



Is Janet Viewing Porn in Class!?!?

By Dr. Vicki Napper, chair of the AECT Professional Ethics Committee, Dr. Kristin Hadley, and Dr. Andrew R. J. Yeaman, Column Editor

Scenario

It is several weeks into the term and Susan asks to see her Educational Technology instructor privately. Professor Portillo can tell she is nearly crying.

Susan arrives at the professor's office and complains about another student's in-class activities. Janet often surfs with her laptop during class time. Today, Susan sat at the table behind her and was surprised to see naked adults on Janet's laptop. Not knowing what else to do, she asked Janet to stop displaying the embarrassing pictures. Janet ignored her and kept on searching for images. Susan tried to focus on the lecture but remained distracted.

After calming and reassuring Susan, Professor Portillo calls Janet. It is pointed out that she is preparing for a career where accessing pornography in a public school could result in immediate dismissal and legal action. She agrees to come in tomorrow to explain what happened.

Next, Professor Portillo asks the university's technology supervisor what the policy is for viewing pornography over the campus network. The professor is advised nothing can be done except request the student not to visit these sites. There is no stringent policy regarding this situation. It is a freedom of speech issue for an adult.

Professor Portillo struggles with the differences in laws related to pornography as they apply to children and to adults. The *Children's Internet Protection Act* exists "to limit children's exposure to pornography and explicit content online" and stipulates that federally funded schools and libraries must have safety policies regarding the access and safety of minors using computers. At the same time, according to the *Child Pornography Prevention Act*, Janet has the right of freedom of speech. Accessing and thereby viewing or experiencing pornography as a means of expression of individual freedom is protected unless it is child pornography. Adult pornography may be viewed without criminal prosecution.

Anticipating meeting with Janet the next day, Professor Portillo wonders what Janet will say, how Susan's anguish could have been avoided, just who is responsible for this mess, and how to write the report the department chair promised the dean on students using their own technology in the classroom.

Principle

AECT Code of Professional Ethics Section 2 - Commitment to Society Proposed Principle

In fulfilling obligations to society, the member should guide learners toward the responsible use of commu-

nication media for learning and social purposes.

Apply the principle to the scenario for yourself before going on to read the analysis on the next page.)

Further Reading

Greenfield, S. (2008). *ID: the quest for meaning in the 21st century*. London: Sceptre.

An eminent neuroscientist enthusiastically explains her work. Upon that authority she argues that new media technologies are rotting our minds, especially the minds of the young. "Familiar as I am with the malleability of the human brain, I predict that spending so much time in cyberspace will inevitably lead to minds very different from any others in human history." (p. 160). "If interacting with a screen is preferable to exercise, reading and writing, what will happen to the thought processes of the next generation?" (p. 171). "By practicing computer games, the brain may become configured in a way that favors excessive dopamine release, which in turn can be addictive, leading to still more computer games..." (p. 202). "So, if the old world of the book aided and abetted the development of a 'mind', the world of the screen, taken to extremes, might threaten that mind altogether, and with it the essence of you the individual." (p. 203).

Karaganis, J. (Ed.). (2007). *Structures of participation in digital culture*. New York: Social Science Research Council.

Provides readers with a selection of 15 field reports documenting the social aspects of recent developments in media technology. These are far more informative than becoming personally involved because as a reader you can take a more objective viewpoint and see things from the outside.

Ong, W. J. (1982). *Orality and literacy: The technologizing of the word*. London: Methuen.

Valuable insights into how communication media affect the way people think and what they do are imparted in this excellent book by an outstanding humanities scholar.

Sternheimer, K. (2009). *Connecting social problems and popular culture: Why media is not the answer*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

This sociologist makes a good case for media being commonly used as a scapegoat to cover up social problems. Rather than blaming communication technologies for bad behavior by young people, it would be more helpful to examine the real issues and address the systemic causes.

Column Editor's Notes

The text of the Analysis section has been inverted so as to improve the instructional effectiveness of this article. The inversion brings readers to stop reading. The point is to encourage thinking through complex matters rather than to provide readers with a 'right' answer. In many real life professional ethics situations the dimensions of problems cannot easily be reduced. It appears the best way to prepare for encountering difficulties is to have practice with encountering difficulties. People are likely to find this approach interesting, too, because they will realize their own values and how they relate to others. Small group discussions of scenarios can be fascinating and sometimes result in shedding new light on established principles with explanations and

resolutions not anticipated by the authors.

In this article the words porn and pornography mean materials thought to be sexually explicit and prohibited by law in certain jurisdictions. In general usage these words can be quite vague. It is as if every society seeks to maintain order by regulating its sexuality. Like professional ethics,

control is largely exerted through language. Total success is impossible.

Professional ethics scenarios published in *TechTrends* are fictitious, see *TechTrends* March – April, 2006, pp. 10-11. There is never any intended resemblance to specific individuals or specific institutions. The instructional purpose is to raise consciousness about AEET's professional ethics.

Analysis

This principle focuses attention on oversights which may have caused the dilemma. It also provides Professor Portillo with solutions. Every instructor's duty is to maximize learning and minimize interference, including protecting students like Susan from the disruptions contributed by students like Janet. "If you don't like what you see then look the other way," is always unsatisfactory.

While faculty may find setting standards for classroom conduct distasteful, the intrusiveness of technology makes it unavoidable. Perhaps through a misguided spirit of liberalism Professor Portillo sidestepped this obligation to engage student attention. Obviously, attendance and class participation matter because a class is a community. There should be guidance for what technology use is acceptable and unacceptable. It would be sensible, too, for Professor Portillo to increase student involvement by designing interactive learning activities for class time. These could be augmented by media usage.

Further, Professor Portillo ought to develop student comprehension of what communication technologies do to people. Do they cultivate particular ways of thinking? Do they incline us toward certain behaviors? How should we cope with pathological results?

How matters will be resolved depends on the explanation given by Janet.

Did she merely give in to academic anxiety and connect with the network to study for her midterm in art history?

Is Janet's violation of social norms only a peccadillo? Perhaps, as a young teacher herself, she unknowingly reverses roles and becomes mischievously hedonistic like the eighth graders who daily test her expectations? Alternately, there is the frightening thought that her disregard of interpersonal boundaries indicates mental illness.

Is Janet subscribing to online dating and unable to resist the temptation of logging on? Have computers made her a sex addict?

Is Janet desperately erasing personal information? She is concerned her students may be finding it. She fears it will be shown to their parents and then to the school principal.

Is it that following a break up she is worried a person whom she allowed to photograph her has vindictively made those photos publicly available?

Imagination is the only limit to guessing what Janet will say. Certainly, some explanations are needed. More than anything else, if Professor Portillo had followed the principle given here and provided guidance on the responsible use of communication media, then Janet might neither have upset Susan nor been suspected of viewing pornography in class.