

Wow

A week ago (sadly, my most recent blog post) I blogged about a school district monitoring their students by remotely turning on the webcams of their school-issued laptops. This story has really ballooned. On one site I have been following a thread about it and many links have been posted. Here are a few—click the titles for the full articles:

[Lower Merion School District vs. Mike and Ikes](#)

...AP reports the FBI is investigating the school district's webcam program, and district spokesman Doug Young suggests without claiming that Harriton High School student Blake J. Robbins' webcam was activated only because the laptop had been reported stolen – in accordance with an established policy. The boy was charged with an undisclosed infraction based on an image the school picked up from his webcam. District superintendent Christopher W. McGinley, in an orotund statement, defends the program while canceling it. And just to make clear that we're still in high school, Master Robbins appears to have gotten in trouble when he was photographed eating Mike and Ikes...

[Federal judge orders Pa. schools to stop laptop spying](#)

...Yesterday, U.S. District Court Judge Jan DuBois issued a consent order that prevents Lower Merion School District of Ardmore, Pa., from "remotely activating any and all web cams

embedded in lap top [sic] computers issued to students ... or from remotely taking screenshots of such computers."

Lower Merion spokesman Doug Young said today that the district would fully cooperate with the court order...

The Spy at Harriton High (and more)

...The truly amazing part of this story is what's coming out from comments from the students themselves. Some of the interesting points:

- *Possession of a monitored Macbook was required for classes*
- *Possession of an unmonitored personal computer was forbidden and would be confiscated*
- *Disabling the camera was impossible*
- *Jailbreaking a school laptop in order to secure it or monitor it against intrusion was an offense which merited expulsion*

When I spoke at MIT about the wealth of electronic evidence I came across regarding Chinese gymnasts, I used the phrase "compulsory transparency". I never thought I would be using the phrase to describe America, especially so soon, but that appears to be exactly the case...

Software maker blasts 'vigilantism' in Pa. school spying case

The company selling the software used by a Pennsylvania school district to allegedly spy on its students blasted what

it called laptop theft-recovery “vigilantism” today.

Absolute Software said it dissuades users of theft-recovery software from acting on their own. “We discourage any customer from taking theft recovery into their own hands,” said Stephen Midgley, the company’s head of marketing, in an interview Monday. “That’s best left in the hands of professionals.”...

There is now a [Wikipedia page](#) about the ongoing investigation of this lawsuit, though the blogs and articles (full of even more links for your perusal by the way) are more interesting IMHO.

Next up, something about my own unexciting life. Hopefully. ☐

How Far is Too Far?

Besides being a song from a show I was in once, this is a question we ask ourselves over and over again as the government or some other entity does some eyebrow-raising stunt. It seems a lot of such stunts have occurred in the recent decades, and this one isn’t going to make you feel better. The question here is, what should a school be allowed to do to keep tabs on their students or the school property they use, in this case laptop computers? A lawsuit has been brought against a school district for remotely activating webcams when the computer is off-site. This came to light when a school had the gall to discipline a student for something that happened at his home using webcam footage as evidence. Now I can fully understand monitoring computer use

when the computers are at the school. After all, at school students should be engaged in schoolwork. But at home? It isn't mentioned just what the student did at home, but even if it had something to do with the computer, should the school really be allowed to turn on the webcam? What if the student left his or her computer open in the bedroom while undressing for the night or to shower? I really hope this school goes down for this, but not with some big financial settlement as it would be the taxpayers of course who wind up paying. What a stupid decision, in my humble opinion of course. Here is the article:

[BoingBoing: School used student laptop webcams to spy on them at school and home](#)

School used student laptop webcams to spy on them at school and home

Toy Culling

A few weeks ago, our kids were chronically misbehaving. Our oldest, a tween, was sassing back and saying "no" too much, her younger sister (the "spirited" one) was throwing lots of tantrums and trying to cause trouble with her sisters, and our youngest daughter was constantly upset and insecure about the continuous chaos in the house. Desperate times call for desperate measures, so one day while the oldest kids were at

school and the younger ones were sleeping, my husband took off work for an afternoon of "toy culling". This is a drastic discipline measure we only use in emergency situations. It is time-consuming and intensive labor for the parents, but well worth it, at least in our house.

Toy culling consists of us going into the girls' room (the three oldest girls share one big room, and our baby boy isn't yet old enough to cause trouble) and taking out every toy. We leave the tv, computer with educational games, books, and the clothes and board games in the closet. Everything else goes – dressup clothes, doll clothes, dolls, stuffed animals, all the little miscellaneous toys that can really junk up a child's room quickly, etc. If you have lots of time, you can sort it all by what you want to keep and organize the rest, but we are very busy people and so we just took all their junk and put it in our son's room for now. He's a baby who wakes in the night so he's still in our room. When it's time to move him into his room, we'll have to clean it out obviously, but for now it was a means to an end of the horrible behavior of the girls. We leave the board games, and they know that they take one out and put it away when they're done, just like the books that are left. If the rules aren't followed, anything that's left on the floor in subsequent days gets culled. You need to check their room everyday, and it's **imperitive** that you follow through with rule-enforcing. And for some reason, this process really works. I don't know what it is... Perhaps a feng shui effect where the much more pleasant ambience of the room and the *mucho* extra space is what leads to the kids being in better moods and hence, less trouble and more obedient. It could be the fact that there are less toys over which to fight. Maybe they're happier not having it constantly hanging over their heads that they're going to have to clean their room. But I don't care what the reason is, the toy culling has worked wonderfully the 3-5 times we've had to set aside a chunk of time to do it. My kids are now putting their dirty laundry in the hampers that are provided, and their trash is

going into garbage cans. Also, their room is staying clean, and I don't have to worry about it staying that way because they don't have anything with which to mess it up! And, as the behavior improves, they can earn their toys back – you don't have to spend money to get them any special reward PLUS the kids feel senses of accomplishment = WIN/WIN. Toy culling proves that less is more, and it helps put a damper on the sense of entitlement that can cloud the good attitude of even a generally well-behaved child.

I think I first read about the method in a parenting column in the newspaper. I'm not sure which expert gets the credit, but I do know that I highly recommend toy culling! And oh yes, early December is a perfect time to do this – makes room for the burst of new things they might receive for the holidays!

Choices

When I got home from small group last night, I did a check again for jobs, and came up with one district that had two postings. One was closer, one was one of the furthest schools from me. People who know me know my love for driving, or rather how much I love to **not** have to drive much in traffic. So the choice was obvious of course- I took the second one. Say what? You're thinking, "Didn't he just get through saying...?" Well, yes, but I mentioned in one of my comments a couple of days ago that there is a position I vowed never to take again. This was for one of those teachers. ELL at that one middle school is a nightmare I wish never to repeat, err, again. I actually subbed for these teachers (two ELL teachers on the team) a few times but I finally had enough last year. My theory is that discipline is far more strict in Mexico (these were primarily Hispanic kids) and so when they come to

the US and enter our education system, we are far more limited on what we can do for punishment and so it's like a cake-walk to them. Our worst is no problem to them as long as they only break rules and not laws in which case they finally have justice meted toward them. In any event, coupled with typical low-income for this area they are very difficult to work with. There is another middle school in the district, but oddly enough I have never actively chosen to not sub for ELL there. Maybe the difference is the grades are separated over there but all combined at the first school. 6th-graders learn how to play the system sooner from the 8th-graders since they spend a lot of time in the same room. In any event, as possible proof of this theory one of the days a student actually threw his binder at another student's head (in retribution). In front of me while I started to deal with the initial problem. Besides this, there was just a constant lack of respect overall.

Never again.

So of course that same position just showed up for tomorrow, but no alternative assignment. I am still looking for something for tomorrow...

Of course there are even worse positions. A nearby district actually has a lot of gang activity at their middle schools, though it is really not as bad as what I hear of from the city. I no longer sub in that district.