

## Educational Leadership - From Research To Practice

Blog By: Surrey Schools Superintendent/CEO, Jordan Tinney

# Just because we can doesn't mean we should

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Published On: November 2nd 2013



[\\_\(<https://www.jordantinney.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Ethical-Dilemmas.jpg>\)](https://www.jordantinney.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Ethical-Dilemmas.jpg) Many times technology pushes the boundaries of our comfort levels. Where are the moral and ethical lines when it comes to current capabilities we possess? I came across a product that I wanted to highlight because I think it is a great example of a values based and ethical conversation about how we decide what to do when we have the capability but the simple use of the capability crosses the lines of comfort. In homage to Rushworth Kidder's great work on right versus right dilemmas, here is an ethical dilemma for the education blogosphere.

Everyone knows that social media is fraught with privacy issues. On a regular basis I am shocked to see just what people will put online in the public space. In many cases people have not taken advantage of the privacy settings that are available but in many other cases, people just post away ignoring the potential consequences. Teenagers are great examples of those who post and really don't give a ton of consideration to privacy. Certainly not all teens, but many post things that parents wish they would not.

Imagine a secondary school of 1500 students, just how much social media traffic is going on at any one time? I wouldn't want to guess at the volume of what is being sent all completely in the public domain for anyone potentially to see. If we could "capture" all those threads and conversations, what would you learn about a school's culture? What if you not only captured, but had a means to quickly analyze and look for trends and patterns? Perhaps trends and patterns of bullying or students in need of social/emotional support, brewing conflicts or other cultural issues that impact the learning culture and individual or groups of students. Would such a capture of publicly available data be useful?

Along comes Geo-listening (<https://geolistening.com/>). They have developed a service that can captures social media traffic originating from a school and they do analysis based on those threads. Targeting schools and districts as customers, they capture all public threads and posts originating from a school, analyze the results, and report back to the school on any material that they feel (in collaboration with the school) is a cause for concern. Then schools, can intervene and act as appropriate. Some schools have already adopted ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/16/glendale-schools-social-media\\_n\\_3935075.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/16/glendale-schools-social-media_n_3935075.html)) this service.



[\\_https://www.jordantinne.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Silence.jpg](https://www.jordantinne.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Silence.jpg)

I won't go into the argument for why Geo-listening feels that this is a needed service suffice to say that they feel very strongly that if we could stop one suicide, one instance of significant violence, then this is something that schools and boards of education should be using. I understand their argument fully. However this post is not intended to argue for or against, I am interested in the ethical and moral issues that emerge. Just because we can capture all the (already available) public posts from our students, my question is should we?

This is, to me, a fantastic example of where our technological capabilities are outpacing our pre-work on the ethical questions. In Rushworth's world of right versus right dilemmas – is it right to do all we can to stop bullying and to avoid tragedies? Absolutely. Is it right to respect our students privacy even if the "conversation" is in fact public? Absolutely. How do we adequately explore such questions without the quick jumping into camps where one side argues we have no right to eavesdrop on our students and the other side argues that if people post this in public anyway and if we can save one life by using such a service then we are compelled to do so?

The speed of technological advances continue to outpace public policy. We have in our hands tools that we haven't developed ethical frameworks for using let alone guidelines for practice. For teachers, many of these tools are doing amazing things in the classroom by empowering teachers and learners. We have a great little group in Surrey who are devoting their time to social media policy. It's representative of teachers, parents, and district staff and this group allows an ongoing conversation about how we not only develop enabling policies that support practice but we discuss how to balance responsibility vs. support. What we don't want is the baby thrown out with the bathwater.

If we aren't careful with the tools we have and the ways in which they are used, then we run the risk of the emergence of policies that are overly restrictive. I spent a couple of hours this week watching about 50 students try to write their own school policy on social media in the classroom. In the end there were many suggestions and a vote on statements. One of the top statements said:

"...our guiding principles for responsible and respectful use of cellphones and digital technology are that cell phones should be allowed in classrooms as long as it benefits students' learning, with students taking responsibility for their actions and teachers utilizing their own purposeful guiding principles in order for successful implementation."



(<https://www.jordantinney.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Trust.jpg>) My time with the students at Enver Creek further demonstrated that we should be showing students that we trust them. Their voice matters in the operation and the culture of a school. They not only know the implications but in this situation their responses fell into three distinct categories: protect the learning environment, develop responsible learners, and allow teachers to guide the rules for their classrooms. Seemed pretty logical to me. I guess all we have to do is to set the stage and listen...but perhaps from across the table and not from the sky above.

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30	31	1	2	3	4	5	
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	
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