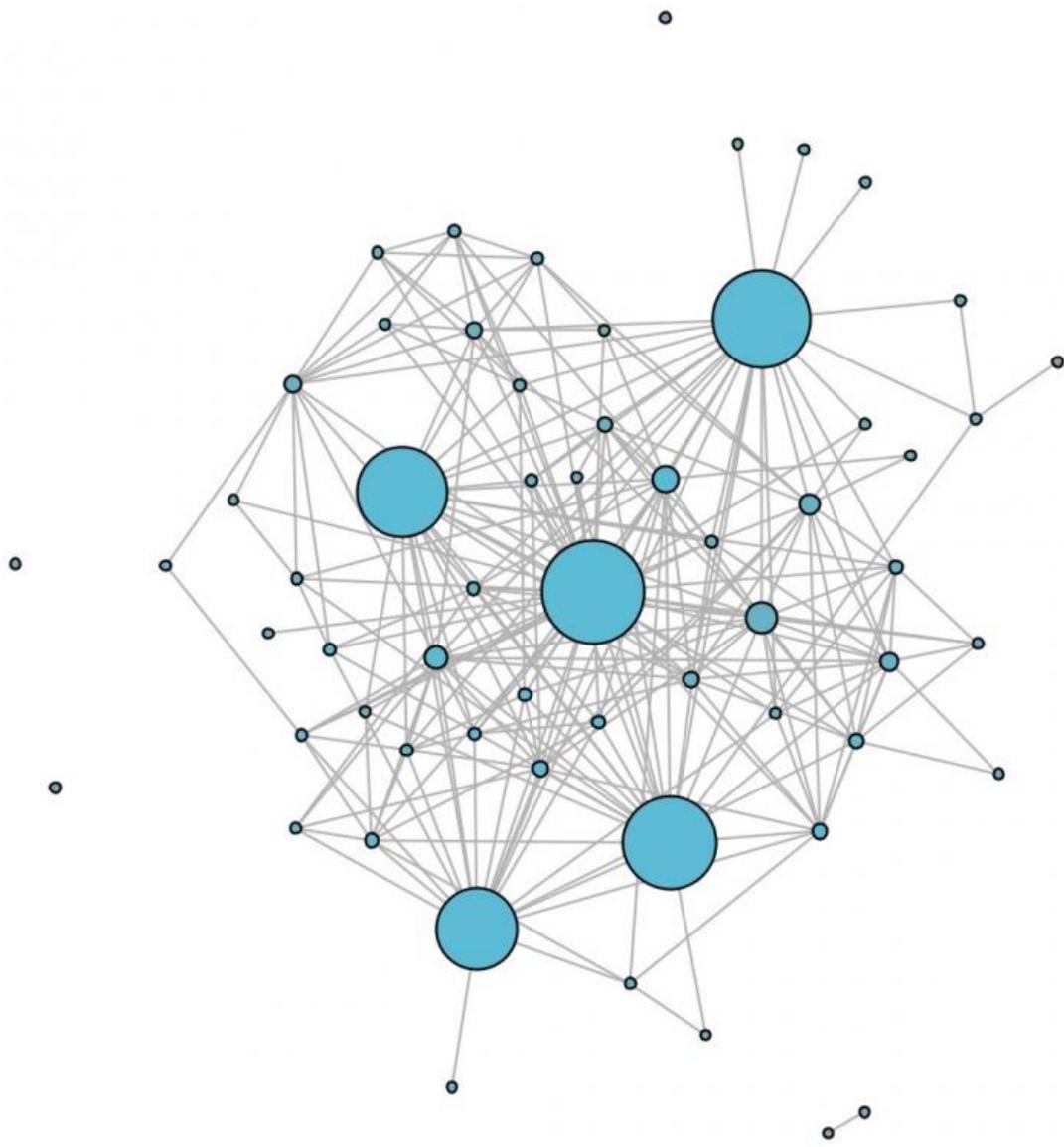# Devices or divisive: Mobile technology in the classroom

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This graphic represents how teachers in one school formed a collaborative network around the issue of using mobile and educational technology in class. Credit: Vincent Cho/Boston College

Little is known about how new mobile technologies affect students' development of non-cognitive skills such as empathy, self-control, problem solving, and teamwork. Two Boston College researchers say it's time to find out.

Lynch School of Education Assistant Professor Vincent Cho and researcher Joshua Littenberg-Tobias, PhD, present a new survey measuring teachers' perspectives on these issues today at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting session "Examining the Potential of Mobile Technology."

"Schools see digital devices - smart phones, tablets and laptops - as a way to propel innovation, but we haven't effectively asked teachers about the impact of these technologies on students' social, emotional and personal development," said Cho. "Furthermore, teacher attitudes are crucial to the success of high-tech initiatives. Teachers are the people who will revolutionize schools. Technology is just a starting point. We should know what teachers think."

Schools around the world spent $13 billion - including $4 billion in the U.S. - on K-12 classroom technology in 2013 and total spending is slated to grow to $19 billion by 2018, according to Futuresource Consulting.

Cho and Littenberg-Tobias have designed a survey tool to measure views on the effects of digital technology. The researchers surveyed 59 educators at a "1:1" Catholic high school where each student is required to bring a smart phone, iPad or laptop.

They found that teachers' views could be grouped into three areas: how [mobile technology](#) can be used to improve "whole student" outcomes, the impact of these new technologies on classroom learning, and the degree to which students are plagued by "digital distraction."

Although [teachers](#) were mostly positive about the impact of technology on classroom learning, they also had concerns about the impact of mobile technologies on students' non-cognitive skills, such as empathy, self-control, problem solving and teamwork.

"Teachers are the ones implementing these new technologies," said Littenberg-Tobias. "They are the eyes and ears on the ground and they see the impact of these technologies on a day-to-day basis."

Provided by Boston College