

rankings themselves but in the questions they provoke and the analysis of their significance.

## Twitter Trends

The day I started to write this article, #McKinney exploded on Twitter. The video of a police officer in Texas drawing his weapon on a group of black teens due to an incident at a pool alarmed and distressed many who followed the tweets that used this hashtag. Hashtags are used on Twitter, a microblogging social media site, to help track the popularity of certain topics and make it easier to follow and archive. It is also a valuable way to examine multiple points of view about current events. Twitter hashtags are an important way of understanding current events outside of the mainstream media portrayals. It is a version of crowd-sourced news and commentary combined. Often, some of these Twitter trends will in turn impact regular news outlets, as newspapers and magazines will share some of the most quotable images and phrases that arise from these tweets.

Because of the immediacy of trending hashtags, it may be challenging for teachers, especially in the elementary panel, to preview content to ensure that it is suitable for younger audiences. However, this shouldn't prevent educators from using Twitter and hashtag trends for teaching.

Alana Guinane, a middle school teacher with the Toronto District School Board says that she uses Twitter primarily as a communication tool with her students and parents but plans to add a more analytical approach this coming year. "Students learned that Twitter is a public forum, not a space for one on one conversation. They learned about safety considerations (what to include in account set-up and personal details) and how each account is used for a specific purpose. What one might tweet from a personal account might be different from a business account. We addressed the issues of the messages you are sending through your Twitter feed—directly through tweets and retweets and indirectly through who you follow and what you favourite (since these are public). Students practiced these skills through their personal use of Twitter (following me for classroom related posts) and through

their "company" pinball Twitter accounts –used strictly to promote their companies and the project." [Editor's Note: see #PinballProject for information on their multidisciplinary STEM project they were involved in making full sized working pinball machines. The project included math, science, design and technology (including coding) as well as media literacy, geography and learning skills].

If educators need assistance on how to analyze hashtags or leverage them for meaningful teaching in the classroom, an inspiration article by Laurie Townshend and Michelle Solomon can be found on the Association for Media Literacy's website: <http://www.aml.ca/memphis-missouri-voices-echoes/>. The weekly #K12Media chats on Twitter often delve into teacher-focused discussions on the most current issues as reflected in hashtags and on the news.

Hashtags themselves can become powerful tools for communication. It can be challenging to keep the integrity of hashtags, considering any Twitter user can try to boost their views by including a popular hashtag in their tweet. The founders of the #EduColor hashtag have taken an innovative and intelligent approach to hashtag abusers.

On their website, [www.educolor.org/guidelines-for-using-the-educolor-hashtag](http://www.educolor.org/guidelines-for-using-the-educolor-hashtag), it says "Please remember that, similar to #BlackLivesMatter and #YouOKSis, #EduColor was created both as a resource for intersectional discussions of race and education and as a safe space. Therefore, even though hashtags are open to the public, those of us who started it reserve the right to push back and challenge tweets we see as leading the discussion astray (see "derailing" for more details)." [Editor's Note: Thanks to Jose Vilson for permission to quote this resource in the article.]

The examination of Twitter hashtags invites not only a discussion of current issues relating to social justice but also deep critical thinking about how social media can be manipulated. Students will have the opportunity to test information for relevance, credibility and bias and to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the medium as a tool.