Chapter XXVIII
Lost in the Funhouse, Is Anyone in Control?

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, a framework which models at a high level the interactions between technology, pedagogy, and ethics is applied to the interpretation of a case study. The case study describes a student excluded from his course as a result of administrative error. Since his studies are, in part, mediated through a Virtual Learning Environment, the exclusion takes on additional impacts not anticipated by the human actors, and proves surprisingly difficult to undo even once the error is acknowledged. This reveals problematic aspects of the interaction between the domains. Conflicts between the aims and interests of the various stakeholders, combined with misunderstandings of the way that the technology operates, provide obvious surface causes of the problem. However, analysis reveals that the deeper cause lies in the fact that the life world of education has been colonised by a system that replaces human communication, and thus inevitably presents ethical problems.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter uses a case study to explore some aspects of the intersections between pedagogy, ethics, and technology, in the context of a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Nowadays it is clear that VLEs are gaining increased popularity as the favoured platform for e-learning in

most universities and many Further Education (FE) Colleges. For example "the MLE landscape report survey in 2003, which received returns from 358 institutions across both HE and FE, reports a very high prevalence of VLE usage in all types of institutions surveyed. 85% of FE colleges, 84% of pre-1992 universities and 97% of post-1992 universities report using one or more VLEs in their institution" (Britain & Liber, 2003). However, despite the undisputable importance of ICT in education (see Lehtinen, et al., 1999 for a review), there clearly remain a number of issues that are not understood sufficiently (e.g., Lipponen, 2002; Phipps & Merisotis, 1999). These include the relationships between technological tools available for learning delivery and their links with ethics and pedagogy. One view of the connections and overlaps between each of these concepts has previously been illustrated as the Venn diagram shown in Fig. 1 (Jefferies et al., 2006).

This diagram was originally produced to highlight the perceived **relationships** between pedagogy, ethics, and technology, as three important constructs in the development of an ethically aware e-learning strategy. In developing this framework it was subsequently realised that a number of external influences in the form of such things as government/public expectations, institutional/stakeholder constraints and professional bodies would all, to varying degrees, impact implementation of such a strategy. It should, however, be noted that consideration of these "external" influences has largely been adjudged to be outside the scope of this particular paper, although the impact of institutional/stakeholder constraints will be highlighted within the case study to be described. However, the particular significance of the three central constructs (pedagogy, ethics, and technology) was first proposed by Jefferies (2004), who then used this framework to provide a pedagogically sound foundation for designing a

Figure 1. The links between pedagogy, ethics, and technology (2007 © by ITTE Used with permission)
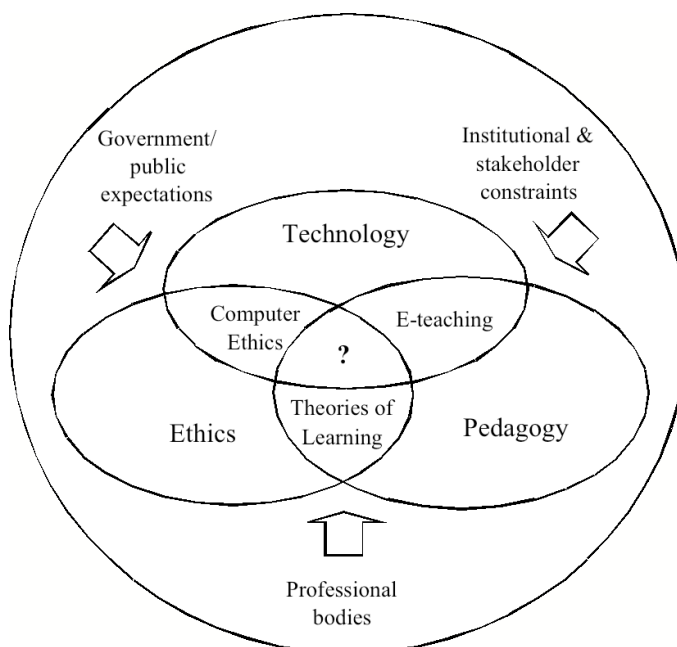
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