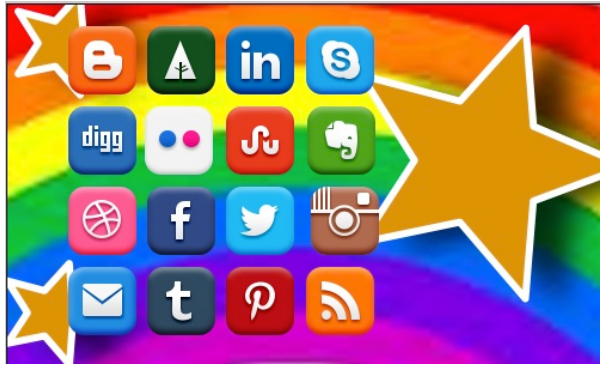


As the Director of Information Technology at Holy Trinity Episcopal Academy in Melbourne, FL, one of Susan Bearden's primary roles is educating teachers and students about the safe use of technology. If you asked her in 2009 what she thought of social media, especially its use by teachers or in schools, her thoughts were stern and forbidding.



The open and unpredictable nature of social media ran counter to the very principles of best IT practice. How could you maintain privacy and security in a public and unsecure environment? Meanwhile, there were countless examples of misuse that negatively impacted individuals or schools. Why risk it?

However in 2010, she changed her stance. After hearing a colleague discuss the use of Twitter in her classroom at a state conference, she was curious about the possibilities. She followed up with the speaker, and later visited her school to see the use of social media in the classroom first hand.

"I was blown away by the things they were doing at the school, even though they didn't have a tech-rich environment in terms of computers," Bearden said. "They were teaching students how to blog and comment appropriately on social media, and using it to fuel discussions, and using Skype to communicate with other classes around the world. It was incredible to watch."

Bearden decided to give Twitter a try and began tweeting and following popular education hashtags and ed chats. Like Dorothy waking up in Oz, Bearden quickly saw her personal learning network (PLN) explode with new characters, discussions, and variety. Inspired by other teachers who blogged, she tried blogging. She became a regular on multiple ed chats, and then a moderator on #edtechchat. She built friendships with educators all over the world, and began receiving invitations to speak about social media topics and write articles for publications such as *The Huffington Post* and *The Center for Digital Education*.

In January 2013, she ranked 9th on Huffington's national list, "[The 50 Most Social CIOs on Twitter](#)," above leaders from NASA, the Office of the President, DreamWorks Animation, and Seagate Technology. On Twitter today, she has over 6,500 followers. She also has a significant presence on Google +, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and Facebook. Anyone would say Bearden's career has reached new heights and she's had incredible new opportunities – all because of her use of social media.

Bearden says her biggest gains have been through the relationships she has made, plus the ability to stay on top of cutting-edge education and technology trends.



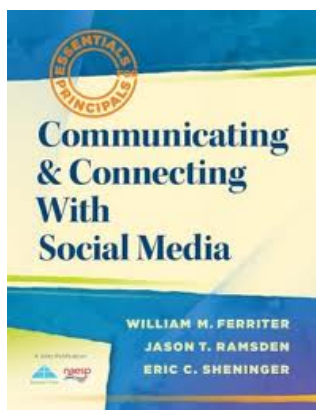
“Teachers don’t have a lot of time to connect with other teachers and I just love getting to know more and more educators and the broader ed community. I’ve connected with teachers from all sectors – private, public, charter – and we’ve had some of the most interesting conversations. We all care about making education better for all kids, and social media is the chat room where we can discuss how.”

According to Scholastic Instructor, 45% of all K-12 teachers use some form of social media for work purposes. On Twitter, around 8% of all users are K-12 educators. Pinterest is wildly popular with elementary school teachers, and grew by 3,267% between 2012 and 2013 alone. Around 65% of K-12 teachers say they use YouTube to upload videos, music, photos, or projects. Other networks are growing in popularity or are equally popular: Google +, LinkedIn, Instagram, and of course Facebook and the various platforms teachers use to blog and teleconference, including Skype, but also WordPress, and Google’s Blogger, to name a few.



Jason Ramsden, Chief Technology Officer at Ravenscroft School in Raleigh, NC, has been active on social media longer than most. He opened his first Twitter account in 2007, a year after the site launched when there were less than 50,000 users total. He branched out into blogging and podcasting, and over time grew a robust and diverse PLN. He uses Twitter not only to connect to other educators, but also to glean content for his school updates and blogs. For instance, on his blog, “[Cup of Joe with the CTO](#),” he publishes topical news or advice for parents and students about how to use technology safely. He aggregates his Twitter feeds using Paper.li to launch a second newsletter, “The Innovative Educator,” and to gain ideas for his other publications.

Ramsden has also had numerous opportunities arise due to his use of social media. Among other positions, he is presently a member of NAIS' 21st Century Curriculum/Technology Task Force, a contributing writer for [edSocialMedia.com](#), and a board member for Triangle Learning



Community Middle School. Also, he is a co-author of *Communicating and Connecting with Social Media*, which was published in May 2011 as part of Solution Tree’s “Essentials for Principals” series. How was Ramsden inspired to write a book? He met his fellow authors, William Ferriter and Eric Sheninger, via Twitter. The group spent around six months coordinating their work virtually via Google docs.

Ramsden estimates about 20% of the teachers at Ravenscroft currently use social media, but that number is growing. He encourages his fellow teachers to leverage social media to grow their PLN. Doreen Kelly, Head of School at Ravenscroft, also encourages her teachers to try social media, and models its use with her own activity on Twitter and Instagram. “I’m on Twitter all the time; it’s a great way to connect to other educators and see what they are reading and what’s going on in their world,” she said. “Also, as head of school, it’s great to document what’s going on in our school community, share pride in our institute, and market our school.”



Jennifer Carey, Director of Educational Technology at Ransom Everglades School in Miami, FL, says she was “a techy” since she was a child. She grew up in San Francisco during the dot.com boom in Silicon Valley. Her father had an original Apple I computer, and they had Internet access as early as the 1980s. She studied archeology and mythology in college, and later taught the subjects at Texas Christian University before choosing to move into independent schools. She



taught U.S. History at Trinity Valley School in Fort Worth, TX, and quickly differentiated herself due to her technology skills and growing presence online. She developed a robust following on her blog, “Indiana Jen” and wrote articles for MindShift and Edudemic.

Along with her blog, Carey has 4,510 followers on Twitter and, in a Mashable article in January 2014, was named one of “[Ten Rockstar Teachers on Twitter](#).” Like others, Carey values social media’s ability to connect her with other educators and experts to share content, experiences, and ideas.

“Working in education can be very isolating,” Carey said. “You spend most of your time with kids or students in a classroom or similar setting. But with social media and online communities, we have the opportunity to collaborate with our peers instantly. The majority of teachers want to know what else is going on, and are interested in making their lessons more dynamic or relevant.”

Bo Adams, Chief Learning and Innovation Officer at Mount Vernon Presbyterian School in Atlanta, describes himself as, foremost, a learner. He believes that learning is part of being human and the best teachers are those who inspire learning organically. Social media has been a natural fit for Adams, considering his love of processing, planning, learning, designing, and sharing his explorations with others. He likes nothing better than being a part of conversations about how to make schools more like real life or what disciplines or environments facilitate greater learning. With technology, he says we are somewhat like Lewis and Clark in their exploration of the Louisiana Purchase. We don’t know all the ways technology can enhance learning. We don’t know what the classroom will look like in ten years or what partnerships could emerge, so we must be willing – purposefully excited even – to explore new ground.



Adams relies on multiple social media and tech resources for his daily explorations. His digital footprint spans Twitter, Google +, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Diigo, which he manages via dashboards and aggregators such as Feedly and HootSuite. He writes weekly on his WordPress blog, “[It’s About Learning](#).” He served as the Director of Educational Innovation at Unboundary, a strategic design studio in Atlanta, between July 2012 and May 2013. Prior to that, he spent 17 years in various teaching and leadership positions at The Westminster Schools of Atlanta.

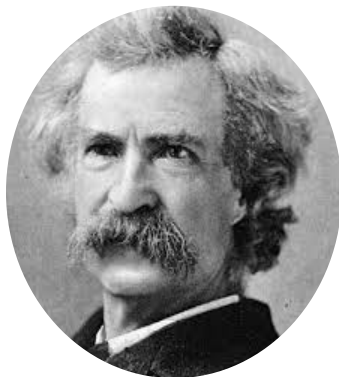
Adams spoke about current and future trends in education at the 2010 TEDxAtlanta and 2012 Martin Institute for Teaching Excellence. And his current position at MVPS developed through his activity on Twitter. Adams connected with MVPS’ Head of School Brett Jacobsen, and was



impressed with the school's direction. Jacobsen had led the school in developing the [Mount Vernon Institute for Innovation](#) in 2010, which seeks to build private-public partnerships that promote inquiry, innovation, and impact. The program, which is based on models developed by Stanford University's d.School, has gained international attention and led to the development of a Design Thinking Summit in 2012, which was rebranded in 2013 as //fuse. In his current position, Adams continues to explore ways to design innovative and engaging learning experiences, both at MVPS and nationally.

"I'm an experimenter and a tinkerer; I love being at the intersection of research and practice. I think schools need to be redesigned and it's fascinating to be part of that process," Adams said.

While Adams maintains a strict regimen of blogging and social media activity –waking up at 3:30 a.m. to write, walk, and meditate for two hours every day – he believes teachers can see significant gains with much less effort. He finds that some educators are still wary or intimidated by social media. However, in the words of Mark Twain, "The secret of getting ahead is getting started. The secret to getting started is breaking your complex, overwhelming tasks into small manageable tasks, and starting on the first one." For new users of social media, tweeting once a day, or committing to blog can start the process of building a regional, national, or international network that can be transformative.



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Would Twain have been on Twitter?
@saisnews your thoughts on what his
handle would have been

*Are you a Social Media SuperStar? Or do you know one? Please let us know!
Send Sarah Stewart a note about what's going on: sarah@sais.org*

