

The Centre for Bioscience
Professional Development Programme

Teaching Ethics to Bioscience Students

Weds 1st Nov 2006

The Use of Drama in Teaching Ethics

Ice-breaker: Find a space. When I say go, walk around the space and shake hands with as many people as you can, introducing yourself and saying something about yourself. Try to meet as many people as you can before I say Stop.

Repeat the above, saying your name and the name of a scientist you admire, but this time you cannot let go of the other person's hand until you have found another person to introduce yourself to, and you are shaking their hand.

What Do We Think?

The aim of this exercise is to enable students to explore what they feel and think about ethical issues posed by genetic testing, screening and selection.

Imagine there is a line across the space. It is an "Opinion Continuum". One end of the line denotes 'Agree Strongly' and the other end denotes 'Disagree Strongly', with all shades of opinion in between.

I am going to make a series of statements. After each one I would ask you to take up a position on the continuum according to whether you Agree or Disagree. Then I will ask a few people to say why they have taken the position they have chosen.

You will be able to change your position after you have heard what has been said.

Afterwards: "What have you discovered?"
"What further information do you want provided?"

1. I would like to know how my genes could affect my future.
2. If we can improve people's lives by genetic testing, we should do it.
3. Couples should take genetic tests to discover whether they are going to pass on a disabling or fatal disease to their child
4. Genetic screening should be allowed by employers
5. We should be able to select for inherited characteristics such as height or intelligence
6. An individual who tests positive for a genetic disorder should be allowed not to tell their partner or family the results of the test.

The Story of 'The Gift'

The play tells the story of three generations of the Kay family. It begins in 1998. Barbara Kay is a widow with two children. Annie, aged 16, is a talented athlete, and Ryan, her brother, aged 14. Annie begins to experience a loss of physical control, clumsiness and balance problems. After having tests done she is told that she has Friedreich's Ataxia, as a result of her parents both being carriers of the gene. We see her emotional turmoil, her loss of hope for the future, and the social effect on her life. Her brother Ryan decides that he wants to find out whether he has inherited both genes, and we see him arguing with his mother and rehearsing how he will argue for the test with the doctor. He is told that he only has one of the genes and so is a carrier. In the future he will have to make sure that any partner with whom he wants to have children does not also carry the gene.

The action shifts to 2012. Ryan is now a commercial geneticist. He has married and has taken his wife, Jennifer, for the test. Jennifer is a carrier. The doctor outlines what they must do to avoid passing on Friedreich's Ataxia to the child they wish to have.

And finally the action moves on to 2028. Ryan and Jennifer's son, Mark is attending a high-flying tennis academy. When he turns 16 he finds out that he was genetically selected by his father, not only to avoid FA, but also that his father selected his gender and his athletic ability (quick reflexes).

ROLE-PLAY

Jennifer and the doctor

Jennifer knows there is a risk of her child inheriting Friedreich's Ataxia, but she feels that she does not have the right to interfere, and wants 'nature' to take its course.

The doctor argues that Jennifer must take action now that she knows there is a risk.

Annie and Barbara

Annie believes that Ryan is right to want to be tested, so he can find out what is going to happen to him.

Barbara feels that he is too young to make this decision. Let him live in ignorance for a bit longer. Knowing may interfere in how he lives his life at the moment.

Ryan and the doctor

The doctor argues that since there is no treatment available, there is no point in Ryan finding out before he has symptoms.

Ryan wants to know because he can see how it has affected his sister and he doesn't want to have to live with the possibility hanging over him.

Ryan and Mark

Mark is angry that his father selected for more than just avoiding Friedreich's Ataxia. He feels that his father has 'played god' and that his talent for tennis is not due to his own efforts but due to his father and genetic selection. Ryan believes that he was only acting in his child's best interests.

Get into groups of 4 or 5.

Choose who will be the role-players (2) and who will be the supporters.

The supporters will explain the role to their player, and will give support and ideas when asked for it, or even take over the role if the player wants to take 'time out'. Do not interrupt until the player asks for help.

The role-play can be run for about 5 minutes. Give the groups a one minute warning of the end of the exercise so that they can include all their ideas before it finishes.

Afterwards ask each group to discuss what happened: What went well and what could have been improved if it was repeated.

Then they can choose one of the small group to report back to the large group in a plenary,

Or, if they are an outgoing group they can perform the role-play in front of the large group.

At the end it is advisable to de-role the players. Ask them to state who they are and who they are not, in a formal way one after the other, to make sure they leave behind the feelings that may have been evoked.

More information can be found on the [Y Touring](http://www.ytouring.org.uk) web site:

<http://www.ytouring.org.uk>