The Nexus of Critical Citizenship and Social Media

[B. Scott Durham](#)
Michigan State University

The practice of critical citizenship requires an authentic investigation into issues surrounding the exercise of power in our world. However, while young people increasingly engage with others and with the world through social media, this authentic meeting place has traditionally not been the location of a critical analysis within the context of citizenship. This paper seeks to identify a rational for and develop a process by which social media becomes both a site of contestation and empowerment in the project of critical citizenship. It seeks to place this work of criticality not in a world thrust upon young people, but rather, within the social media world of young people.

When I first began teaching high school civics over *20 years ago*, an old wooden bench outside my room became a place for students to congregate during breaks. Students would tell each other, "I'll meet you at the bench," or ask, "Can I go sit on the bench for a bit?"

It was a space that was physically conducive to interaction and had developed a cultural significance in the school as well as a place where students were always welcomed. Many such gathering spaces were located around the school where students found solace, community, and comfort with each other during the pauses in academic rigor required of their classes.

Earlier *this* year in a course of college seniors I teach, we took a break after an invigorating and engaging discussion. The 14 students around the table all pulled out their mobile devices and sat quietly looking through whatever worlds they found on their phones. For those 15 minutes, these supportive and generous students were connected to absent people and faraway places through their electronic tether, oblivious to those around them.

These two stories describe what is not surprising to anyone who works with young people today: They engage in the world and with each other differently than they did in times past. This paper does not critique this new way of engagement nor does it determine if things are better or worse than they used to be. It is sufficient to recognize that there *is* a difference.

I argue in this paper that this development offers a "new frontier of … education" (Journell, Ayers, & Beeson, 2013), manifested in Tweets, Facebook posts, and other technological communication. Social media should be the site where academic and nonacademic critical investigations into worldly engagement can and should occur, "or else [we] run the risk of further alienating a student population that will have grown up on social media" (p. 478).

Two developments in my teaching career have prompted my interest in these topics: (a) the turn toward *critical citizenship*, or the investigation of exercises of power that both challenge or reify hierarchies of privilege; and (b) the importance *social media* plays in how individuals engage with each other and in worlds that are both near and distant.

While seemingly disparate topics, taken together, critical citizenship and social media offer a powerful nexus that opens for investigation how lives, especially those of the young, contribute to the projects of citizenship, equality, and social justice. Choi (2016) commented on this bifurcation, as well, claiming that some researchers have sought to reinterpret citizenship while others recognize the impact technology has had on human activity, including citizenship (p. 570). She encouraged the melding of the two. In addition, the 2013 Technology Position Statement of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) attempted to converge these two interests:

In a time when as a field social studies struggles for relevance, social studies educators need to recognize and promote how they are uniquely qualified and situated to enable young people to effectively use mobile technologies as a citizen, learner, and member of a democratic society in a global setting and to explore the civic, economic, and social implications of such technologies across time and place.

By accepting the role of social media in the lives of students, viewing it not as a distraction but as an opportunity to develop skills of criticality, educators can foster the dispositions essential for citizenship in lived, authentic ways. Heath (2018) suggested that this work can and should be done in the social studies, where "educational technologists [are] familiar with the intellectual history of citizenship" (p. 351). Therefore, the *location* of this critical analysis has now become important.

Social studies educators are facing a new digital divide, less between those who do and do not have access to technology and more "between the realities of their classrooms and their students' world" (NCSS, 2013). In other words, as educators continue to work through the challenges of hegemony that confront us through content and pedagogy, those hegemonic forces can be reified under the guise of openness and diversity or challenged in more authentic and meaningful ways in the world of actual engagement.

Rather than fearing the use of social media in this process, "adults should help youth develop the skills and perspective to productively navigate the complications brought about by living in networked publics" (boyd, 2014, Chapter 1). Just as pedagogical and curricula foci have deepened through the use of more critical lenses, it is time for that criticality to be transferred to and analyzed through the realities of young people and their ways of living.

To help explain what the process of bringing the tenets of critical citizenship to social media use might look like, I first discuss the importance and difficulty of the process of becoming a critical citizenship educator by intertwining theory with personal experience of this process. I then lay a foundational rationale for including the investigation of social media *into* critical citizenship curricula. Finally, I offer some ways this investigation may take place in actual classrooms.

Critical Citizenship

Defining critical citizenship is important at this stage, as well as identifying the challenges its inclusion in civics classrooms may cause. These challenges may be similar to potential pitfalls experienced when transferring skills of criticality to the terrain of social media. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) identified three categories of citizenship education taking place in American schools today: those that promote personally responsible citizens; those that encourage participatory citizenship; and those that develop justice-oriented citizenship.

The personally responsible citizen does things such as "obey laws; recycle; give(s) blood; contribute to a food drive" (p. 240). Participatory citizens "organize community efforts to care for those in need; know how government agencies work; help(s) to organize a food drive," (p. 240). Finally, justice-oriented citizens "critically assess social, political, and economic structures to see beyond surface causes; seek(s) out and address(es) areas of injustice; explore why people are hungry and act(s) to solve root causes" (p. 240). Critical citizenship resides in this third category.

Critical citizenship theorists and curriculum writers have refocused and enlarged the concept of citizenship education by magnifying the importance of those who have yet to enjoy citizenship's benefits (i.e., access to basic needs, opportunities for growth, physical and emotional safety, freedom from political, economic, and emotional oppression). This type of criticality builds on the work of critical pedagogues (Friere, 2018; Giroux, 1980; Kincheloe, 2011, McLaren, 2015) by, among other things, questioning where power resides, rejecting the innocence or neutrality of knowledge (and the process of learning it), while emphasizing action resulting in changes towards a more just society.

In their "Framework for Critical Citizenship Education," Johnson and Morris (2010) emphasized the ability to identify systems of oppression as an important aspect of critical citizenship. They also called for the developing of the following skills: the ability to politicize aspects of the culture in which one lives; the opportunity to dialogue with others in a holistic way; and the ability to speak for oneself in courageous ways to foster an imagined better world (p. 90).

Andreotti (2014) added that the ability to analyze one's own position in the process of reifying or challenging structures, assumptions, and identities that may be causations of the injustices one sees and experiences is also an integral part of critical citizenship (p. 47). In short, critical citizenship asks students to investigate what is wrong with the world, why that may be, what is their role in maintaining this difference, and what they can do to eliminate that gap. The skills required for this investigation include macro understandings of the world (through historical antecedents), personal examinations of thoughts and actions, and a willingness and ability to take effective individual and collective action.

I was, no doubt, a traditional civics instructor at the beginning of my career, focusing on the personally responsible and participatory aspects of citizenship. I taught about checks and balances and what was in the Bill of Rights, but I failed to help students investigate

why these concepts exist and how they have been (in)justly implemented. I taught about the freedom of religion, for example, but not how and why different religions (or nonreligions) are given greater or lesser voice, rights, and influence in not only public policy issues, but in everyday lives and experiences.

By not teaching in a critical way, I was still teaching my students *something*. Westheimer and Kahne suggested that regardless how one teaches civics, there are, "political implications," that, "have consequences for the kind of society we ultimately help to create" (p. 265). For example, they found, "some indications that curriculum and education policies designed to foster personal responsibility undermine efforts to prepare both participatory and justice-oriented citizens" (p. 264). In other words, by focusing on the aspirational aspects of civics (e.g., life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, freedom of religion), I too was practicing politics by teaching that the issues of equity and justice, especially historical structural oppression, were not important aspects of civics education.

As I became more aware of these issues in my own surroundings, I began to see that how and what I was teaching was insufficient. The moment that jarred my thinking and pushed me into the world of critical teaching occurred in 2011 while coordinating a "Celebration of Race and Diversity" in our community. During the events of this celebration, certain topics were deemed off-limits to students by school leaders, who determined students were too fragile to engage in discussions around issues of race, diversity, and the historical antecedents that still poison our world today.

I began to realize that perhaps social studies education had a problem that I had not been able or willing to see before. I knew that more needed to change in my teaching, in my school, and in my community to recognize our past and make visible its impact on our present. It was then that I became more a teacher of critical citizenship. I realized, as Giroux (1991) suggested, that critical citizenship education should, "challenge ideologies and social practices that further the mechanisms of inequality and domination at the level of *everyday life*" (p. 306, emphasis added).

I tell this story for two reasons. First, critical citizenship education, especially for a new teacher, can be intimidating. Teachers often teach in more traditional ways to be safe or nonpolitical. This fear of being viewed as political is real amongst teachers all over the world and often results in teaching citizenship in a seemingly detached and safe mode.

Sincer, Severiens, and Volman (2019) found that citizenship teachers across the globe take a "depoliticized approach" to citizenship education instead focusing on "developing social skills and creating harmony" (p. 190), both aspects of personally responsible and participatory citizenship. Giroux (1980) referred to this exclusion as evidence of a hidden curriculum that stresses "rule conformity, passivity, and obedience," (p. 354), dispositions and ways of thinking that serve as an antithesis to criticality.

This aversion to criticality by administrators, curriculum designers, and teachers must be seen as a political act, just as impactful and potentially dangerous as its inclusion. Only by engaging and stripping away the political innocence of existing cultural norms that define most classrooms and citizenship education curricula can educators and students engage in the analysis required for critical citizenship.

The second reason I tell this story is to illustrate how the move from a traditional to a critical citizenship educator was, while difficult, essential to making my teaching more powerful, meaningful, and important. A similar transformation must now take place, not in *how* critical citizenship is taught, rather, *where* it is taught.

One site where students are socialized in the ways in which to engage each other and with the world is at school. Giroux (1980) called for the "recognition that schools are agencies of socialization" and, therefore, an analysis is needed of "the socialization process [of schools] as a vehicle of economic and cultural reproduction … that mediates the social practices and cultural beliefs necessary to maintain dominance of certain groups and power structures," (p. 333).

Even today, schools impose their "own set of meanings and social practices through the selection, organization, and distribution of school knowledge and classroom social relationships," (p. 333). Ignoring young people's engagement with the world and each other through social media is one way that schools impose a dominant power structure, which prevents an authentic investigation into the world in which *they* live and violates a key principle of critical citizenship.

Ohler (2011) suggested that the continued refusal to recognize this difference in engagement creates the dilemma of what he called "two lives." By ignoring what is becoming not only the preferred and most common way young people engage with the world but also how governments, leaders, and resisters interact, as well, he claimed that the hidden curriculum educators create is one that determines "issues concerning the personal, social, and environmental effects of a technological lifestyle are not important in a school curriculum."

In bridging this "false binary" (Shapiro, 2018, p. 28) schools can, "help our digital kids balance the individual empowerment of digital technology use with a sense of personal, community, and global responsibility" (Ohler, 2011, p. 1). Critical citizenship educators have a choice: Should we maintain the hidden curriculum, teaching that social media is not a viable or respected form of engagement? Or should we embrace the lives of our students and help them interrogate their social media practices in full collaboration with the precepts of criticality?

Social Media

One aspect of the hidden curriculum that dominates most educative spaces in America today is reflected in an unacceptance of and refusal to address the impact and influence of social media in the lives of young people. The Pew Research Center (Perrin et al., 2015) and Common Sense Media (2018) have documented the ways and to what extent social media, in fact, impacts students' lives. Approximately 90% of young people (aged 13-17 in the United States) own their own smartphone and more than 70% engage the world through social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat) on a daily basis (Common Sense Media, 2018, p. 3). In addition, the Common Sense Media (2018) report indicated that this engagement with social media makes teens feel more popular, more confident, better about themselves, less anxious, less depressed, and less lonely (p. 4). In addition, young people *prefer* interacting with others electronically rather than in person (p. 5).

Clearly, social media has become a preferred medium through which young people engage with each other and the world. Subsequent calls for increased education around digital literacies (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004), digital political engagement (Bennett, 2008), and mobile phones in schools (Merchant, 2012) have encouraged more frequent use of and research into how technology, in general, and social media, specifically, can be used in educational spaces (Aydin, 2012; Bennett & Maton, 2010; boyd & Ellison, 2007; Greenhow & Askari, 2015). The fact remains, however, that many American schools have banned mobile device usage (Strauss, 2018), and many block access to social media sites. This occurrence is

further proof that the dominant power structure of schools, as Giroux (1980) warned, have yet to recognize social media as a valuable field of interrogation. thereby helping to maintain the "dominance of certain groups and power structures" (p. 333).

Critical citizenship theorists have begun to include aspects of media analysis and technology use in their work too. Lewis-Spector (2016) called for increased use of technology in an effort to promote "citizen engagement among *all* our students while in our classrooms and continuing into their adult lives" (p. 94).

Kubey (2004) claimed that media literacy is essential because students will "spend close to 2,000 hours each year of their young lives with the electronic media, and another 2,000 hours every year for their entire adult lives" (p. 76). Krutka and Carpenter (2016) suggested that, because "social media platforms are integral to the lives of young people, educators should teach with and about social media" (p. 2). They added that, "if teachers hope to educate children for the world in which they live, then social media must have a place in school experience" (p. 7). Choi's (2016) framework for digital citizenship offered insights into how "digital citizenship as an extension of traditional and/or critical approaches to citizenship would be beneficial to gaining a deeper understanding of evolving human activities, civic engagement, and citizenship" (p. 588).

What makes ignoring the world of social media even more perplexing and potentially hazardous is its proliferation in the political life of the United States and its use by individuals, groups, and nations as a way both to preserve and challenge power structures of the privileged. The manipulation of the United States 2016 Presidential Election by Russian entities has been well documented (Badaway, Ferrara, & Lerman, 2018; Inkster, 2016; Persily, 2017) and revealed, "It less likely that voters will choose on the basis of genuine information rather than lies or misleading 'spin'," (Persily 2017, p. 68).

In his book *Antisocial Media*, Siva Vaidhyanathan (2018) suggested, "If you want to build a machine that would distribute propaganda to millions of people, distract them from important issues, energize their hatred and bigotry, erode social trust, undermine journalism, foster doubts about science, and engage in massive surveillance all at once, you would make something a lot like Facebook" (p. 19). On the other hand, several studies have documented the role of Twitter and YouTube for the purposes of resistance and rebellion. Khondker (2011) argued that "new information technology has clearly the transformative potential to open up spaces of freedom," (p. 675).

In the case of the Arab Spring, for example, one activist said of social media, "We use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world" (p. 677). Tufekci (2017) found that these "networked protest" movements, from the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street, shared "collective identities outside traditional political and social divisions" and provided ways to investigate issues important to critical citizens, including "participation, horizontalism, institutional distrust, ad hoc organizations eschewing formal ones, and strong expressive bent[s]" (p. 83).

Krutka (2018) called on educators to "show their own tactical maneuverability if they hope to cultivate citizens for a time when the outcome of revolutions can shift with what is on our social media feeds" (p. 493). To this end, an analysis of how revolutions or even local change can occur (or be suppressed) with the assistance of social media can be an integral part of any critical citizenship curriculum.

Much reporting has been done on how Facebook was used by the Myanmar government to foment hatred against the Rohingya people through an organized process of

dehumanization (Mozur, 2018). This particular campaign resulted in the death and exile of thousands of Rohingya over the course of the past 2 years. Not only is social media, therefore, a site where young people engage with each other and the world, but it is a site where oppression and freedom, liberation and enslavement, power and submission comingle, conflict, and combat in real terms.

The world of social media, however, is at best unstable and at worst harmful. This uncertainty calls for *more* rigorous investigations aimed at understanding its impact in every facet of public and private life. For example, a recent clinical study found that greater social media use among young people results in greater symptoms of anxiety disorders (Vannucci, Flannery, & Ohannessian, 2017). In addition, a recent study by the Prince's Trust (Booth, 2019) found that young people in the United Kingdom (ages 16-25) feel less happy today than they did 10 years ago, including experiencing an overwhelming need to succeed based on their social media usage.

On a more global scale, it is important to note that most Arab Spring nations were, in fact, already "ready for revolutionary movements due to an assortment of politico-economic conditions," and that social media played "a supportive role at best" (Khondker, 2011, p. 678). More critical dispositions within students could unveil, for example, that the practices of power of Egypt's ruling party over 30 years might have played a larger role in the fomenting of revolution than social media. It was not, a critical citizen may conclude, the invention of social media that caused the Arab Spring to occur, but rather, social media was only a tool, albeit an effective one, that allowed for the dissemination of the findings, thoughts, and ideas resulting from critical citizenship itself. I

Years after the Arab Spring, activists lay some blame on the proliferation of misinformation through social media to explain why the promises of the protest movement have not been actualized. "I think it is time to let the world know," one activist said, "that the social media is also destroying the Arab Spring," (Tufekci, 2017, p. 266). Within these contexts critical citizenship educators and critical citizens themselves may "ask how social media can facilitate both power and fragility for networked protests" (Krutka, 2018, p. 493).

In addition, a quick search of the history of the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar would reveal that the persecution of this population can be traced back to a 1982 law that stripped citizenship from the Muslim population as a result of a request for Pakistan to annex their land at the end of WWII (Calamur, 2017). Critical citizenship's requirement of understanding historical antecedents would have revealed the limits to and causation of the Facebook campaign to dehumanize the Rohingya people, revealing it not so much a result of social media but rather part of an ongoing feud that used social media (and those who consume it) as a tool toward more longstanding and entrenched goals.

The complexity and instability of these interactions cannot be left to chance if we expect the development of critical citizenship dispositions. According to Shapiro (2018), the exposure to many different ideas and people is only increasing through technology and social media, but he added, "We seem to be seduced by a utopian fantasy that all contact among people eventually leads toward understanding, compassion, and kindness" (p. 255).

It is not enough to hope that critical skills will reveal themselves to young people through their social media experiences. In fact, "many K-12 students are neither savvy nor mindful social media users" (Krutka & Carpenter, 2016, p. 7). Likewise, in her book *Alone Together*, Turkle (2011) warned of the unchecked proliferation of technology in our lives, and suggested that people must "fight against" the "tempting idea" that "technology [will] get us out" of the predicament we find ourselves (p. xxvi).

In their book, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education in the 21st* Century, Jenkins (2009) suggested that educators need to, "engage [students] in critical dialogues that help them to articulate more fully their intuitive understandings of their [online] experiences" (p. 15). Students, therefore, must, "know how to use new media to articulate their unique sense of self while simultaneously sustaining the dignity and value of global difference and diversity" (Shapiro, 2018, p. 255). This nexus, then, the between critical citizenship and social media is where both are empowered. By employing strategies, techniques, and pedagogies that align with critical citizenship education, analysis of our engagement with the world, including through social media, can be authentic, meaningful, and transformational.

Critical Citizenship *Through* Social Media

Analyzing social media use through the lens of critical citizenship can be a powerful way to practice critical citizenship and, as a result, change how students interact with and use the medium toward more productive ways. Students can use their own social media feeds, for example, as a way to investigate how they and others use the tool in their daily lives – and to what ends.

They can investigate how it is used by governments, politicians, and corporations to manipulate and coerce. In short, dispositions used in critical citizenship education can be transferred in a number of ways to the terrain of social media. Many accessible investigative entry points for students of critical citizenship to interrogate social media are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Voice

First and foremost, one important aspect of critical citizenship is the affordance given to students to speak with their own voice, (Giroux, 1980, p. 359; Johnson & Morris, 2010, p. 90). That voice is expressed most commonly through social media today. By allowing students to use social media as a means of disseminating their findings and thoughts, critical citizenship classrooms can also become much more authentic spaces for this critical transformation to take place.

In fact, "students … found writing for authentic audiences [through Twitter] empowering" (Krutka & Carpenter, 2016, p. 5), thereby fulfilling an important aspect of critical citizenship by offering opportunities for courageous and effective discourse about issues important to them. Greenhow and Gleason (2012) also found benefits from the use of Twitter through improved motivation, greater opportunities for feedback (from both peers and teachers), and lower barriers for "publication" (p. 473).

The Echo Chamber

Another aspect of social media usage that is ripe for critical analysis is its capacity to act as an echo chamber, especially regarding how, why, and where young people get their information about the world. A Pew Research Center study found that over 70% of people between the ages of 18-49 get their news from social media sites (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017), while fewer than half of that number, according to a Nielsen study (Newspapers deliver across the ages, 2016), get their news from either print or electronic newspapers. This reliance on social media as a news provider fuels the power of the echo chamber.

Kobayashi and Ikeda (2009) found in their study across Japan and the United States that "the internet exposes people to information that is consistent with their predispositions

much easier than traditional mass media do" (p. 930), thereby acting as a tool of "selective exposure" (p. 929) to new and/or challenging ideas. In fact, the use of "social networking sites (SNS) makes it easier to be exposed to homogeneous information and to filter out indifferent or uncongenial heterogeneous information that threatens one's preexisting beliefs and values" (p. 931).

By using social media as a tool of news gathering, young people often fail at meeting one foundational requirement of critical citizenship – the desire to know another, especially those who think, act, and engage with the world differently. Rather, the news they obtain through social media would likely reify their existing attitudes and beliefs.

An analysis of one's news gathering habits and the diversity of opinion that those habits uncover (or hide) could be an initial way to determine how (if at all) students hear and engage with voices and perspectives that have traditionally been marginalized. The results of that analysis could help each student, with assistance from a critical citizenship educator, to identify not only why those gaps occurred but also how social media usage tactics could help fill such gaps. Critical analysis includes an interrogation of personal understandings, views, and (inter)actions. By coming to an understanding of *how* one comes to these understandings through news gathering strategies, students can make real changes in this aspect of their critical practice – identifying the voices that are silent to them and taking action to ensure a more cacophony of views resonate in their now expanded (or diminished) echo chamber.

Hashtag Activism

One way in which social media is already used to take action toward forms of social justice is through the use of hashtag activism. The goal of hashtag activism is "to bring attention to race, class, and gender-based injustices, often garnering mainstream media coverage" (Dadas, 2014, p. 17), using Twitter's system of hashtags (represented by the symbol #). Some common hashtag activism campaigns include #metoo, #justicefortrayvon, and #blacklivesmatter. The issues and goals of social justice in these campaigns align nicely with many the goals of critical citizenship.

While the intention of these hashtag activism campaigns is to bring awareness to an issue, awareness does not always result. Dadas (2014) pointed out that, "while the use of activist hashtags can focus readers' attention, we should also seek to acknowledge that which falls beyond the field of attention: politics, historical context, and competing arguments" (p. 33). In other words, beyond Twitter's 280-character limit lies deeper, more systematic hierarchies and abuses of power that can be difficult to identify. Participation in hashtag activism *and* the analysis of what hierarchies that participation reifies are both aspects of a critical citizenship investigation.

Though hashtag activism attempts to bring awareness to a social justice issue using a common hashtag by relying on speed and mass retweets, likes, and so forth, the process itself is subject to outside influencers, reinforcing echo chambers, and other abuses of power. One way to generate interest in one's posts in the world of Twitter, for example, is to market a hashtag so it is deemed "trending."

According to Twitter, "Twitter Trends are automatically generated by an algorithm that attempts to identify topics that are being talked about more right now than they were previously" (Twitter.com, 2010). These algorithms are *not* transparent, and no one outside of Twitter completely understands how they work, resulting in some claims of bias

(Proferes, 2016, p. 10). This process, in and of itself, is an exercise and perhaps even an abuse of power by Twitter.

Through their use of nontransparent algorithms, Twitter can influence what users read, what they are made aware of, and what is deemed "important" by controlling what is trending at any given point. This algorithm seems to be more reliant on the velocity of the likes, retweets, and postings rather than the volume of them or even the social significance of the issue or accuracy of the posts. By unpacking this phenomenon and understanding how Twitter's power is impacting any hashtag activism campaign, students would practice and implement dispositions required of critical citizens. Johnson and Morris (2010) identified the "capacity to politicize notions of culture, knowledge, and power" (p. 90) as an important skill critical citizens possess.

Friends

Critical analysis also suggests that exploring the relationship between the self and others is important in developing critical citizenship dispositions and skills. Johnson and Morris (2010) suggested that critical citizens value "inclusive dialogical relationship[s] with others' identities and values" (p. 90). Critical citizenship analysis can problematize the very concept of friendship in the world of social media.

The problem manifests itself when considering how users of social networking sites have ways to "unfriend" or "unfollow" those with whom they disagree. The most common reasons people were unfriended on Facebook, for example, were because their posts were either not interesting to or contradicted the ideas and experiences of the user (Sibona & Walczak, 2011). The ability to ignore (or unfriend/unfollow) another based on these reasons are diametrically oppositional to the dispositions required in critical citizenship. Critical citizenship requires learning and acting in *cooperative* ways especially *with* others – particularly those who do not fit within the dominant narrative.

While the definition of the dominant narrative may be murky, suffice it to say that. if one's friending/unfriending and following/unfollowing strategy reflects these motivations, one's dominant narrative will never be challenged or expanded. In fact, it may be reified. In addition, Twitter recently began populating newsfeeds not only with Tweets from those users consciously and purposefully follow, but also by those that are followed by those that users do not intentionally follow. In other words, if I follow House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, I would normally find in my Twitter feed posts directly from her. Now, Twitter has started populating *my* feed with Tweets from those that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi follows – without my consent or permission.

The intended purpose according to Twitter is to "expose users to new accounts and content that they might be interested in" (Darcy, 2019, para. 3). Yet, the fear is that "the practice [may] end up amplifying political rhetoric, misinformation, conspiracy theories, and flat out lies to its users" (Darcy, 2019, para. 5). This practice, combined with the concept of the echo chamber, may result in being exposed to new accounts and content, but only by those with which you may already agree.

It is reasonable to assume that most young people *do* employ these friending/following strategies and then are subject to algorithmic manipulations. A Common Sense Media (2018) study reported that 70% of young people feel left out or excluded while using social media at some point. This finding suggests that users have a desire to feel *included* during social media interaction and reinforces what boyd (2014) claimed are the struggles for teens to "make sense of who they are and how they fit into society" (Chapter 8).

One way to feel included is to acquire virtual representations of approval through likes, retweets, and other signifiers. Obtaining or earning likes may be a motivating factor in what young people post and with whom they interact. In short, young people *want* to be included and be liked; this is nothing new. What *is* new is *how* they are seeking inclusion and likability through technology.

Young people may then be motivated to friend or follow others online in a way that makes themselves feel included. They may post items that a potentially homogeneous group, with shared interests and ways of looking at the world, will like or retweet. A post that may challenge the status quo of the homogeneous group may result in unfriending, unfollowing, or at the very least, a minimal number of likes or retweets. These activities do not foster, encourage, or develop critical dispositions; an analysis of them does.

Posting on social media may be a way to engage with the world; however, without analyzing *what* one posts, *why* one posts, *for whom* one posts, and *to whose benefit* the post is made, it remains an act outside the boundaries of critical citizenship. Hence, the analysis of the practice of friending (or unfriending) and following (or unfollowing) others on a social media platform can be a meaningful exercise in the practice of critical citizenship.

Strategies for Implementation

The type of analysis regarding hashtag activism and social media friends/followers can be best described as developing critical social media literacies. These literacies are many and varied. For example, Choi (2016) offered four areas of digital citizenship to consider: ethics, media and information literacy, participation/engagement, and critical resistance.

A critical citizenship lens will help reveal what she identified as the "multifaceted, interrelated, critical, and global characteristics" (p. 584) of social media use. For example, Jacobson and Mackey (2013) developed the Metaliteracy Model to foster these critical literacies in social media. Students who engage with the world within the context of this model can, they argued, develop critical dispositions regarding their online activity that "empowers [them] to participate in interactive information environments, equipped to continuously reflect, change, and contribute as critical thinkers" (p. 88).

Through the seven elements of the Metaliteracy Model, students investigate the genesis and purpose of their own social media activity, analyze feedback from others, understand how messages are conveyed, and are encouraged to actively participate as informed critical users (Mackey & Jacobson, 2011, p. 70-76). Within this model, "Metaliterate learners continuously reflect on their own thinking to expand their knowledge and adapt to evolving technologies" (Jacobson & Mackey, 2013, p. 90).

Gleason (2018) found some potential benefit in this area as well. In a 2-year case-study of Twitter use among teens, he found that users began using reflective practices, including "vetting" potential Tweets through close friends and developing a level of comfort and empowerment to confront issues of personal interest, including sexual abuse. These and other strategies of how one uses social media, are used by social media, and to what ends, all fall within the desired dispositional aspects of critical citizenship.

Finally, planning a campaign for change through social media is a process that can be analyzed, learned from, modeled, and even engaged in through critical citizenship education. By identifying the weaknesses of hashtag activism, the limitations of the echo chamber, and the reifying power of friending/following strategies, students will learn about both the potential limitations and opportunities of this type of campaign.

For example, consider a study of the #bringbackourgirls campaign, which sought to change American policy after Boko Haram kidnapped hundreds of Nigerian girls. While public policy was changed, a broader discussion on the nature of American foreign policy also occurred within the same hashtag thread. One user-generated response stated, for example, "[Obama] has killed more Muslim girls than Boko Haram ever could," (Dadas, 2014, p. 31), referring to the Obama Administration's use of drone aircraft in its fight against terrorism.

This analysis may reveal that online activists need "a more critical, well-rounded socio-political perspective" by being "cognizant of what is being concealed when we advocate for increased attention to a cause" (p. 31). In this case, a deeper understanding of the motivations and implications of the entirety of American foreign policy is required to see what instances of injustice may be linked, unveiled, or caused by online activism.

While the concern for the kidnapped girls is laudable, the ignoring of other potentially troubling aspects of American foreign policy may be ignored and not addressed. The identification and understanding of these aspects of online activism can then be used to inform a locally, student-driven hashtag activism campaign. Students could use their own existing social media literacies along *with* critical citizenship dispositions to address the issue they want to impact while recognizing the deeper and more systemic problems that may have caused it. This process would, no doubt, represent a culmination in the understanding of the critical issues facing their community, as well as how the use of social media can be a tool for positive, emancipatory change.

Conclusion

As social media becomes ever more important to how young people engage with each other and with the world, its role and use in critical citizenship education should become more integral to the authenticity and impact of both. By weaving the use of social media with an analysis of its use within the context of critical citizenship, educators and young people alike can develop dispositions that help them understand how each is informed by the other.

Using social media as a tool of analysis *and* a tool of empowerment, critical citizenship educators can forge a new path forward. This paper joins the voices of others like Schultz and Jorgenson (2009)

as a call to change the way things are done; to strive toward an education at its best that is based on inquiry, critical thinking, and deep engagement that results in changes in learning, action, and both local and global social conditions. (p. 29)

Such a process calls for, "the reinterpretation of traditional adultist power relations …with meaningful response to the views and participation of young people" (Moore, 2011, p. 504) in the preferred way of engagement today – social media. The National Council for the Social Studies (2013) closed its Technology Position Statement with this call: "Social Studies educators already have identified what characterizes deeper or powerful social studies learning. What now is necessary is bringing this vision of powerful social studies education into the 21st century" (para. 7).

This paper has laid both a foundational theoretical rationale for the investigation into critical citizenship *through* social media and offered some examples of what this investigation might look like in actual classrooms. Much more work needs to be done, however. In his study of virtual communities and their potential for the future, Howard

Rheingold (1993) suggested that this new tool could either result in a "technological utopianism," that is, "citizen-designed [and] citizen-controlled," or it, "could become an instrument of tyranny" (p. 376). While these two extremes may never come to fruition, they both help shape the boundaries of an issue citizenship educators have been struggling with for many years. If we hope for a future defined as one that identifies and challenges injustice while fostering action to confront it, citizenship educators must engage in the world *of* the young rather than pretending they eternally engage in ours.

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