

4-4-2019

## Toward Critical Social Media Pedagogy: The Intersection of Narrative, Social Media, and the Civic

Marie K. Heath  
*Loyola College in Maryland*

Benjamin W. Gleason  
*Iowa State University, bgleason@iastate.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/edu\\_conf](https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/edu_conf)



Part of the [Communication Technology and New Media Commons](#), [Gifted Education Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Social Media Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Heath, Marie K. and Gleason, Benjamin W., "Toward Critical Social Media Pedagogy: The Intersection of Narrative, Social Media, and the Civic" (2019). *Education Conference Presentations, Posters and Proceedings*. 19.

[https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/edu\\_conf/19](https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/edu_conf/19)

This Conference Proceeding is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Education at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Education Conference Presentations, Posters and Proceedings by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [digirep@iastate.edu](mailto:digirep@iastate.edu).

---

# Toward Critical Social Media Pedagogy: The Intersection of Narrative, Social Media, and the Civic

## Abstract

This paper presents a theoretical meditation connecting the co-constructed, participatory narratives of social media with opportunities for increased participatory and critical civic engagement. We argue that teaching with and through social media uses practices to develop student agency, facilitate raised-consciousness, and encourage action-oriented problem solving by leveraging co-constructed processes and the social. We work toward a critical social media pedagogy by considering the possibilities of social media. These allow for storytelling across dimensions of time and space through co-constructed understandings of reality in order to bend the arc of narrative. Further, we contend that through social media storytelling, we see the development of preconditions for civic engagement engaging in identity formation, affinity building, and participation.

## Disciplines

Communication Technology and New Media | Gifted Education | Higher Education | Social Media

## Comments

This conference paper is published as Heath, M. and Gleason, B. (2019). Toward Critical Social Media Pedagogy: The intersection of narrative, social media, and the civic. Paper presented at Annual Conference of American Educational Research Association, Toronto, ON. April 4-9.

**Towards Critical Social Media Pedagogy:  
The Intersection of Narrative, Social Media, and the Civic**

Author note: 1995 words excluding references

### Abstract

This paper presents a theoretical meditation connecting the co-constructed, participatory narratives of social media with opportunities for increased participatory and critical civic engagement. We argue that teaching with and through social media uses practices to develop student agency, facilitate raised-consciousness, and encourage action-oriented problem solving by leveraging co-constructed processes and the social. We work toward a critical social media pedagogy by considering the possibilities of social media. These allow for storytelling across dimensions of time and space through co-constructed understandings of reality in order to bend the arc of narrative. Further, we contend that through social media storytelling, we see the development of preconditions for civic engagement engaging in identity formation, affinity building, and participation.

## **Towards Critical Social Media Pedagogy:**

### **The Intersection of Narrative, Social Media, and the Civic**

While scholarship exists that examines *narrative and social media* (see: Couldry & van Dijck, 2015; Harper, Whitworth & Page, 2012; Hollett, Phillips, & Leander, 2017; Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016), *civic culture, civic engagement, and social media* (Dahlgren, 2003; Jenkins et al., 2009; Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011), and *social media pedagogy* (Krutka, Nowell, & Whitlock, 2017), we have not seen scholarship which establishes a clear connection between these. In this paper, we connect the co-constructed, participatory narratives of social media and opportunities for participatory and critical civic engagement, placing pedagogy at the theoretical and practice-based intersection of narrative, social media, and civic engagement.

In the first part of the paper, we explore the ways in which social media narratives mingle with, but also manipulate, traditional narrative commonplaces of *temporality, sociality, and place* for the purposes of critical counter-narrative and identity formation. We then connect the importance of identity and participation to Dahlgren's (2003) pre-conditions for civic engagement, what he calls *civic culture*. We develop an argument to suggest that these social media practices that play with narrative's commonplaces illuminate potentialities for pedagogy might similarly engage in these practices. Finally, we synthesize these findings into broader themes of agency, raised-consciousness, action-oriented problem solving, co-constructed processes, and the social to suggest a critical social media pedagogy.

### **Narrative, Social Media, and Civic Culture**

Those who study narrative have suggested a number of critical purposes of narrative, from racialized and minoritized people using narrative to write themselves into existence (Le

Guin, 1980; Rooks, 1989); to explicating the connections between place, stories, and memory; to leveraging narrative to name and challenge exploitation and domination (McLaren, 2015; Thomas and Stornaiuolo, 2016); and for creating spaces where we may tell of “something more” - a space and time when whiteness, as a racialized set of practices, ceases to exist (McLaren, 2015). Narrative’s three dimensions or “commonplaces” of *temporality*, *sociality*, and *place* provide opportunities for re-storying and possibilities for imagined future lives and are extended by social media (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006; Huber et al., 2013; Thomas and Stornaiuolo, 2016).

Playing with time and narrative shapes identity formation. Social media mediates time by compressing or freezing time, and by offering ability to “timehop.” Harper, Whitworth, and Page (2012) studied time, identity, and Facebook, and concluded that “time is connected to the ability to perform self-hood” (p. 4). Harper et al. (2012) described how identity emerges and evolves on social media as people replace old pictures with new ones, or other friends contribute to the story (in narrative, contributed comments, or with images). The authors proposed a conception of identity that is dynamic and fluid rather than static (e.g., essentialist).

As seen in the connections Harper and colleagues (2012) made between time and co-constructed stories, the connection and manipulation of time occurs within the context of the social. Here we understand “social” as Couldry and van Dijck (2015) theorized it, as “a space that does more than hover above everyday practice because its horizons are being built, at the level of micro-adjustments of practice, *into* the habits of individual actors, with direct benefit for the accumulation strategies of collective actors” (p. 1-2). Social media facilitates the creation, curation, and circulation of co-constructed, multimodal stories. Authorship is hybridized, as even stories told by individuals are influenced and shaped by social practices and affordances.

Authorship on social media is an “interactive, co-constructed, social activity” that may “facilitate the capacity to join (and to get others to join) others in an emergent world driven by interests, relationships, and creative assembly” (Author, 2018) As people build stories with contributions, comments, or critique, these co-constructions leads to new knowledge, practices, and a changed social milieu.

The integration of practice “*into the habits*” (Couldry & van Dijck, 2015, p. 1) suggests to us that the act of social storytelling is participatory. A number of related disciplines have explored how social media can be used to support participatory practices, from political science (Bennett, 2008; Tufekci, 2017) to communication (Ellison & boyd, 2007) to education (Mirra & Garcia, 2017) and to literacy (Knobel & Lankshear, 2014). In education, some have begun to suggest that participation in social media can support learning about a particular topic (Author, 2013). All of these themes involve the idea that social media supports participation as it enables activity or action.

Finally, the commonplace of *place* recognizes that every story “take(s) place some place” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 481). Here we take our definition of place as “place-making,” crafted from the multiple and competing forces in a place and the networked relationship of people to each other who place-make in an ongoing and shifting landscape (Pierce, Martin, & Murphy, 2011). Hollett, Phillips, and Leander (2018) examined place-making and the digital, asserting that digital media untethers place while intertwining dimensions of virtual and physical space. Further, social media allows “meaning make on the move” (Hollett et al., 2018, p. 148), thus we write the world as we move through space.

Social media place-makings reflect back to us our systemic inequalities and contribute to the complex act of networked and relational place-making (Hollett et al., 2018). On one hand, mediated space can empower (Buck, 2012). However, Akil (2016) reminds us that systemic constraints still exist on racialized bodies in this intermingled space. He reported his experience of playing Pokemon Go as a Black man in the United States, wherein he spent five of 20 minutes playing the game and the remaining time “trying to look as pleasant and non-threatening as possible as I walked passed a visibly disturbed white woman at the bus stop” (Akil, 2016, n.p.)

Finding resonance in how young people make meaning, tell stories, and develop identities with, and through new media, a number of scholars have suggested that participatory practices found in new media can support civic outcomes (Jenkins et al, 2009; Dahlgren, 2003; Bennett, 2012; Author, 2018). Media enables new forms of participation that are so transformative that it represents a paradigm shift (Jenkins et al, 2009). For the purposes of this study, we highlighted three conditions-- affinity, identities, and practices-- that are present in a participatory culture. Participatory culture is facilitated, in part, through *affinity*, or deep engagement with media and peers in a playful space that encourages learning, knowledge sharing, and recognition from peers. These affinity spaces can be empowering because they are rooted in experiences and stories that bridge differences in age, class, gender, sexual orientation, educational level, and so on. Within these affinity spaces, users develop identities and practices that, Jenkins argued, can be used in conjunction with media literacy efforts in order for full social, economic, cultural and political participation. These practices, critically, are not born of individual autonomy, but rather facilitate meaning-making through collaboration, leading to

“pooling knowledge within a collective intelligence, for negotiating across cultural differences” (2009, pg. 20).

However, we are interested in helping young people go beyond “mere participation” in exciting, engaging, popular cultures to *explicit participation* in political, purposeful, critical action. We build on Jenkins’ work (2016), and acknowledge Zuckerman’s admission (2017) that maybe we were too hopeful or idealistic in the past decade. We see Dalhgren’s (2003) work as a potential link that connects “mere participation” to *explicit participation*. We see a need for explicit, critical pedagogy, and suggest that by conceiving Jenkins’ participatory practices not as, necessarily, a low barrier to entry or as Bennett’s “new type of citizenship,” but instead, as the soil from which explicit participation grows - and grows in ways facilitated by social media - we believe we can identify potentialities for pedagogy to further the growth of these practices in young people.

### **Critical Pedagogy in Action: Building Civic Culture with Social Media**

Through storytelling, Jenkins et al wrote, youth “re-enact narratives in ways that transform them, and in the process...demonstrate that they understand what they have read” (2009, p. 29). These narratives tell the story of participants’ engagement with broader social, cultural, economic, and civic forces in the world. However, we know that “mere participation” is not sufficient to create justice and equity in a world that is explicitly oppressive, tortuous, and cruel, as the rising tide of global authoritarianism demonstrates. Dalhgren (2003) conceives of democracy as action, as a thing we do, not a thing that is.

Here, we build on Jenkins (2016), Zuckerman (2017), Mihailidis and Gerodimos (2015), Avila and Pandya (2013) and others in suggesting the need to use critical theory to create explicit

political, social, and cultural change in our communities, states, and nation. A key lever for this change comes from linking engaged communities that have mobilized identities, practices, and affinities for political change. We imagine a pedagogy to develop critical conceptions of citizenship, grounded at the intersection of narrative theory, social practice theory, and civic culture as an analytic construct. We suggest that as such, critical social media pedagogy must do three things: develop student agency; facilitate raised-consciousness; encourage action-oriented problem solving by leveraging co-constructed processes and the social.

Teachers may encourage social practices which help students shape identity while developing participatory social practices. When youth are invited to push back, to reimagine, and to re-story the world from their own perspectives, they engage in new forms of becoming. The rising generation is moving toward a kind of collective restorying—Achebe’s suggested “balance of stories” (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016). Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) provide examples of students inserting themselves into narratives through a bending of the narrative. Social media offers opportunities to bend the arc of time, place, and the social in order to insert or re-write the self into a narrative. This may occur through digital storytelling (Matias & Grossland, 2016) or through a weaving and re-weaving of identity through multi-modal and media arts (Binder & Kotsopoulos, 2011).

Jenkins et al. (2016) found that young people most engaged in civic engagement were those who grew up in a household that valued these activities, and if they attended schools that offered opportunities to develop civic culture. Here, we advocate civic engagement through explicit critical consciousness of the kind envisioned by critical scholars such as Freire (1970), Rooks (1989), McLaren (2015), Giroux (1983), hooks (1989; 2014). In a formal learning setting,

this kind of critical consciousness might take the form of training high school students to become critical ethnographers (Morrell, 2004) who advocate for improved educational conditions (Garcia, 2017; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). In this tradition, students, teachers, and partners act as allies to investigate the systemic and structural roots of educational inequality through attention to political, social, economic, and psychological oppression. Through this joint activity, young people work with educational researchers, teachers, parents and community members for explicit participation in creating civic culture.

The diversity of social media applications and platforms means that action-oriented civic engagement can take a wide range of shapes. For example, Eric Gordon and colleagues at the Engagement Lab at Emerson College in Boston, MA use game-based learning processes (GBL) to facilitate civic engagement (Author, 2014). In places where community members have faced systematic oppression (e.g., Boston), community distrust has impeded civic participation, leading to low rates of participation and few opportunities for informed deliberation (Gupta, Bouvier & Gordon, 2012). Using an online game, participants collectively decided on critical issues facing the city of Boston's K-12 schools. Through social media, participants answered questions, responded to other comments, recorded video commentary, pinpointed learning sites on a map, and suggested new ideas to be discussed. This created opportunities for dialogue among groups normally excluded from decision-making processes, facilitating a new avenue for public engagement.

## **Conclusion**

We imagine the power of narrative within social media to argue that teaching with and through social media uses practices to develop student agency, facilitate raised-consciousness,

and encourage action-oriented problem solving by leveraging co-constructed processes and the social. We worked toward this critical social media pedagogy by considering the possibilities of social media, which allow for storytelling across dimensions of time and space through co-constructed understandings of reality, to bend the arc of narrative. Further, we contend that through social media storytelling, we see the development of Dahlgren's (2003) preconditions for civic engagement as we engage in identity formation, affinity building, and discussion.

## References

- Akil, O. (2016). Warning: Pokemon GO is a death sentence if you are a black man. *Mobile Lifestyle. Medium*. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/mobile-lifestyle/warning-pokemon-go-is-a-death-sentence-if-you-are-a-black-man-acacb4bdae7f>
- Author, 2018.
- Author, 2014.
- Author, 2013.
- Ávila, J., & Pandya, J. Z. (2013). *Critical Digital Literacies as Social Praxis: Intersections and Challenges. New Literacies and Digital Epistemologies. Volume 54*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Bennett, W. L. (2008). Changing citizenship in the digital age. *Civic life online: Learning how digital media can engage youth*, 1(1-24).
- Bennett, W. L., Wells, C., & Freelon, D. (2011). Communicating civic engagement: Contrasting models of citizenship in the youth web sphere. *Journal of Communication*, 61(5), 835-856.
- Binder, M., & Kotsopoulos, S. (2011). Multimodal literacy narratives: Weaving the threads of young children's identity through the arts. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 25(4), 339-363.
- Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of computer-mediated Communication*, 13(1), 210-230.
- Buck, A. (2012). Examining digital literacy practices on social network sites. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 9-38.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Rosiek, J. (2006). Borders, tensions and borderlands in narrative inquiry. *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology*, 35-76.
- Connelly, F. M. and Clandinin, D. J., (2006). Narrative inquiry. In Green, J., Camilli, G. and Elmore, P (eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research*. Pp 375-385. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Couldry, N., & Van Dijck, J. (2015). Researching social media as if the social mattered. *Social Media+ Society*, 1(2), 2056305115604174.
- Dahlgren, P. (2003). Reconfiguring civic culture in the new media milieu. *Media and the Restyling of Politics*, 151-170.
- Davies, J. (2013) 'Trainee hairdressers' uses of Facebook as a community of gendered literacy practice'. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*. 21(1), 147 – 149.
- Davies, J.A. (2015) Facebook Narratives. In: Rowsell, J. and Pahl, K., (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Literacy Studies*. Routledge.
- Duncan-Andrade, J. M. R., & Morrell, E. (2008). *The art of critical pedagogy: Possibilities for moving from theory to practice in urban schools* (Vol. 285). New York: Peter Lang.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (MB Ramos, Trans.). *New York: Continuum*, 2007.
- Garcia, A. (2017). *Good reception: Teens, teachers, and mobile media in a Los Angeles high school*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Giroux, H. A. (1983). Theory and resistance in education: A pedagogy for the opposition.
- Goodson, I., & Gill, S. (2011). *Narrative pedagogy: Life history and learning* (Vol. 386). Peter Lang.
- Harper, R., Whitworth, E., & Page, R. (2012). Fixity: Identity, time and durée on Facebook. *Selected Papers of Internet Research*.
- Hollett, T., Phillips, N. C., & Leander, K. M. (2017). Digital Geographies. *Handbook of Writing, Literacies, and Education in Digital Cultures*.
- Hooks, B. (1989). *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking black*. New York: South End Press.
- Hooks, B. (2014). *Teaching to transgress*. Routledge.
- Huber, J., Caine, V., Huber, M., & Steeves, P. (2013). Narrative inquiry as pedagogy in education: The extraordinary potential of living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories of experience. *Review of Research in Education*, 37(1), 212-242.
- Jenkins, H., Shresthova, S., Gamber-Thompson, L., Kligler-Vilenchik, N., & Zimmerman, A. (2016). *By any media necessary: The new youth activism*. New York: NYU Press.
- Jenkins, H., Purushotma, R., Weigel, M., Clinton, K., & Robison, A. J. (2009). *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Krutka, D. G., Nowell, S., & Whitlock, A. M. (2017). Towards a social media pedagogy: Successes and shortcomings in educative uses of Twitter with teacher candidates. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 25(2), 215-240.
- Knobel, M., & Lankshear, C. (2014). Studying new literacies. *Journal of adolescent & adult literacy*, 58(2), 97-101.
- Le Guin, U. K. (1980). It was a dark and stormy night; or, why are we huddling about the campfire?. *Critical Inquiry*, 7(1), 191-199.
- [Matias, C. E., & Grosland, T. J. \(2016\). Digital storytelling as racial justice: Digital hopes for deconstructing whiteness in teacher education. \*Journal of Teacher Education\*, 67\(2\), 152-164.](#)
- McLaren, P. (2015). *Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education*. Routledge.
- Mihailidis, P., & Gerodimos, R. (2016). Connecting pedagogies of civic media: The literacies, connected civics, and engagement in daily life. *Civic media: Technology, design, practice*, 371-391.
- Mirra, N., & Garcia, A. (2017). Civic participation reimaged: Youth interrogation and innovation in the multimodal public sphere. *Review of Research in Education*, 41(1), 136-158.
- Pierce, J., Martin, D. G., & Murphy, J. T. (2011). Relational place-making: the networked politics of place. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 36(1), 54-70.
- Rooks, N. (1989). Writing themselves into existence: The intersection of history and literature in writings on Black women. *Iowa Journal of Literary Studies*, 10(1), 51-63.

- Thomas, E. E., & Stornaiuolo, A. (2016). Restorying the self: Bending toward textual justice. *Harvard Educational Review*, 86(3), 313-338.
- Tufekci, Z. (2017). *Twitter and tear gas: The power and fragility of networked protest*. Yale University Press.
- Zuckerman, E. (2017, Sept 10) The Open Mind: Defining Civic Media. [video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OH-i73ZZTIg>