

Leadership, Citizenship and Critical Thinking Enabled Through Machiavellian Methodologies

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Abstract

From a behavioural perspective data-driven decision making enabled through tracking of online behaviour and communication may afford school organizations the ability to gain insight into behavioural intention. Traits common with Machiavellianism in online behaviour on social media websites lends itself to spying to increase the users repertoire of “advantageous” information to use. This study considers the potential student benefits attributed to tracking online behaviour and collection of “advantageous” information found online in schools including the development of leadership, citizenship and critical thinking, as well as enabling data-driven decision making and evidence-based psychology. Data and results from a two-year qualitative study provides insight into school administration and information technology staff experience with technology policies and the collection of student data.

Keywords: Leadership; Critical Thinking; Tracking; Evidence-based

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1. Introduction

Scholars have a very limited understanding of the extent to which technology policies may impose inequitable threats to students from marginalized or vulnerable populations, who may be less familiar with some of the nuances of technology. Thus, there is a need for research to understand:

1. *How schools and boards define inappropriate behavior;*
2. *How they may accommodate those in vulnerable and marginalized populations;*
and
3. *How marginalized and vulnerable populations are accorded greater protections because of their status.*

2. Theoretical Framework

Micropolitics involves issues of structural power games including the development and maintenance of contacts for personal gain (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Awareness of gender-bias, equitable hiring and strategic reflections can help provide deeper understanding (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). From a behavioural perspective data-driven decision making enabled through tracking of online behaviour and communication may afford organizations the ability to gain insight into behavioural intention (Ajzen, 1991) while offering assessments or guidance for cognitive self-regulation (Ajzen, 1991). Machiavellianism lends itself to spying “by doing so they can increase their repertoire of “advantageous” information they possess” (Stiff, 2019, p. 63). “Power and influence, however, don’t only refer to tension, conflict, struggle and rivalry, but also encompass collaboration or coalition building in order to achieve certain valued goals” (Blasé, 1991 as cited by Kelchtermans, Ballet, 2000, p. 5).

3. Methodologies

Research and data collection began in 2019, with four Canadian School Districts (located in British Columbia (BC) and Ontario (ON)) agreeing to participate in person and online. Coronavirus disease 2019 protocols for Face-to-Face contact were followed and noted in this study, with the additional complexity of Ontario teachers and administrators engaged in Work-to-rule job action which has yet to be resolved as of the date of publication. Interviews took place on-site at school board offices, and online through videoconferencing, over the phone and through emails. Triangulation of data was achieved through teacher written response (list of questions), followed by teacher interview, and finally through external review. A case study approach was used to summarize the findings.

There are limitations to the present study. First, it should be acknowledged that the participants in the study were selected based on their technological background, and position within the participating school districts. Second, the sample size is a limitation. Socio-economic status (SES) is a third consideration in this study due to the technology provided

to the schools, and the experience with technology students and parents or caregivers had in the home. One final consideration is the potential for participants to formulate responses that the researcher may wish to hear, or that the school district may wish to hear when participating in a research study, such as this.

Interview transcripts were reviewed with an open-coding format, which facilitated the consideration of emergent patterns. The information collected set a framework for the literature and guided the direction of themes emerging from previous interviews, ones that aligned with the literature review as well as new ones that had yet to be mentioned. The combination of the data from the four case studies and literature review helped to refine and differentiate categories to explore that seem promising to develop. Axial coding is used to relate emergent patterns found in the case study data with literature review themes.

Table 1. Demographic information collected from study participants

	Case Study # 1	Case Study # 2	Case Study # 3	Case Study # 4
Date	Jan 8.2020- Jan 10.2020	Oct 29.2019	Nov 1. 2019	Dec 13.2019
Location	Vancouver Island, BC	Vancouver Island, BC	Toronto, ON	Vancouver Island, BC
Size	8,000 students	11,300 students	247,000 students	14 700 students
Gender	Female: 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d	Male: 1a, 1b	Female: 1	Male: 1
Position	Teacher : 1a, 1b, 1c, Administrator : 1d	Head of Department : 1a Director (IT): 1b	Administrator : 1	Management (IT): 1

4. Results

Q1: How do schools and boards define inappropriate behavior

Data collected during the study indicated inappropriate behaviour in schools, from the perspective of participants is often anything not assignment related (Case Study 1 (CS1), without the permission of the teacher (CS3) and during instructional time (CS1; CS3; CS4), or on school electronic resources. Consent for taking pictures (CS1), videos (CS1), recording others, disrupting others (CS2), or interacting in a hurtful and harmful way (CS3) was also indicative of inappropriate behaviour. Finally, concerns about the use of phones in class

(CS1; CS3; CS4) and the exchange of personal phone numbers (CS1) lead to the perception of cheating with phones on math problems (CS1), or during tests (CS4), and privacy concerns (CS1). As of Nov 2019, the province of Ontario has issued an acceptable use policy to guide school principals in the application of the term in Ontario schools (CS3).

Q2: How do educational institutions define inappropriate behaviour?

Data collected during the study indicated inappropriate behaviour in schools, from the perspective of participants is often anything not assignment related (CS1), without the permission of the teacher (CS3) and during instructional time (CS1; CS3; CS4), or on school wifi. Consent for taking pictures (CS1), videos (CS1), recording others, disrupting others (CS2), or interacting in a hurtful and harmful way (CS3) was also indicative of inappropriate behaviour. Finally, concerns about the use of phones in class (CS1; CS3; CS4) and the exchange of personal phone numbers (CS1) lead to the perception of cheating with phones on math problems (CS1), or during tests (CS4), and privacy concerns (CS1). As of Nov 2019, the province of Ontario has issued an acceptable use policy to guide school principals in the application of the term in Ontario schools (CS3).

Q3: What are the potential courses of action and consequences that can be taken, relating to inappropriate use?

Data collected during the study indicated that specific networks, such as Palo Alto Networks (CS2) firewalls and they have lists of sites that are inappropriate and accepted as industry wide lists. Additionally, inappropriate sites such as porn sites are blocked, malicious sites, malware sites are all blocked (CS2). Schools can use the same tool to occasionally block a site that is an obvious phishing website (CS2). Teachers can request and view internet browser history (CS3), to see if students were off task in class. The use of digital platforms such as Google Classroom (CS3), and Google Apps for Education (GAFE) (CS2) offer an electronic footprint (CS3), that allows schools to track and monitor if students are misusing their access, writing stuff and sharing inappropriate documents. If a school requests, sites can be identified as social media applications and blocked (CS2). The teacher can request a particular student is blocked (CS2) from access for a temporary period (CS2) and if the cell phone is the device used for the inappropriate use, schools can request to see the phone (CS3). Many schools use a progressive discipline (CS3) approach that allows students several attempts at regulating behaviour that escalate in increments as the behaviour continues, worsens or challenges. These policies are successful when loss of privileges and phone jails (CS3) in the office are supported by parents in the community.

5. Key Findings

1. A person's understanding of the term vulnerable or marginalized dictates their assumptions of how that person might differ in their understanding

For the participants in case study 2, IT staff considered the role of assistive technologies when considering the term vulnerable or marginalized. Due to the remote and isolated community case study 2 represents, the term marginalized was modified to include the term "isolated" (CS2-1b). The school district response was to increase "hands-on" opportunities when possible. The teachers represented in case study 1 considered socio economic status and First People's to be vulnerable or marginalized, in addition to children, teenagers and senior citizens. One teacher believed that a low socioeconomic status (SES) implied a high likelihood "have less exposure to information about digital citizenship and educational use of devices" (CS1-1a). However, the other two teachers did not believe differences existed in understandings because, "in this day and age access is everywhere and usage is growing all the time" (CS1-1b), and "all people are capable of inappropriate use and actions with BYOD" (CS1-1c). The administrator in case study 1 considered English language learners, adults over the age of 50, senior citizens and administrators to be vulnerable or marginalized and believed that students learn what has been modeled to them by their environment (CS1-1d), therefore there are subtle and larger differences in understandings about social contracts. Well-being and in particular suicidal students were considered vulnerable or marginalized by the administrator/parent in case study 3.

2. IT staff and consequentially school districts may be unsure of their application of privacy matters for the electronic storage of, or access to, personally identifiable information

Since the shift in control some school districts are struggling with their application of privacy matters, "That is an area we struggle with, is how do we manage, how do we ensure that we have the right privacy controls in place" (CS2). Everything now is on the cloud, right." (CS2). Parents have requested greater privacy controls in some cases, "we have a parent that will not give us consent to allow their child to be on Google Apps for Education (GAPE) using their regular name. They want to use a randomized name like island life or something like that which encloses its own sort of issues like how do the teacher or students know who that student is" (CS2). Both school districts rely on Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPPA) for guidance in privacy matters and sharing information (CS2; CS4).

6. Scientific or scholarly significance of the study or work

The concept of leadership and citizenship can be daunting for some students and exhilarating for others. “Education and engagement are political acts that can bring about empowerment” (Freire, 1970 as cited by Stanlick & Sell, 2016, p. 80). However, the concept of what makes a strong leader can be stereotypical “First-year students receive messages that they should become innovative entrepreneurs- over-emphasize a particular conception of leadership: one that assumes technocratic power centered on innovative individuals at the top of the social hierarchies” (Stanlick & Sell, 2016, p. 80). While the motivation behind some student leaders may be world domination, striving to ensure students are engaged in their communities through careful observation, discourse and action may be the mark of a true leader for other students and teachers. “Avoid the superhero mentality and focus instead on connecting and sustaining, with the goal of collective empowerment at the forefront” (Stanlick & Sell, 2016, p. 80).

While studies suggest students with Machiavellian tendencies may use their knowledge of others for their own personal gain (Stiff, 2019), student reflection on power and their awareness of their power can be educational. Stanlick and Sell (2016) noted “Freire, also affirms the need for oppressors – those who hold privilege and power in a way that marginalizes and disempowers others – to honestly acknowledge power imbalance and re-examine their role through “conscientization” (critical consciousness)” (p. 80). Jameson, Clayton, and Jaeger (2010) suggested transformative reciprocity ensures all stakeholders are transformed by a deep thick collaboration. “Valuing humility in our students and ourselves needs to be a top priority as we navigate meaningful engagement, with open lines of communication (Stanlick & Sell, 2016, p. 81-82). Not surprisingly for students who have experienced a loss of membership, “The remedy to that power imbalance is education, through which the oppressed regain their sense of humanity and agency” (Stanlick & Sell, 2016, p. 80).

Students can sometimes experience a lack of voice or engagement when they feel policies are unfair or did not involve them, therefore the use of a student leadership team can prove beneficial as yearly reviews of school policies are given an opportunity for students to reflect, critique, question and edit. Involving the students in policy review invites students to practice agency and resistance in a structured way. Stanlick and Sell (2016) posit “Challenges to established understandings invite ongoing making and remaking of their place in the world and their beliefs” (p. 82). While providing parents with a policy and asking for their help to engage their student removes the student from the policy meaning making and advocacy. “Planning and designing that happens outside of the partnership relegates the community

partner to a powerless or supporting position” (Stanlick and Sell, 2016, p. 82). Further opportunities to cultivate humility are suggested by Lund and Lee (2015) “Cultivating humility can lead to better outcomes” (Stanlick and Sell, 2016, p. 82) and further, allow students to, in as much ways as they possibly can lead and govern their education. “Let us take care in our rush to provide assistance and right wrongs that we not assume a role that disempowers and reduces agency” (Stanlick & Sell, p. 81).

7. References

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