Chapter XLII
Historical Perspective of Technoethics in Education

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ABSTRACT

Fundamental democratic principles and values that guide our social relationships have been important concerns in the evolution of this nation's system of formal public schooling. With its increased use and reliance on advanced technologies, education faces some fundamental challenges that have potentially far-reaching implications for educational institutions, professional teaching strategies and practices, and student learning. This chapter explores the topic of technoethics as an applied field of ethics and research, viewed from a historical perspective of education in the United States and its embrace of technology. The underlying intent is to inform the readers' understanding of the basic concepts of common good, citizenship, and democratic values that are the underlying precepts associated with the history of public schooling in the United States. Additionally, the author discusses the increasingly critical need for educators to address the social and ethical dilemmas associated with new technological developments and their application to educational settings.

INTRODUCTION

The world of technology has undergone transformations that have profound implications for the moral and ethical, as well as the legal and professional, dimensions of educational practice as well as for society in general. Just as the invention of the automobile, printing press, telescope, and space exploration had led to revolutionary changes in culture and societal values that were not predicted at the time of their discovery and initial use—technology has had similar impacts upon society. Milson (2001) states, technology—defined, in a broad sense, as tools to accomplish objectives—can also "incorporate the interrelationship of the tool with life, society, and the environment. Arguably, technology has the ability to impact and transform our conception of

key democratic values, such as liberty, equality, and justice. The emergence of telecommunications, for example, is causing us to reconceptualize liberty as it relates to freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and privacy" (p. 88).

Are printed and online pornography unethical, or are they expressions of free speech and artist expression? Are the attempts of the Homeland Security agency in the United States to monitor telecommunications transmission, Internet Web site and e-mail, and long-distance phone calls justified in the name of national security, or are these measures an affront to freedom of speech and privacy? What are the implications of parental controls of cable television in the home and Internet access restrictions at public libraries? What threats to intellectual property rights does the Internet pose? These are but several of the many ethical issues that confront society today and its embrace of technology. Likewise, they are important ethical concerns that impact educational institutions, processes, and professional practices.

Ethics Defined

Emmans (2000) defines *ethics* as a set of moral principles or values, built upon existing mores, and result from a society's ideas and actions. They do not precede the society and the situation in which it finds itself; rather, they are a reaction to the situation, ever changing, and reflect the current state of affairs of the society. Ethics differ from morals in that ethics is a "philosophical reflection on moral beliefs and practices…a conscious stepping back and reflecting on morality" (Hinman, 1984). Additionally, Muffoletto (2003) asserts, "ethics is based upon values grounded on some notions of and for the common good, or what is perceived as good and right (the truth) for individual and community actions" (p. 62).

BACKGROUND

Increasingly, education has become a critical area in society with a growing need to address moral and ethical dilemmas associated with new technological developments: Its manifold uses and reliance on advanced technologies creates fundamental challenges that have potentially far-reaching implications for educational institutions, professional teaching strategies and practices, student learning; and, research methods and processes. However, this is not to say that education as a field, and educational technology as a discipline, have not addressed ethical issues throughout their history in the United States; quite the contrary. Ethics and morals have nearly always been central to education's history, reform movements, and philosophical thought: Fundamental democratic principles and values that guide our social relationships have been important concerns in the evolution of this nation's system of formal public schooling.

This chapter explores the topic of educational technoethics as an applied field of ethics and research, viewed from the historical and philosophical perspectives of education in the United States. This view of education is important: History opens the mind to the world around us; and, through it we can better understand the events, issues, and crises in today's social world.

History provides explanations of how our present society has evolved and why it has adopted certain institutions, roles, practices, and ideologies. From this history, we can gain a sense of perspective and a realization of the complexities and impacts brought about by social and technological changes:

- Pedagogy, media and technology, and the means of social communication, are posited as requiring ethical analyzes in order to be used in a suitable and coherent way in education.

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