Using drama to introduce ethics to technology students and practitioners

Conference Item

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he poster describes the use of Joe Penhall's play Landscape with Weapon for teaching ethics in ICS. The play is set in a world where technology and ethics are intertwined. In this world, the play explores the ethical implications of technology development, particularly concerning the development of a weapon that has the potential to cause harm. The play raises questions about the morality of the development process and the role of technology in shaping society.

INTRODUCTION

The play is developed and, on occasion, answered. Accordingly, such dialogues influence audience and guide conduct. Rather than focusing on the formulation of a play script, the play script in the play script. In short, a suitable analysis and discussion of ethical problems.

The Unit development has capitalised on the lessons and feedback provided to teach ethics to students and practitioners in a variety of areas of technology development.

Landscape with Weapon provides an example of one amongst many which highlights the potential value of play and dialogues used as resources for teaching ethics in the Unit. Introducing Ethics in Information and Computer Sciences (working title), currently under development with the support of the HEA Subject Network for ICS, the Unit, a self-contained multi-media course, will be made available, for re-use by educators and learners and under a Creative Commons license, on the Laspetime (http://laspetime.openauk.co.uk), the experimentation site for The Open University's open content initiative OpenLearn (http://www.open.edu/openlearn). KEYWORDS: Ethics; professional practice; drama; rhetoric; emotions; ethical reasoning.

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- Discuss what ethics is and what constitutes an ethical issue.
- Identify and discuss ethical issues that arise in the media, routine conversations and, in daily professional practice.
- Discuss the role of emotions in ethical deliberations.
- Discuss the role of education in ethical deliberations.
- Identify and discuss the ethical issues presented and rhetorical styles used in play and drama, especially with focus on explaining how language is used to alter other people's ethical perceptions and convince them of specific points.

Core resources

In addition to various resources from the 2008 trial video discussions, the following materials are included in this unit:


Synopsis

The play revolves around the issues faced by Ned, an engineer who has created a novel technology, originally envisaged for surveillance but eventually construed as a weapon of mass destruction. The play begins with a powerful conversation between Ned and his brother Dan, a dentist, when Ned starts to confront not only the potential implications of his invention, but also his own motivations and feelings towards this technology. As the play unfolds and other characters appear, Ned is led towards a changed outlook on technology and the professionals who create it.

Relationships: does mum know?

The beginning of the play presents a fairly naïve Ned, who initially believes himself to be in control. He is clearly very proud of his intellectual achievements and less concerned with more than his technical expertise. He finds 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 really significant point in the play because it draws in another relationship and, accordingly, the potential of different ethical positions.

In the end

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.

However, Ned then introduces the artist's imperative to discover something: a discovery that gratifies the artist directly and/or indirectly, if the audience betrays its satisfaction with what the artist presents. But, of course, art also has the potential to transform the way we think and see things, and that's the task. Perhaps most developers would agree that this is not the task, that they need to continue to make their technology work, that it's not enough to make something novel, but maybe something that will change the way we think about technology and who we are. That's the significance of the play. The play is also a commentary on the role of ethics in technology development, and how it interacts with the role of technology in shaping society.

To conclude, this play is a powerful commentary on the role of ethics in technology development, and it highlights the potential role of technology in shaping society.

REFERENCES

Moore, G. E. (1903) Principio Etica. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Full text available online at http://lib.pu.es/e-g-moore/principio-ética/]


