Using drama to introduce ethics to technology students and practitioners

Conference or Workshop Item

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**INTRODUCTION**

The poster describes the use of Joe PENHALL'S play Landscape with Weapon. It can be viewed as an allegory about the fact that technology has the potential to cause harm. Any weapon is a technological system that can be designed to cause harm. When it comes to patents, the person having the idea is only granted rights if the idea is novel and not obvious. This is often the case, but it is not always clear who owns the rights to an idea. As a result, many ethical questions are raised about the ownership of ideas.

**INTRODUCING ETHICS IN ICS**

Unit overview

Ethics is an established area of academic interest, but it is only fairly recently that the relevance of ethics to ICS started to emerge. There are several reasons for this, including the increasing complexity of technological systems and the increasing importance of computer technology in everyday life. As technology continues to develop, it is important for professionals to understand the ethical implications of their work.

**THEORITICAL GROUNDING AND TERMINOLOGY**

G. E. Moore (1903)

R. Rorty on 'final vocabularies' (Rorty, 1989)

L. Wittgenstein on 'language games' and the 'language of art' (Wittgenstein, 1967; 1992)

M. Nussbaum on 'emotions' (Nussbaum, 1998)

Some lessons from the Unit

Landscape with Weapon offers that are of relevance to practitioners in a variety of areas of technology development. Some lessons include:

- Introduce the Unit by discussing the themes raised in the play, such as the ethical implications of technology development.
- Discuss the ethical issues raised in the play, such as the role of the engineer and the responsibility of the developer.
- Use the play as a basis for discussions on ethical issues, such as the rights of the user and the impact of technology on society.

**LANDSCAPE WITH WEAPON**

An allegory

Landscape with Weapon centres on the development and exploitation of a weapon system, and can be viewed as an allegory about the fact that technology has the potential to cause harm. Any weapon is a technological system that can be designed to cause harm. When it comes to patents, the person having the idea is only granted rights if the idea is novel and not obvious. This is often the case, but it is not always clear who owns the rights to an idea. As a result, many ethical questions are raised about the ownership of ideas.

**Ethical standes**

As a dentist, Dan meets his customers face-to-face while he performs his work, and his professional skills put him in control of the immediate outcomes of his work. On the other hand, Ned, the technologist, in general does not normally meet the users face to face when they are designing systems that are not yet known with certainty, perhaps a small part of a large-scale design. The key point here is that technology is a social convention but there really is no compulsion, no way to guarantee the convention is respected. 'Rights' are a social convention but there really is no compulsion, no way to guarantee the convention is respected.

Ned makes a number of statements in the final act. He says, "The engineer's prime task is to make a machine" — or, perhaps, the technology — "as effective as possible." That is the 'duty of the engineer; that is the task. Perhaps most developers would agree that this is their job, that they need to make 'systems' or 'devices' effective, the 'best' technology they can make. However, Ned then introduces the artist's imperative to find analogies that highlight the aesthetics of what he is designing. At a crucial point in the conversation, his brother Dan asks: 'Does mum know?' This is a very significant point in the play, because it leads to another relationship and, accordingly, the potential of different ethical positions.

**REFERENCES**


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