

# Principals' Perspectives on Social Media in Schools

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## *Abstract*

The purpose of this study was to gather information from Texas school principals regarding their perspectives on social media as an instructional tool. This study examined current uses of social media in the schools, principals' perceptions of the educational value of social media, the necessity for digital citizenship, the potential barriers to using social media, and device usage. Overall, principals indicated via online questionnaire that they were using social media to communicate with stakeholders and there was enthusiasm toward using social media in the classroom for instructional purposes. However, the use of social

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media to promote 21st century skills remains has yet to reach its full potential and remains an elusive target. Principals also acknowledged implementing social media as instructional tools was a complex process.

**E**ducators around the world have been juggling information from testing standards, school guidelines, and district initiatives for years. Lately, they are beginning to hear a new lingo around the halls. Edmodo, Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest have taken on a whole new meaning for the 21st century classroom learning experience. These tools are core to a rapidly rising phenomena known as social media, which are defined as forms of electronic communication (as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Social media is touted to bring to the classroom instruction such as student engagement, collaborative learning, and developing skills for the future global workplace (Walsh, 2011). Although a vast majority of teachers are using social media in their personal and professional lives, fewer than one in five (18%) are implementing it into their instruction. Ironically, almost half (47%), believe that it could enhance learning (K-12 Teachers, 2014).

Principals, on the other hand, are finding social media to be robust platforms for communicating with parents and other community stakeholders (Sheninger, 2014). Unlike traditional static platforms such as newsletters and websites, social media enables greater interactions

with community stakeholders via the two-way exchange afforded by social media. Thus, principals who are master communicators can use social media to “empower teachers, keep stakeholders informed, and foster relationships” (Ferriter & Ramsden, 2011, p. 3).

The debate continues, though, over using social media as learning tools in the K-12 classroom. Proponents for inclusion of social media make several compelling arguments. Advocates point to studies by Pew Research which documents the widespread adoption and use of social media by adolescents (Madden, et al., 2013). Greenhow & Robelia (2009) argue that this widespread use supports the inclusion of social media and could “make schools even more relevant, connected, and meaningful to kids” (p. 1153). Others argue that participation on social media platforms leverages students’ ability to develop 21st century literacies such as collaboratively producing information in real time for global audiences. Opponents, however, also raise several salient points. Many opponents point to the prevalence of cyberbullying and child predators on social networking sites as well as a forfeiture of privacy (Crane, 2012). Others argue that school bandwidths are already strained to capacity and social media sites add a significant load (Campbell, 2013). A final frequent complaint is that social media sites are a significant distraction in the classroom (Lederer, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to gather information from Texas school principals regarding their perspectives on social media as an instructional tool. Principals and classroom teachers have embraced many emerging educational resources and use them with their students, but there are different views and opinions of social media

when using it in an educational environment. Negative effects such as cyberbullying, privacy, and access raise concerns about the use of social media in the classroom. On the other hand, collaboration, leadership, and 21st century skills are showcased when social media are introduced into instruction with care and concern. Social media specialists claim that social networking is here to stay and students are at the forefront of this battle.

## **Literature Review**

### **21st Century Skills**

At the outset of the 21st century, social media platforms provide many benefits to young people not the least of which are their ability to nurture 21st century skills and literacies (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Tucker, 2014). Many educators and policymakers have chosen to focus efforts on the transformation of K-12 learning environments through the implementation of 21st century learning skills and literacies. According to the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2002), students should develop robust skills in creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, and communication and collaboration. This framework was borne out of conversations with the business community, educators, and policymakers with the goal of improving the competitive advantage of the United States in a global economy. Although there has been debate on the importance of these skills relative to content knowledge (Higgins, 2014), the intent is to intertwine these skills with content knowledge (Rotherham & Willingham, 2010; Terego, 2009). Through this process, it is anticipated that students focus less on rote memorization and engage in deeper, more invigorating learning en-

vironments as producers rather than just consumers of information. Indeed, Greenlaw (2015) suggests that learning environments that balance the two approaches (content and 21st century skills) while incorporating meaningful work will lead to greater depth of understanding.

Workforce development is the oft-cited basis for the need for 21st century skills. Work environments of the 21st century are dominated by rapid technological change, scientific innovation, and collaborative teams working across time zones. Workers in this environment will be in a continual process of invention and reinvention of their skill sets as they create, analyze, and transform information resulting in innovative solutions to social, economic, political, and environmental problems (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2002). Communicating effectively not only with other workers, but also with stakeholders will require that students develop effective digital communication skills across a multitude of platforms and devices. The impetus for these changes is the shift to the knowledge economy where knowledge and ideas are the main sources of economic growth and knowledge workers who can think critically and creatively are the most important resource.

Some educators look to social media sites not only as a means for developing content knowledge and nurturing engagement and motivation but also for the 21st century skills they enable. A limited number of studies have documented gains made by K-12 students engaging in learning environments that include social media. Research on social media sites has documented that informal use of social media sites fosters collaborative knowledge building through their participatory culture where participants

change from consumers to producers and even co-builders and contributors to their digital community (Bradley & Thouësny, 2011; Cheng, Kuo, Hsin, & Wei, 2013). In school settings, students in social media mediated environments are no longer passive observers in the learning process, but active collaborators where they discuss, plan, and create knowledge through their interactions (Bull & Adams, 2012; Mao, 2014; Peters & Hopkins, 2013). Creating a generation of learners who can think critically and creatively to solve problems has become a priority across the globe (Thompson, 2011). Teachers are actively seeking learning experiences that scaffold deeper learning and situate learning in problem-solving and inquiry. Studies such as those reported by Krutka & Milton (2013) and McClain (2013) illustrate the potential for social media to support critical thinking in K-12 education. In the former, students in a social studies class researched philosophers from the Enlightenment and assumed their persona in Tweets and blogs to other students. Their task was to find areas of agreement and disagreement in their posts and Tweets regarding the role of government and the individual in society. In a similar vein, students in McClain's (2013) study of an English class assumed the persona of a character in *The Crucible* and created a character profile in Edmodo. Students interacted with each other in character through their posts. Finally, Lalonde and Castro (2015) working admittedly in an informal learning environment with at-risk teenagers found that the use of social media was engaging to their students and created a sense of community where teachers and learners co-constructed knowledge. Through these studies, we are better able to understand how social media has the potential to not only create en-

gaging learning environments, master content but also to develop and hone 21st century skills.

### **Technology Leadership**

Technology leadership by school principals is of critical importance for schools to provide these kinds of 21st century learning experiences. A cursory review of the literature reveals much debate on the attributes required for strong technology leadership, but Demski (2012) reports on a consensus of attributes established through a nationwide survey of school principals. According to this study, the critical elements of technology leadership are 1) creating an atmosphere that inspires innovation, 2) fostering collaboration, 3) being open to new ideas, 4) being a connected learner personally, 5) locating and providing appropriate resources, 6) taking risks, and 7) having a visionary focus. Working to attain these attributes helps to produce a school culture in which learning technologies are encouraged and supported. As Farrace (Create, 2014) observes, "Creating a culture that embraces technology is one of the most important tasks for principals, but also one of the most difficult to accomplish" (para. 6). Leadership style plays a strong role in the success of these efforts and it is argued that schools need to move away from autocratic forms of leadership toward more collaborative forms of leadership that support innovation and are adept at navigating the fast pace of technology change. After conducting a historical review of leadership styles, Creighton (2011) asserts that the Entrepreneurial Leadership style is one aspect of an overall leadership style that is a good fit for technology rich learning environments. Roomi and Harrison (2011) define Entrepreneurial Leadership as

“having and communicating the vision to engage teams to identify, develop and take advantage of an opportunity to gain competitive advantage” (p. 2). In their study of historically disadvantaged schools, Xaba and Malindi (2010) found that school principals in these schools unconsciously practiced the tenets of entrepreneurial leadership including proactiveness, innovativeness, and risk-taking and through this process were better able to acquire resources and deliver education to their students. Similarly, Pihie, Asmiran, and Bagheri (2014) found a significant relationship between teacher perceptions of principal entrepreneurial leadership and school innovativeness. Over the past several years, digital tools have become more pervasive in learning environments, but their use remains tied to lower level thinking skills, at best. To meet the challenges of both the workforce and 21st century learners, school leadership will need to pivot away from traditional leadership practices to more innovative ones.

Many school principals have found the affordances of social media platforms to be an important element in their school leadership practice. Communication and public relations with stakeholders, one of the nine most important skills of school principals (Hoyle, English, & Steffy, 1998), is the most oft-quoted rationale for using social media (Dembo, 2015; Ferriter & Ramsden, 2012; Kellough, & Hill 2014; Sheninger, 2014). School leaders who employ a strong social media communication plan earn the trust of their school communities, enjoy more positive feedback from stakeholders and benefit from a lively exchange of ideas with their off-site and extended community (Kellough & Hill, 2014; Larkin, 2015). Dembo (2015) further asserts that social media can support school princi-



pals' efforts to create a positive school culture and drive their agendas forward. Dr. Mark Stock, superintendent of the Wawasee School District, for example, uses his blog as a way to keep stakeholders in the school district informed of pending legislation, delays in school construction, and other pressing matters (Baird & Fisher, 2005). Similarly, Lepi (2012), reports on ten schools across the nation who are using social media in a "real world way." The principal at Piedmont High School in California, for example, uses Twitter to help students and teachers reach the school's goal: "Achieve the Honorable." Through his Twitter account, the principal communicates with students at the school, congratulates school teams, and posts updates about calendar events, educational tips, useful resources, and links. Others (Cox & McLeod, 2014; Sheninger, 2014) found that social media provide a unique platform for administrator professional development. Reaching beyond traditional networks, principals can leverage social media tools to participate in professional learning networks nationally and internationally. Through these networks, they can "communicate; collaborate; acquire resources; elicit feedback; get support; and share ideas, data, strategies, and information" with other principals (Sheninger, 2014, p. 48). Ultimately, some contend that the debate over the use of social media as part of school principals' leadership practice has been settled (Clark, 2012; Cox & McLeod, 2012) due to the emergence of newer forms of social media that offer school principals new opportunities to engage in rich interactions with stakeholders.

### **Challenges of Social Media**

Although social media offers considerable advan-

tages in communicating and engaging with school stakeholders, many school principals are reluctant to bring social media into the classroom due to challenges such as cyberbullying, student privacy issues, and access issues. Cyberbullying is typically defined as aggression that is intentionally and repeatedly carried out using digital forms of communication (e.g., e-mail, blogs, instant messages, text messages) against a defenseless person (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2012; Sticca & Perren, 2013). Recent studies of students' digital behaviors have found that cyberbullying is occurring at alarming rates. Researchers (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015) have found that as many as 25% of students reported that they had been bullied at some point in their lifetime and 10% reported that they had been bullied in the last 30 days. Similarly, these same studies indicated that 16% of students reported that they had cyberbullied at some point in their lifetimes, and 6% reported that they had cyberbullied in the last 30 days. Thus, as schools consider the use of social media in the schools, consideration must be given to the potential that some students may bring their negative digital behaviors into the learning environment. Some schools are responding to this challenge by educating students on proper digital citizenship (defined as "the norms of behavior with regard to active technology use," Ribble, Bailey, & Ross, 2004, p. 7), strengthening student policy regarding offenses, and community building (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012; Horowitz & Bollinger, 2014; Page & Page, 2015).

Protecting student privacy when using social media in academic environments is another concern for school principals (Whitehead, Floyd & Decker, 2013). Although, today's students are skillful at navigating across multiple

social media platforms sharing copious amounts of information about themselves throughout, school principals, bound by Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Child Internet Protection Act (CIPA), and like legislation, are concerned that students' personal information or preferences may be publicly revealed or hacked on social media sites if they are used as part of instruction (Baule & Lewis, 2012). Many social media sites are responding to the call for greater privacy by giving users more control over their privacy settings (Pacansky-Brock & Ko, 2013). Additionally on some social media sites, teachers can create class accounts where students are enrolled through class identifiers rather than personal information. On other social media sites, teachers can invite students to a closed group that is only available to students within the class.

Access to digital tools and networks is a final concern for principals (Hughes & Burke, 2014). While reports about the pervasiveness of student ownership of smartphones and devices continue to climb, some students still do not own these tools or have limited or no access to the Internet outside of school. According to Lenhart (2015), 75% of teenagers in their national survey claimed ownership or access to a smartphone and 91% of teenagers reported that they most frequently used mobile devices to access the Internet. While these numbers reflect a substantial decline in the Digital Divide, there are still some students for whom accessing the Internet for a homework assignment outside of school may prove problematic especially in many rural environments. Some schools are addressing these concerns through providing before and after school access to computer labs and the library, placing wifi

on school buses and working with public libraries (McCrea, 2015; Ormiston, 2011).

Given the available literature, the following list of research questions guided this study:

1. Which social media sites do school principals see being implemented in their schools
2. What results do school principals see from teachers using social media in the classroom?
3. What are school principals' perceptions of digital citizenship?
4. What barriers do school principals face when using social media in the classroom for instructional purposes?
5. What technology devices and platforms, are commonly used in classrooms?

## **Methodology**

To explore school principals' attitudes toward and perceptions of the use of social media in classroom instruction, surveys were administered through an online survey program. A survey research design was employed in this study because it collects quantitative, numbered data using a questionnaire and statistically analyzes the data to describe trends about responses to questions (Creswell, 2011).

## **Participants**

Responses were drawn from principals in a school district in Texas and included 25 principals and 18 assistant principals at all levels. Participants ranged between the ages of 40-49 and were largely female with 27 females responding and 16 males responding. The majority of re-

spondents were experienced educators and had 21-25 years of experience. Although most participants had been in education for a time, the data showed most of them to

Table 1  
*Demographics of Surveyed Participants*

	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	27	62.79
Male	16	37.21
<b>Age</b>		
30-39	13	30.23
40-49	15	34.88
50-59	13	30.23
>60	2	4.65
<b>Years in Education</b>		
6-10 years	3	6.98
11-15 years	8	18.60
16-20 years	10	23.26
21-25 years	12	27.91
26-30 years	6	13.95
30+ years	4	9.30
<b>Years at Current Position</b>		
Less than 1	7	16.28
1-5 years	22	51.16
6-10 years	7	16.28
11-15 years	7	16.28
16-20 years	0	0
21-25 years	0	0

be in their current position for 1-5 years. A breakdown of the participants is shown in Table 1.

## **Context**

The principals in this study were drawn from a medium size urban district in Texas. Over 90% of the students in this district are Hispanic with 79% of the students classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged. This district has embarked on several technology initiatives including a model technology classroom initiative, a Bring-Your-Own-Device, or BYOD, initiative, and information literacy centers in the school libraries.

## **Instrumentation**

A researcher-developed survey instrument was created with a total of 29 questions divided into two sections. The first section included demographic items such as gender, age, educational experience, current position in education, and years at the current position. The second section included questions on social media familiarity, devices used, websites used, and looked to determine how social media was best utilized and its effectiveness on each campus. There were several types of formats for the survey including forced choice items with yes or no answer choices or Likert-scaled items with 6 choices ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree and open-ended items that included choices of websites, devices, and information related to social media.

## **Procedures**

An online survey was used to gather data from participants. After approval for the research project was ob-

tained from the school district and the university institutional review board, approximately 62 potential principals and assistant principals were invited to participate in the study through an email that contained a link to the online survey. Once the link was accessed, the participants were able to give consent and answer the questions in the study. Two weeks after the initial survey was sent, a follow-up email was sent to non-respondents requesting completion of the questionnaire. The survey was open for one month and generated 43 completed responses giving a response rate of 69%.

### **Data Analysis**

A total of 48 surveys were submitted. All surveys were examined by the researchers for completeness and 5 were rejected for incomplete responses leaving 43 complete surveys. Quantitative data were downloaded from the survey website and analyzed in a spreadsheet. Descriptive statistics including item, frequencies and percentages were calculated for each survey.

## **Results**

### **Social Media in the School**

In the first part of the survey, school principals were asked to report on what social media applications they had observed in their schools. A substantial majority of participants surveyed indicated that social media was allowed and encouraged on their campus for both instruction (90%) and disseminating information (83%). However, 37% of school principals indicated that fewer than 15 percent of their classroom teachers were using social media applications for instruction, 28% responded that between

15-35% of their teachers use social media for instruction. Only 21% said half of their teachers use social media for instruction. Of the social media applications that they had

Table 2  
*Social Media in the School*

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
<b>Is social media allowed/encouraged on your campus?</b>		
For instruction	Yes – 39	90.70
	No – 4	9.30
For disseminating data	Yes – 35	83.33
	No – 7	16.67
<b>Which of the following social media are used on your campus for <u>instruction</u>?</b>		
Facebook	11	26.19
Twitter	4	9.52
Instagram	3	7.14
Pinterest	15	35.71
YouTube	31	73.81
Blogs	14	33.33
Wikis	5	11.90
None	3	7.14
<b>Which of the following social media are used on your campus for <u>disseminating information</u>?</b>		
Facebook	22	61.11
Twitter	3	8.33
Instagram	3	8.33
Pinterest	6	16.67
YouTube	11	30.56
Blogs	9	25.00
Wikis	0	0.00
None	7	19.44



observed, principals indicated that the most frequently observed social media application for instruction was YouTube with 74%, followed by Pinterest with 36%. When considering social media for disseminating information from the school, Facebook had the highest number of users with 61% (see Table 2).

### **Value of Social Media**

School principals' beliefs regarding the educational value of social media were examined in this part of the survey. There was robust agreement among participants that social media applications were useful in the classroom with 52% in agreement or strong agreement and 35% somewhat agreeing (see Table 3). While there was overall agreement that social media applications had favorable results in student participation, participants split on the degree of agreement with 49% agreeing or strongly agreeing and 45% only somewhat agreeing. Similarly, while there was overall agreement that social media applications contributed to success on standardized test scores, the majority of participants, 61%, only somewhat agreed with that statement. There was similar modest agreement when asked if they encouraged teachers to use social media in their instruction with 40% indicating that they only somewhat agree with that statement. When asked which social media applications they felt were appropriate for the classroom, the majority of school principals chose YouTube and Pinterest. Finally, a considerable majority (65%) agreed that they had provided professional development for teachers on using social media applications for classroom instruction.

Table 3  
*Educational Value of Social Media in Instruction*

	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Classes which use social media applications have favorable results in participation.</b>		
Strongly disagree	1	2.38
Disagree	0	0.00
Somewhat disagree	1	2.38
Somewhat agree	19	45.24
Agree	14	33.33
Strongly agree	7	16.67
<b>Classes which use social media applications have favorable results in standardized test scores.</b>		
Strongly disagree	1	2.38
Disagree	2	4.76
Somewhat disagree	4	9.52
Somewhat agree	26	61.90
Agree	6	14.29
Strongly agree	3	7.14
<b>I encourage teachers in my school to use social media platforms in their classrooms for instruction.</b>		
Disagree	1	2.38
Somewhat disagree	2	4.76
Somewhat agree	17	40.48
Agree	12	28.57
Strongly agree	10	23.81
<b>In your opinion, which social media platforms are useful for classroom instruction?</b>		
Facebook	12	28.57
Twitter	12	28.57
Instagram	10	23.81
Pinterest	20	47.62
YouTube	37	88.10
Blogs	23	54.76
Wikis	13	30.95
None	0	0.00

## Digital Citizenship

School administrator's perspectives on digital citizenship formed the next part of the survey. In these questions, school principals were asked if they believed that schools should review digital citizenship with students to protect student privacy and to prevent cyberbullying. There was robust agreement with these statements with approximately 79% agreeing or strongly agreeing to the need to review digital citizenship to protect student privacy and approximately 72% agreeing or strongly agreeing that reviewing digital citizenship is necessary to prevent cyberbullying (see Table 4).

Table 4  
*Digital Citizenship*

	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Schools who do not review digital citizenship before using social media in instruction face the issue of protecting student's privacy.</b>		
Strongly disagree and Disagree	0	0.00
Somewhat disagree	2	4.76
Somewhat agree	7	16.67
Agree	20	47.62
Strongly agree	13	30.95
<b>Schools who do not review digital citizenship with students at the beginning of the year face issues of cyber bullying and/or online abuse.</b>		
Strongly disagree and Disagree	0	0.00
Somewhat disagree	4	9.52
Somewhat agree	8	19.05
Agree	17	40.48
Strongly agree	13	30.95

## **Barriers**

School principals were asked a few questions related to specific barriers to using social media applications in the classroom. A majority of participants agreed or somewhat agreed (65%) that using social media would cause technology problems. A larger majority agreed or somewhat agreed (72%) that they would face resistance from teachers if asked to include it in their instruction (see Table 5). There was similar strong agreement that parents would resist using social media in the classroom with 66% agreeing or somewhat agreeing.

## **Technology Tools**

The last part of the survey considered technology tools were used on their campuses for instructional purposes. All principals indicated that they had seen iPads being used on their campus for instruction with mobile devices such as iPhones and Androids ranked second and third highest percentage at 74 and 54 percent (see Table 6). Platforms such as BYOD and 1:1 were acknowledged and principals agreed that these platforms help integrate social media into classroom instruction. Also, 75% of participants showed robust agreement with the statement that providing technology to teachers will increase the implementation of using social media in the classroom.

## **Discussion**

Social media has become a dominant, pervasive force in our lives. The focus and power of social media for adolescents are about leveraging their personal networks to become part of and to engage with a broader community where they can “gather, connect, hang out and joke

Table 5  
*Barriers*

	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Schools who include social media in instruction face technology problems from technology issues in using social media.</b>		
Strongly disagree	3	7.14
Disagree	3	7.14
Somewhat disagree	8	19.05
Somewhat agree	20	47.62
Agree	8	19.05
Strongly agree	0	0.00
<b>Schools who include social media in instruction face resistance from teachers in including it in their instruction.</b>		
Strongly disagree	2	4.76
Disagree	5	11.90
Somewhat disagree	9	21.43
Somewhat agree	19	45.24
Agree	7	16.67
Strongly agree	0	0.00
<b>Schools who include social media in instruction face resistance from parents objecting to their student's participation on social media sites</b>		
Strongly disagree	2	4.76
Disagree	5	11.90
Somewhat disagree	11	26.19
Somewhat agree	17	40.48
Agree	7	16.67
Strongly agree	0	0.00

Table 6  
*Technology Tools*

	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Please select the devices in which you see being utilized at your school for classroom instructional use. Please select all that apply.</b>		
iPad	43	100.00
iPod	26	60.47
iPhone	32	74.42
Microsoft Surface Tablet	7	16.28
Google Chromebook	11	25.58
Android Mobile Devices	23	53.49
Nook	13	30.23
Kindle Fire	15	34.88
None	0	0.00
<b>Technology platforms, such as Bring-Your-Own-Device or 1:1, help teachers to implement social media into classroom instruction.</b>		
Strongly disagree	1	2.38
Disagree	0	0.00
Somewhat disagree	0	0.00
Somewhat agree	14	33.33
Agree	17	40.48
Strongly agree	10	23.81

around” (Boyd, 2014, p.9). In their study of adolescents, the Pew Research Center (Lenhart, 2015) found that mobile devices have enabled 92% of teens to be online daily, 56% to be online several times a day and 24% of teens to be online constantly. Further, Pew Research also found that at least 71% of teens participate across multiple social media sites including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and

Snapchat. Adults also engage in social media communities (Duggan, Ellison, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015) with 74% of all online adults participating on social media sites. The principals in this study acknowledge this social media paradigm shift and as seen by their overwhelmingly agreement that they use social media to connect with and disseminate information to their stakeholders. The principals' first choice of social media platform for information dissemination was Facebook with all others trailing well behind.

The principals in this study did not find social media to be a transformative presence in their schools. Although they overwhelmingly endorsed the use of social media for instruction and there was strong support for encouraging teachers to use social media as part of their instruction, the majority of principals reported that they had observed fewer than 35% of their teachers using social media in their instruction. Further, when asked what social media sites were observed, the majority named YouTube followed by Pinterest. Approximately one third also indicated that they had observed student blogging. Similar results were found when asked what sites they considered appropriate for instruction. These results are similar to previous research that found that teachers' predominant use of video is for presentations or motivation (Tamim, 2014). While YouTube does provide a vast video resource for teachers, its use is analogous to the use of video in VCRs from a generation ago (McCleod, 2014). In this instructional model, teachers chose the video, teachers presented the video, and students passively watched the video. With regard to Pinterest, the principals' second choice, teachers use it largely as a source of professional

development with its “creative lesson plans, classroom decorations, and teaching tips” (Cummings, 2015, para 2). Nevertheless, the principals did find value in social media giving modest agreement that it could support greater participation and could contribute to better standardized test scores. However, the vision of Holland and Judge (2013) where social media “can be effectively harnessed to support constructivist and transformative learning environments, enabling collaborative engagement in authentic learning situations, reflective practice, and sharing of learner knowledge and experience” (p.6) remains largely untapped in this study.

Finally, the principals in this study found that implementing social media in their schools was a complex process requiring thoughtful analysis of existing processes and structures and careful planning and consideration. In many districts, access to technology is the overarching struggle in implementing any technology program. As evidenced in the digital tools survey items, this district is well supplied with iPads and other devices minimizing this usual constraint. Principals in this study also showed strong support for educating students about the intricacies of digital citizenship and netiquette (Internet etiquette) prior to their engaging in social media. This is consistent with Weiser’s (2013) assertions that districts successful in implementing social media programs are found in schools “that recognize the importance of guiding students in their journey” (p. 38). The principals in this study also acknowledged the possibility of teacher and parent resistance to using social media as part of classroom instruction. In order to create and cultivate a robust social media program that engages students in rich and meaningful learning ex-



periences, principals will need to provide active leadership in facilitating change (Rosenberg, 2014). As leaders, they will need to engage with stakeholders to seek discussion and develop a shared vision for student success. They will need to examine ongoing barriers to the challenges in implementing social media platforms such as Acceptable Use Plans (AUP) disciplinary policies, and district filters. Finally, these principals also agreed that staff development was offered, and teachers were given opportunities to learn the tools. This suggests that as principals continue to see these devices used on their campuses and as they see support for teachers, social media integration in the classroom will benefit students in the long run and become a natural tool for instructional preparation.

### **Implications**

Although infrastructure is important, the strongest predictor of teacher use of technology is principal leadership (Anderson & Dexter, 2005). Therefore, as schools look to broaden and strengthen their use of social media in their learning environment, each school's leadership team must assess how their leadership style and school culture mediates change. Selvaraja and Pihie (2014), for example, argue that schools with the typical top-down or hierarchical leadership style have a poor relationship with innovation whereas schools that support innovation are characterized by entrepreneurial leadership and cultures that encourage teacher risk-taking and creativity. Numerous authors have also stressed the importance of shared leadership structures in which technology leadership is distributed through a team of teacher experts allowing the school to work collaboratively in sharing ideas and expertise

(Hauge & Norenes, 2014; Hughes, & Burke, 2014; Schrum & Levin, 2013). At this point, using social media in instruction is more of a rarity than accepted practice. Thus, implementing school leadership structures which intertwine entrepreneurship and shared leadership enable schools to collaboratively invest in promising practices, challenge conventional ideas, and manage the associated risks.

Hope and Stakenas (1999) proposed three primary roles for the principal as technology leader: role model, instructional leader, and visionary. While administrators do not need to be intimately acquainted with the nuts and bolts of machines, they do need to demonstrate effective use of technology in their practice, understand the pedagogical affordances that digital information and devices provide, and convey a vision of the potential impact of technology on teaching and learning (Creighton, 2003; Whitehead, Boschee, & Decker, 2012). The principals in this study had some familiarity with social media and some even used it in their practice, but few saw a role for it beyond a few limited uses. Thus, professional development for the principal becomes key to finding a wider and more robust purpose for social media in the curriculum.

Of equal importance is professional development on integrating social media in instruction for teachers. Although 80% of teachers use social media for personal or professional use (Bolkan, 2014), fewer than 15% use it in instruction and as our research indicates, the definition of social media can vary (Bolkan, 2015). Further, 62% indicated that they were reluctant to incorporate social media into their practice. Professional development would need to include not only how to use a variety of media as in-

structional tools, strategies for integrating social media into the curriculum, but also how to keep students safe.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study was limited by its use of data from a single district in Texas. Further, the use of a survey for data collection limits the accuracy of the results as they reflect self-report, which may vary from actual circumstances. This study may have turned out differently if data were obtained from a larger number of participants. Consequently, future research should obtain data from a broader spectrum of participants who represent a wider geographic area in order to improve the ability to generalize research findings and results. In addition, more research is needed that demonstrates the ability of social media to improve student engagement and learning outcomes. Finally, future research could explore the personal perspectives of principals where a more robust platform of social media has been permitted to understand what benefits they saw and how they managed the challenges.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the school principals' perspectives of the impact of social media in schools. The majority of school principals surveyed feel that implementation is important for teachers and students on their campuses. Social media interaction keeps students engaged, interested, and teachers can perfect their practices by incorporating tools in which our digital natives are familiar.

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