Tommy Gober

Chapter 10 Reading Facts

While I find Role Playing to be best suited for reviewing previous content and synthesis, I found the section tying Role Playing and Technology very interesting with ideas. My class just finished a unit on Intellectual Property rights of software wherein students were asked to choose sides. The two opposing sides (even though they’re not always in opposition) were Free, Open Source Software and Proprietary, For-Profit Software. Some of the issues presented to the proprietary team were: “How will pricing work? You can’t charge the same price around the world due to different income levels, so how do you justify charging one country more just because they have more money? Or how do you justify charging so much more for a program just because a country happens to be poor? Is it okay to restrict software use to someone that can’t pay for it? What if the software will help raise them out of poverty?” Issues posed to the Free community-driven software is “How can we rely on your software when nobody really knows who all the programmers are? Where is the accountability? If you don’t charge for it, isn’t it worth nothing? Why not charge then? Is someone who charges for their software greedy? Is it okay for someone to charge for software that they’ve acquired from you for free?”

Students were asked these questions and expected to defend their points of view. Later, I picked a few key players from the class and asked them to switch sides – to argue the opposing viewpoint. I found they had a hard time arguing the inverse – who wouldn’t? But it was a great class discussion that brought to light the conflict of piracy. Many students admitted they wanted software, music or games and could easily download such files from the internet. They also admitted that if we spent the rest of the year writing a program to do a job that they should charge for the software and would be offended if someone stole it and used it for free and distributed it. By posing this example, they were caught up in their own views on what is ‘fair’. If it’s a corporation, some argued, then it’s okay to use the software if you can get it. If it’s an individual, then it’s more like stealing to use it. I then posed the question of what makes it right to steal from a collection of individuals (a company) versus an individual. The class discussion lasted for well over an hour and, as pointed out in the text, the main restriction of Role Playing and discussion is the bell to dismiss.

I was pleased to be able to point out such flaws in what’s “fair” (a big basis of morality in school). I hope the discussions lasted outside the classroom and perhaps into their daily lives. I also hope that the opponents of free software saw some validity to community-driven projects and could appreciate their role in the computer realm.