge” – now available for scientists and social scientists. A more recent contribution to the literature is Pearce et al.'s (2011) article “Digital Scholarship Considered: How New Technologies Could Transform Academic Work.” The authors explain how digital scholarship is revolutionizing higher education, making it more than “a pure content industry,” integrating knowledge across distinct disciplinary spaces, and challenging the “fundamental conservatism” of its institutions (Pearce et al., 2011: 1). One of its primary achievements is the unleashing of “unprecedented amounts of data” for use in scientific inquiries – a conclusion shared with Borgman and facilitated by pre-publication networks, such as *Academic.edu*, *ResearchGate* and *ResearchDataBox*. While the present project focuses on writing in the Humanities and Social Sciences, it should be noted that these networks contribute significantly to the creation and dissemination of data within the Hard Sciences and other communities of scholarly inquiry.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Locating a theoretical framework for this project is not an easy task. Most pedagogical theories lend their support to the top-down management of educational resources within both traditional and non-traditional bureaucratic structures, whether schools, colleges, universities or e-learning tools developed on the business model. The search for more unorthodox, even revolutionary, alternatives to traditional theoretic frameworks could land the inquirer in multiple destinations, especially the radical pedagogical theories advanced by Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren and others. The one that I believe is most compatible with a defense of bottom-up, decentralized e-learning is Ivan Illich's model of autonomous and anarchic learning. In *Deschooling Society*, Illich (1970: 36) launches a devastating critique of institutionalized education, including the “modern university”, which he claims “has forfeited its chance to provide a simple setting for encounters which are both autonomous and anarchic, focused yet unplanned and ebullient, and has chosen instead to manage the process by which so-called research and instruction are produced.” Autonomy is, of course, the freedom to choose how, when, and where

to learn. Anarchy is the freedom to interact with one's peers and express oneself with limited or no constraints from above – more specifically, without having one's research and writing micro-managed by others. It could be argued that graduate students lack both autonomy and anarchy in their studies since the terms on which they learn and the course of their research is often subject to tedious supervision and direction. However, micro-managed graduate studies reflect only one style of adviser-advisee mentorship, usually the most repressive and least liberating kind, the outcome of which is often less than ideal: a scholar with limited ability to independently imagine, plan and execute her research agenda. While close supervision might prove helpful in the early stages of graduate studies, a graduate student's learning and research should become progressively liberated from the confines of her adviser's direction, so that she may eventually transform into a self-motivated, early-career scholar. In this way, Illich's notion of autonomous and anarchic learning clearly applies to graduate studies, especially the later stages.

Illich's main argument in *Deschooling Society* seems to be that in order to realize personal autonomy traditional methods of educational delivery must be deinstitutionalized. "In school," Illich (1970: 39) explains, "we are taught that valuable learning is the result of attendance; that the value of learning increases with the amount of input; and, finally, that this value can be measured and documented by grades and certificates." For Illich, educational institutions distort the true objectives of learning: freedom to choose (autonomy) and express oneself through interaction with peers (anarchy). Instead of advancing freedom, the school perpetuates social dysfunctions, "adds prejudice and guilt to the discrimination which society practices against some of its members and compounds the privilege of others with a new title to condescend to the majority" (Illich, 1970: 33). Students learn best by freely exploring and engaging with fellow learners and objects in their environment, not by being taught. "Most learning is not the result of instruction," Illich (1970: 39) notes, but is the outcome "of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting." He continues: "[Y]et school makes them identify their personal, cognitive growth with elaborate planning and manipulation" (Illich, 1970: 39). As a result, students become increasingly dependent on educational institutions, identifying their self-worth with teacher approval and official credentials. But did Illich want all schools abolished? In other words, did he indiscriminately advocate for educational deinstitutionalization?

A quarter of a century after *Deschooling Society* was published, Illich clarified his earlier views on the matter. In a foreword to Matt Hern's *Deschooling our Lives*, he partially recanted his original position, noting that he had "called for the disestablishment of schools for the sake of improving education" but then "began to fear that the disestablishment of the educational church would lead to a fanatical revival of many forms of degraded, all-encompassing education,

making the world into a universal classroom, a global schoolhouse” (Illich, 1998, cited in Stuchul 2009: 18). So, Illich’s argument was not that all educational institutions should be razed and replaced with a totalizing alternative. Instead, he was concerned with abolishing a specific type of schooling:

Education then becomes an economic commodity which one consumes, or, to use common language, which one ‘gets.’ Scarcity emerges both from our perceptions, which are massaged by education professionals who are in the business of imputing educational needs, and from actual societal arrangements that make access to tools and to skilled, knowledgeable people hard to come by — that is, scarce (Illich, 1998, cited in Stuchul 2009: 19).

Likewise, leaders and administrators of many of today’s higher education institutions must ensure that the services they offer remain scarce commodities and, thus, reliable revenue-generators. They sell education to students *qua* consumers, making career success or failure increasingly dependent on institutional products, such as grades, attendance records, certificates, diplomas and job preparation services. In addition, the performance of these institutions is measured in productivity, cost-effectiveness, retention of customers (students) and return on investment, not in terms of how the curriculum fosters learner initiative and independence. In this way, Illich saw education becoming a certain kind of institution – a business – and it was these commercialized educational ventures that he ardently sought to deinstitutionalize.

Although the internet did not exist in Illich’s day, extending his critique of educational institutions to top-down, business-modeled, institutionalized e-learning is a natural next step. In colleges and universities, students and faculty often challenge practices and policies – for instance, tuition increases, tenure denials and the introduction of new instructional technologies – for reasons that stay safely within the bounds of institutional norms. Their complaints are couched with mistaken assumptions (resembling Marxian *false consciousness*) that only assist the commercial enterprise of institutionalized education: “The students and faculty who question the legitimacy of the university, and do so at high personal cost, certainly do not feel that they are setting consumer standards or abetting a production system” (Illich, 1970: 37). Critics of e-learning, too, often complain that its methods and curricula threaten traditional pedagogical models. According to this critique, e-learning is impersonal, ineffective, preserves privilege and reinforces passive learning styles. However, these gripes do not address the root problem – the

same problem Illich identifies – namely, that educational institutions transform students into dependent consumers, not autonomous learners. What the critics fail to question is how e-learning products are packaged, marketed, sold, and delivered to customers (students), and justified to internal stakeholders (faculty, staff and administrators) as low-cost profit centers. Once e-learning's proponents gain the upper-hand (for example, by persuading the majority that these tools complement rather than supplant brick-and-mortar classroom pedagogy), the critics are usually quieted and begin to march to the drum-beat of – in Illich's (1970: 34-5) words – “ritualized progress.” In sum, educational institutions that adopt e-learning on the business model alienate and exploit faculty and students; and the only way to escape the state of alienation and exploitation, Illich (1970: 46-8) argues, is to acknowledge that “learning requires no teaching” and, then, design alternative approaches to educate in the absence of institutions.

In the sixth chapter of *Deschooling Society*, Illich proposes a series of educational innovations that he collectively refers to as *learning or opportunity webs* – in many ways anticipating the advent of online pre-publication networks. According to Illich (1970: 75), a “good educational system” should have three objectives: (i) offer “access to available resources at any time,” (ii) to “empower all who want to share what they know,” and (iii) provide “all who want to present an issue to the public the opportunity to make their challenge known.” Learning webs satisfy all three objectives. They increase access, empower learners, and publicize issues, without commodifying (or in Marxian language, *fetishizing*) the learning process. Although learning web was not synonymous with the “world wide web” (the web-browser accessible system of interconnected hypertext documents would not dawn until 1991), there is an undeniable similarity between Illich's innovations and what we nowadays call the *web* or *internet* (Hart, 2001; Vuković, 2011). Illich (1970: 76) prefers *web* to *network* because, according to him, the latter suggests a medium to indoctrinate, whereas the former connects “individuals who want to send messages to one another.” As alternatives to schooling, learning webs empower individuals to discover new ideas and projects, interact with peers, acquire new skills, exercise initiative and grow as a scholar in the absence of teaching and its institutional paraphernalia (e.g. tuition, certificates, and grades).

Learning webs encompass four innovations: (i) “Reference Services to Educational Objects” (or free outlets to access special educational things, such as machines and books), (ii) “Skill Exchanges” (or the equivalent of personal ads notifying others of technical competencies that skilled individuals can model), (iii) “Peer-Matching” (or networked communications between individuals seeking collaborators in shared investigations or processes of discovery), and (iv) “Reference Services to Educators-at-Large” (or directories of professionals who might agree to

serve as mentors or take on apprentices under specified conditions) (Illich 1970: 78-9). The point of these innovations is to remove teaching from the equation, replacing pedagogical institutions with a web (or network) of self-motivated, autonomous learners. In describing the mechanics of a peer-matching network, Illich (1970: 93) comes close to describing what we would nowadays call an *electronic network*:

The user would identify himself by name and address and describe the activity for which he sought a peer. A computer would send him back names and addresses of all those who had inserted the same description. It is amazing that such a simple utility has never been used on a broad scale for publicly valued activity.

Of the four learning web innovations, “Reference Services to Educational Objects” and “Peer-Matching” come closest to capturing the spirit of a more recent bottom-up e-learning tool: the online pre-publication network. Similar to reference services, pre-publication networks permit individuals to access educational objects, particularly the writings of fellow scholars. In addition, these networks facilitate communications between scholars with shared interests, similar to services that match peers based on their desire to inquire about the same topic. Moreover, access to these networks does not simply facilitate communication and learning, but because access is for all intents and purposes free, it also enables social cohesion – a goal shared with the open-source code and free software movement (Lessig, 1999 & 2006; Stallman, 1992: 121-8). Next, I turn to consider the nature and operation of online pre-publication networks.

A PRIMER ON PRE-PUBLICATION NETWORKS

Besides the brief comparison with Illich’s learning webs, online pre-publication networks merit a more extensive overview. This overview or primer explains what scholarly pre-publication is not, what it is and, finally, offers a brief summary of the steps by which a scholar posts and distributes her work to a standard pre-publishing network.

What Online Pre-publication is Not

Online pre-publication is not about publishing work in an online or open-access journal. It is not even about publishing your work in a print journal with an online teaser or excerpt for web surfers to read and decide whether to purchase access to the entire article. It is certainly not a paper mill, or a business that sells unpublished work to students. It also does not involve placing copies of unpublished work on a personal website or even another scholar’s website. Although the risks

associated with posting work to a personal web-site or having it appropriated by a paper mill are similar, the key difference is that online pre-publication allows for the more efficient distribution of work to scholars in the author's field or those scholars outside that field who work on similar topics and issues. In this way, pre-publication networks resemble peer-matching networks, one innovation in Illich's learning webs proposal.

What Online Pre-publication Is

Online pre-publication involves publishing scholarly work in an organized on-line network which allows the author to post, publish and then distributes your work to other members who subscribe to the areas within which you post and publish. Pre-publication sites such as *Academia.edu* and *ResearchDataBox*, both modeled after social networking model of *Facebook*, have experienced a recent surge in popularity. Two examples of more established pre-publication networks are *Social Science Research Network (SSRN)* and *PhilPapers*. The founders of *SSRN* describe the network as follows: "*Social Science Research Network (SSRN)* is devoted to the rapid worldwide dissemination of social science research and is composed of a number of *specialized research networks* in each of the social sciences" (my emphasis) (Bourget and Chalmers, 2009). The designers of *PhilPapers* state the purpose of the forum in these terms:

PhilPapers is a comprehensive *directory of online philosophy articles and books* by academic philosophers. We monitor journals in many areas of philosophy, as well as archives and personal pages. We also accept articles directly from users, who can provide links or upload copies (Fama et al., 2009).

While the opportunities for networking are abundant, this site is not the same as a social network. Instead of a 'place' to exchange social pleasantries, it is an outlet for uploading and posting abstracts of published and unpublished papers (and in the case of *PhilPapers*, also books), as well as the papers themselves, so that other scholars within the network have instant access to the products of one's research. Also, the author has instant access to the work of other scholars, including searchable abstracts and papers, which they have also posted and uploaded to the network. If the abstract has been posted, but no paper has been uploaded, it is also possible for an inquiring scholar to contact the author and request the paper through electronic or snail mail.

The Process: Posting, Publishing and Distributing

While there are many outlets for pre-publishing one's work in the humanities and social sciences, the one that I will focus on here for the purpose of explaining the mechanics of the pre-publication process is the *Social Science Research Network (SSRN)*. *SSRN* offers a relatively hassle-free registration process and secure platform for posting abstracts to their site. Abstract posting involves assigning the paper a title, copying the abstract into a field, providing key terms, and classifying the work in pre-designated topical categories or letting *SSRN* classify the work by itself. Posting abstracts based on conference proposals has the dual benefit of (i) giving the author a sense of commitment to the project (even if the proposal has not been accepted yet) and (ii) announcing to other scholars that you are working on the project. Of course, one need not finish the project. Many scholars use the posting function as a way of measuring interest in the topic. If other scholars contact the author once the abstract is published and distributed, then one has some evidence that it might be a worthwhile project!

Posted abstracts and uploaded papers must first be approved by *SSRN* administrators before they can be published on the site, and then forwarded to the area editors for distribution to other scholars in the network. Abstracts and papers are placed under one of four categories: (i) "In Process Papers", (ii) "Publicly Available Papers", (iii) "Privately Available Papers" and (iv) "Inactive Papers." Initial submissions of abstract and uploaded papers are automatically classified as in process papers. Once the *SSRN* staff approves them, which can take from 12 to 48 hours, the abstract or paper is reclassified as publicly available. Only publicly available papers are freely accessible by network members. Also, only publicly available papers are forwarded to the area editors who then distribute them in weekly e-mail announcements to the network members subscribed to the area feeds. These e-mail announcements consist of one to five paper titles, author names and abstracts. Paper titles and abstracts can be accessed by interested scholars through links to the author's *SSRN* home-page. Authors of abstracts and papers can elect to move their own papers to the other two categories, either before or after publication and distribution. Privately available papers are displayed on the author's home-page, but can only be accessed by interested scholars at the author's discretion. Inactive papers are not displayed on the author web-page, though they can be accessed by the author. In this way, archiving abstracts and papers under the category of inactive papers is one way to backup work that could become lost if stored on a personal hard-drive.

While establishing a *SSRN* account and having work published and distributed is free, subscribing to major feeds requires that the user pay a fee. Still, pre-publication provides the opportunity to share one's research projects with other scholars who share one's interests,

gauge the level of interest among the scholarly community in one's work and discover what others are treating as cutting-edge topics in their research and writing.

Open Source and Open Access

Are pre-publication networks similar to open source code or free software, insofar as they can inspire resistance to the proprietary, top-down managed, business-modeled paradigm? While the connection between pre-publication and the open source code/free software movement has already been alluded to, additional similarities should be noted. The open source code/free software movement might even serve as a model for a similar movement in on-line pre-publication. Consider, for instance, Richard Stallman's (2004) four essential freedoms, as outlined in his GNU Manifesto:

0. The freedom to run the program, for any purpose.
1. The freedom to study how the program works, and change it so it does your computing as you wish. Access to the source code is a precondition for this.
2. The freedom to redistribute copies so you can help your neighbor.
3. The freedom to distribute copies of your modified versions to others. By doing this you can give the whole community a chance to benefit from your changes. Access to the course code is a precondition for this.

Perhaps pre-publication network-users need a similar manifesto, containing a declaration of the basic freedoms of pre-publishers. While the pre-publication sites are proprietary, their use is, for the most part, free. Positions as subject-matter editors at *SSRN*, however, are delegated, not elected. Norms of fair use could also be articulated in a pre-publication manifesto.

Beyond open source, pre-publication has a more direct relationship with open access in academic publishing. By way of background, academic publishing can be divided into two distinct models: (i) traditional or print and (ii) the new or open access. Traditional publishing occurs in physical books, articles and bound theses, most of which are subject to quality control in the form of peer review. Open access pertains to scholarly work posted on-line, which is sometimes, though not always, subject to lower selectivity standards. Open access is subdivided into (a) open access publishing and (b) open access self-archiving. Open access publishing involves journals and book publishers making a part or the whole of their content available for free on-line. Some countries require that publicly-funded research be published in an open access format (Suber, 2013). Some open access publishers will charge the author or her

institution (funding agency) a fee in order to subsidize the costs of production (e.g. copy editing and typesetting), which would otherwise be paid for through journal subscriptions or book sales in the traditional model. Scholars typically publish in an open access format because they want their article or book to have a wider readership and greater impact (Swan and Brown, 2004). Open access self-archiving is closest to what has so far been referred to as 'prepublication'. It involves authors making their work, published or unpublished, available on-line for free. However, self-archiving also extends beyond pre-publication to self-publication on an author's personal or professional website. Pre-publication networks are third-party sites that facilitate the sharing of scholarly work, so that archiving or storing that work is not usually the primary aim of users.

TWO ANECDOTES

In this section, I share two stories – one positive and the other negative – regarding my own experience with pre-publication. Technically, the negative story is not about pre-publishing, though it is germane to a primary concern that a humanities or social sciences scholar might have in pre-publishing their work: namely, that a fellow scholar might creatively borrow the author's paper or idea prior to it being published in a journal or book format.

Positive

For the past four years, I have avidly pre-published my scholarly work with little or no expectations except that pre-publication will provide a means for me to archive my work products and measure my own progress as a scholar. As many graduate students in the humanities and social sciences soon discover, a small percentage of one's work will eventually be published. This could be for a variety of reasons, some having to do with the uneven quality of one's own work and others with the selective biases of journal editors and referees. Nevertheless, the desire to share one's scholarly work cannot be denied. The motivation for pre-publishing one's work could be an aspiration to publish it in the future, which often requires vital feedback from fellow scholars. In my case, I already have a small group of mentors and fellow scholars who I usually distribute my work to for the sake of receiving feedback. However, as I became an interdisciplinary scholar, writing on far-flung topics that crossed the boundaries of several academic disciplines, I realized that the expertise of this circle of scholars was limited to my initial research interests (mainly those cultivated during the writing of my dissertation) and sought to expand the group of scholars exposed to my work. Likewise, I have become more interested

in finding out what scholars in other fields are working on, just in case it bears on my research or could be an avenue for expanding my research agenda in the future.

Since embarking on the odyssey of pre-publication, several scholars have contacted me expressing interest in reading a paper that I only posted an abstract for. In most cases, I had not yet completed the research and writing for the paper. So, I notified the interested party of this fact and estimate a date of completion, at which time I would send this person a copy of the paper. Although the scholar's request was not fully met, the initial contact provided the opportunity (as mentioned before) to measure interest in the project as well as to motivate me to complete the project in hopes that I might receive valuable feedback. Of course, one also feels a sense of satisfaction that other scholars have an interest in one's work. Admittedly, it can prove difficult, especially in the dissertation writing stage, to network with other scholars unless one meets them at conferences. Consequently, the experience of writing one's dissertation and trying to publish a few papers in preparation for entry to the job market can be a lonely one. Other than the comments one receives from one's advisor and dissertation committee members, feedback on the quality and direction of one's scholarly work can be minimal and often delayed until the end of the doctoral program. So, pre-publication is an alternate way to solicit feedback from scholars who have a range of interests, many of which mirror one's own, throughout the course of one's own studies and thereafter. In my case, the outcome of pre-publishing was that several of my papers were turned into published articles prior to graduation, which helped me to secure a post-doctoral appointment – not to mention the pride of realizing that my work had an audience.

Negative

My negative story is not about an instance of pre-publication. Still, it illustrates one of the main worries that graduate students have when deliberating about whether to pre-publish their work: Will other scholars creatively borrow the author's research and ideas? Of course, the answer is 'yes'. But creative borrowing is not the same as plagiarism. An author can be inspired to write about a topic after she has read an article by another scholar on the same topic. An author might even identify a lacuna in the article or the literature as a whole that she wishes to fill by making her own novel contribution. Writing on a related topic is not the same as copying a passage without quoting or citing the author and source. Still, there are borderline cases in which a paper bears a striking resemblance to a previously published paper on the topic, but the author does not cite the published article. On the one hand, one would expect that academic integrity demands citing the article. On the other, it is quite possible that the author was unaware of the

previously published article (though one might argue that the author has a responsibility to conduct adequate research to become aware of it).

In my story, I submitted an unpublished paper as part of a competition for a pre-doctoral fellowship. It could have been submitted to a pre-publication network, such as SSRN, but it was not. Still, the story bears repeating because what one fears could happen in pre-publishing occurred in what would expect to be an even safer context. When one submits an unpublished paper to an institute, one expects that it will only be read for the sake of assessing one's candidacy for the position applied for. I did receive a phone interview and curiously all of the questions by the two interviewers concerned the paper, how I conducted the research and what plans I had for it. I thought nothing of it then, but several years later, after the paper had been published in a journal, while conducting my dissertation research, I found a paper by another author that bore a remarkable resemblance to my published paper, but was published a year prior to mine and only a year after my interview with the institute. Our two papers focused on the same central theme, had similar theses, analyzed the identical debates and generally reached the same conclusions. No passages were exactly copied, though several select quotes employed by the author were identical to those I had selected. I conducted some background research on the author and discovered that this person had been employed as an analyst at the same institute I had applied for the pre-doctoral fellowship during the period while my application and writing sample were being reviewed. Since there is a remote possibility that the similarities between our papers could be coincidental, I shared the two works with two other scholars who quickly confirmed that it was highly unlikely that this person had never read or creatively borrowed from my paper in the process of writing their own.

The Moral of these Stories

While the moral of the negative story might appear to be that one should not submit unpublished work for pre-doctoral fellowship competitions, this would be an ill-advised rule-of-thumb given how rare such incidents are. The more prevalent phenomenon is probably the creative borrowing of material by scholars in pre-publication networks. One reason for this is that it is more difficult to trace the source. A kidnapper (the meaning of the Latin root *plagiarius*) can be relatively confident that the piece is not yet published in a journal or edited collection, so the challenge is simply to beat the original author to publication. So, it might be concluded that if it can happen in what would one would expect to be such a safe context (an institute under an obligation only to use the material for evaluation purposes), then it is surely to happen in the more risky context (an online pre-publication network). However, when the original author posts an abstract and

uploads a paper, he or she does have some evidence, a time-date stamp, to certify that the material submitted is his or her original work. Indeed, *SSRN* requests that the author certify that it is his or her original work in the process of submitting. Still, the risk of creative borrowing in this context is readily apparent, and the legal issue remains moot. Creative borrowing is not identical to plagiarism. So, the question arises: Should one tempt other scholars to creatively borrow one's scholarly research and writing by pre-publishing or forgo the risk by avoiding pre-publication altogether?

REASONS TO PRE-PUBLISH

One way to answer this last question is to identify and evaluate some plausible reasons for pre-publishing work in these third-party networks. Open-content licensing could relieve some of the fears and anxieties faced by pre-publishers. Creative Commons, a non-profit organization, issues copyright licenses to authors and artists, giving them a range of options for permitting public use of their creations. These licenses are not just taken out by individual scholars, but also by record labels and groups concerned to protect their artistic products from imitation or theft. A Creative Commons licensing option might be one way to minimize acts of plagiarism and creative borrowing in pre-publication networks.

Illich's model of autonomous and anarchic learning is also relevant to the decision to pre-publish, since genuine education is liberated from institutionalized contexts. It takes place through independent learning and peer interaction, not participation in commercialized ventures. Likewise, pre-publication is best when it occurs for reasons that free the learner from the capitalist cycle of marketing, production and sales, offering open access to new ideas and opportunities to form enriching extra-institutional relationships. Following Illich's model could therefore mean abandoning the option of purchasing a Creative Commons license.

Ultimately, if the risk associated with pre-publishing is so palpable and threatening that it undermines one or more of the following reasons, then the decision is clear: Do not pre-publish. Otherwise, if the reasons for – and, by implication, the benefits of – pre-publication outweigh the associated risks, then a scholar is sure to take the opposite path: Go ahead and pre-publish.

First Reason: Exposure-Networking

One reason to pre-publish, as I have already noted, is that it increases peer exposure to an author's scholarly work. As a graduate student, attending and presenting at conferences is essential for accomplishing the same goal. At conferences, one develops networks of fellow scholars that can help in one's further professional development. However, the cost of attending

more than one or two conferences a year can be prohibitive for the average graduate student. So, pre-publication permits the developing scholar and writer to gain greater exposure for his or her work without expending limited resources to attend and present at multiple conferences. Of course, attending conferences is still essential for networking and professional development. Pre-publication can rarely substitute for the quality of face-to-face interaction that can be had with fellow scholars at such events. Still, pre-publication nicely complements conferencing and enlarges one's professional network to an extent that conference-going alone probably cannot.

Second Reason: Feedback-Improvement

Another reason to pre-publish online is that it offers a way to solicit feedback on one's research and writing from other scholars, both inside and outside of one's discipline. A wide variety of feedback from multiple sources, as almost any scholar will attest, tends to improve one's own research and writing. According to Robert Boice, a well-respected scholar in the psychology of writing, "most writing is, after all, a social act" and the best writers tend to "build social networks" (Boice, 1990 cited in Shields, 2003: 11). Some scholars find mentors in pre-publication networks just as they would in real-life. Others will develop relationships with colleagues at a distance, who may serve as outside evaluators on their dissertation committee and, quite possibly, tenure reviewers later in their career. Yet another possibility is that by receiving feedback from scholars in multiple disciplines, the author will transform into an inter-disciplinary scholar, capable of crossing disciplinary boundaries and providing the invaluable service of translator or liaison in the Academy (Ralston, 2009 & 2011). Most disciplines are dominated by experts in ever-narrowing areas of specialization, but in the larger scheme of things, there is a growing need for those scholars who can articulate connections and build bridges between diverse disciplinary perspectives on particular themes and problems.

Third Reason: Dialogue-Discovery

Finally, pre-publishing one's scholarly work on a network such as *SSRN* can also provide an opportunity to participate in an ongoing dialogue with fellow scholars. The exchange of ideas is not a transaction, an exchange, or a matter of buying and selling a commodity. Rather it is a give-and-take process of communication, of learning and of discovery (MacDonald, 1994; Sanders, 2001). If a scholar has ever authored policy analysis papers, grant proposals, how-to manuals or books for a fee or salary, then she knows that the experience of writing can be quite different. It is writing conceived as delivery, i.e. to satisfy a boss or an agent, not writing conceived as discovery, i.e. meant to communicate and learn. Since most scholars write for a

small (and quite specific) audience, receiving little or no remuneration for their work (with the exception of major scholars and textbook writers), the writing process has a certain purity, making it closer to the ideal of writing as a discovery, not a delivery, process. The beauty of pre-publication, or getting one's work out on the net, is that it also does not resemble a process of transaction or delivery, but one of dialogue and discovery. Indeed, pre-publication as a discovery process expresses the autonomous and anarchic model of learning that Illich believed should displace traditional schooling. In their mechanics, pre-publication networks also resemble, as mentioned earlier, Illich's two learning web innovations: reference services and peer matching.

Personal Reflections

In my experience, the last of these three reasons was decisive in overcoming my negative experience of submitting an unpublished paper to a pre-doctoral fellowship competition and it being creatively borrowed. Having my work published and distributed on *SSRN* has been a form of therapy, permitting me to move beyond the negative experience, as well as a form of liberation, permitting me to explore how the process of writing becomes one of discovery, not delivery. For the graduate student or early-career faculty member in the humanities or social sciences, writing can become a chore, especially in the dissertation writing and editing phases. A way to renew one's enthusiasm for writing, even for topics outside the scope of one's dissertation project, is to pre-publish online, sharing one's work without the sometimes overwhelming pressure of writing for a specific audience. I believe that this is a low-cost and high-energy alternative to institutionalized e-learning approach. The decentralized e-learning approach should be bottom-up, not top-down, and modeled after distributed learning networks, not for-profit businesses. Online pre-publication is an expression of the decentralized e-learning approach. Eventually, a scholar's pre-published work can be turned into journal articles, chapters in edited collections or chapters in their own forthcoming book. However, experiencing the freedom of researching, writing and sharing one's written work on pre-publication networks does not need to occur with these objectives in mind. Researching and writing as a form of discovery is valuable-in-itself, not only for the products it delivers but also for its ability to spawn and nourish a scholarly community.

Are pre-publication networks a secret weapon for deinstitutionalizing e-learning? Some might see pre-publishing network-users as the perfect partners in a grassroots movement to deinstitutionalize e-learning. However, as in most collective action situations, the prospect of coordinating a movement with so many far-flung actors evokes complex questions about public goods, motivation, incentive, group cohesion, and the perceived chances of success (Olson,

1965). Perhaps the better way to proceed is to spread the “gospel” of online pre-publication with the expectation of gradually overcoming top-down e-learning on the business model – a potentially transformational strategy motivated by what Peter McLaren (1997) calls “radical hope” and “utopian militancy.” To some extent, this strategy is already in play: The converted network-users persuade graduate students, post-graduates and other early-career academics to join these pre-publication networks and thus to become the autonomous and anarchic learners that Illich imagined, rather than pawns and architects of institutionalized e-learning.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Given the limitations of the present project – a methodology confined to normative-theoretical analysis, a small sample (n=2) case study based on my own personal and professional experiences and conclusions that are hardly generalizable (or externally valid) – there is, admittedly, ample possibility for additional research. Further inquiries could explore the empirical connection between virtual learning and pre-publication networks, using diverse metrics and variables, such as time spent on the network, quantity of submissions, regularity of submission, research productivity, level of feedback, perceived research quality, impact factor and learning outcomes. Besides quantitative studies, researchers could also conduct interviews of network users and even virtual focus groups. In any further research, though, what should be kept in mind is that the kind of virtual learning that, by hypothesis, occurs in pre-publication networks is for the sake of discovery, not delivery, personal and professional growth, not commercial interest and profit. In this way, pre-publication networks will continue to represent a genuine alternative to top-down, business-modeled e-learning.

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KEY CONCEPTS

On-line pre-publication is the activity of posting and distributing scholarly work on the internet prior to formal publication, usually in a networked forum designed for sharing and discussing works-in-progress.

On-line pre-publication network is a forum such as *Academic.edu*, *ResearchDataBox*, *PhilPapers* and *Social Science Research Network* designed for scholars to share and discuss works-in-progress with their peers, prior to formal publication.

Digital scholarship is scholarly work found in on-line pre-publication networks, independent websites, blogs and electronic media, including PowerPoint presentations, CD-ROMs and reality simulations.

Creative borrowing is the use of others' artistic work in order to build upon otherwise underdeveloped ideas and concepts, exploring them in novel ways, but not always giving credit to the inspirational work.

Creative Commons is a non-profit organization that issues copyright licenses to authors and artists, giving them a range of options for permitting public use of their creations.

Learning web is Ivan Illich's vision of a network of learners, educational resources and opportunities for personal improvements made possible through technological innovation, and as an alternative to institutionalized education.

Reference services to educational objects are technologies imagined by Ivan Illich in his vision of a learning web, involving free outlets to access special educational things, such as machines and books.

Skill exchange is a technology envisioned by Ivan Illich in his notion of a learning web, involving the equivalent of a personal ad notifying others of technical competencies that skilled individuals can model.

Open access publishing involves journals and book publishers making a part or the whole of their content available for free on-line.

Open access self-archiving involves authors making their work, published or unpublished, available on-line for free.

Peer matching is a technology imagined by Ivan Illich in his vision of a learning web, involving networked communications between individuals seeking collaborators in shared investigations or processes of discovery.

Plagiarism, from the Latin root *plagiarus*, meaning to kidnap, is to steal or copy another person's creative work and intentionally claim it as one's own, both in terms of ownership and authorship.

Reference services to educators-at-large are technologies envisioned by Ivan Illich in his notion of a learning web, involving directories of professionals who might agree to serve as mentors or take on apprentices under specified conditions

Writing as a discovery process is authorship of creative and scholarly works for the sake of communication and learning, motivated by a search for novel ideas, symbols, and experiences; usually contrasted with writing as delivery, or authorship of creative and scholarly works meant to satisfy a buyer or agent.

BIOGRAPHY

Shane J. Ralston is currently an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Pennsylvania State University Hazleton. He was born in Bellingham, Washington, U.S.A. He earned his doctorate in Philosophy at the University of Ottawa (Ontario, Canada). He also has graduate-level training in the disciplines of Political Science, Public Administration and Human Resources. His research

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