A Pedagogy of Communion: Theorizing Popular Culture Pedagogy

KYLE A. HAMMONDS AND KAREN ANDERSON-LAIN

Teaching [with] popular culture can be rewarding; however, it also is challenging in a variety of ways, not the least of which is that popular culture pedagogy has primarily been studied in terms of specific applications. Designing an individual lesson plan, project, or even unit with/around popular culture is one thing, but to situate an entire course using popular culture is another. At present, popular culture pedagogy has not been theorized in such a way as to find the commonalities that teachers of pop culture share. In other words, pop culture pedagogy is identifiable in application when teachers employ pop culture artifacts, but exactly what it means to teach popular culture is still unclear.

While some theoretical frameworks exist for popular culture pedagogy, these frameworks are highly abstract and philosophical – they do not connect to praxis in a meaningful way. Conversely, many application-based approaches to popular culture pedagogy exist in current literature, but these approaches are rarely grounded in frameworks of popular culture theory. Popular culture theory is uniquely situated to provide insight into a popular culture pedagogy in that popular culture theory centers on the ways in which popular culture itself is pedagogical. By placing popular culture at the center of the theoretical development of pedagogy, we move popular culture from the role of "exemplar" in the teaching environment to the narrative structure and cultural context in which learning occurs.

We employ a case study approach in order to bridge the gap between theoretical development and praxis in the classroom. As Robert K. Yin, noted case study researcher, explained, the researcher's prior experiences in the field of inquiry provides insight to the inquiry. In case studies the researchers are embedded as part of the examination. Yin argued that case studies can address emerging phenomenon, but existing literature and research should provide the theoretical guidance for case studies. Stanford University professor Kathleen M. Eisenhardt developed a theory building approach using case studies which includes enfolding existing literature while examining selected cases that would allow for theoretical development (533). Thus, existing research on the use of popular culture in higher education and popular culture theory provide a lens for analysis of the case study and a means of further theorizing theoretical approaches to popular culture pedagogy.

In response to these gaps, we will use this essay to locate both what is unique to teaching [with] popular culture and to develop a theory of popular culture pedagogy connected to praxis. In so doing, first, we will consider the ways in which popular culture in the higher education classroom has been previously approached, then, we will extend on narrative theory and popular culture theory to develop a theoretical framework of popular culture pedagogy to address gaps in research; and, finally, we will employ a case study to demonstrate the praxis of engaging this theoretical framework in higher education.

Literature Review

Popular Culture in Higher Education

Scholars (e.g., Bowman; Girouz and McLaren; Janak and Blum) have explored popular culture in higher education from both applied and theoretical frameworks. Much of the research on popular culture pedagogy

provides one-off examples of lessons or assignments with little theoretical connection. For example, in the *The Pedagogy of Pop,* Waweru and Ntarangwi made a convincing argument for the need to introduce narratives of African History into high school and introductory collegiate courses, but they failed to provide the theoretical connections to explain how these narratives function or connection to existing limited theoretical frameworks of popular culture and pedagogy (144). Furthermore, the *Lord of the Rings* has been used to examine language and race without providing theoretical framing (Culver, 179). Similarly, Michelle Parke discussed her extensive use of *The Wire, Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and even video games such as *World of Warcraft* to teach college writing (198). The suggestions for practice and lessons in these types of scholarship of teaching and learning are important for instructors in higher education. However as popular culture and pedagogical scholars, we are doing a disservice to separate the practical applications from theoretical frameworks. A true praxis will blend theory and practice (Freire, 123).

Much of the existing theoretical development regarding popular culture and pedagogy stems from an interdisciplinary cultural studies perspectives. Scholars from cultural studies (Bowman; Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren, and Peters; Giroux and McLaren) have explored the ways in which popular culture can be used in education as a form of politicized cultural theory. As Paul Bowman noted "culture has been theorized as pedagogy" (601). For example, Disney has been used to teach narratives of self-control (Aronstein and Finke, 614) and reinforce traditional gender norms (616). Additionally, digital games function as form of informal learning (Apperley, 42). In *Popular Culture, Pedagogy and Teacher Education,* Phil Benson discussed the ways in which popular culture is educative and mis-educative (17) by using a social constructivist theoretical framework to highlight how popular culture can function to provide alternative narratives for our lives and relationships, explore new choices, and expand our thinking about diversity (21). However, his

discussion frames "popular culture as education" (22) and falls short of providing insight into how to enact or interrogate these narratives into pedagogy in the classroom. Thus, scholars embracing this theoretical perspective tend to provide examination of how popular culture "schools" us rather than the use of popular culture in formalized education systems.

As cultural studies scholar Alan O'Shea explained the theoretical development and debates in cultural studies provides an important argument for the need to engage in a critical pedagogy that can educate students to be active and critical citizens in democratic public life (522). However, O'Shea argued that the connections between the theoretical frameworks and critical critiques of cultural studies need to be more specifically connected to students' personal engagements and bodies of knowledge through instigating activities and written assignments (526-27). Furthermore, Bowman argued for the need to interrogate "specific forms of cultural theory and/or which offers new theorizations of pedagogy by way of analysis of popular cultural texts, practices, institutions, or process" (601).

Edward A. Janak and Denise F. Blum began to bridge the gap between theory and practical applications in their edited volume *The Pedagogy of Pop.* Unfortunately the historical and theoretical chapters presented in the volume focus on historical importance of popular culture; analysis of popular culture; and the popular cultural portrayals of teachers and education and thus do not tie the theoretical frameworks directly to the praxis of pedagogy in the classroom. In the second half of the volume, editorial cartoons were used to explore the connections between theory and practice by examining hegemonic social structures using a social constructionism framework (Ellefritz, 108). Likewise, Ludovic A. Sourdot used *Aliens in America* to engage her students in discussion about student-teacher interaction in a teacher education course (171). While she frames her application based on the cultural studies work of Giroux (166) she falls short of developing or interrogating theory in her analysis. Popular culture

has even been incorporated into pedagogical best practices in health education (Leahy and Gray, 88). However, the implications for practice once again default to suggestions for using popular culture as one off examples (91) and stops short of extending or developing popular culture pedagogy theoretically (94).

In order to interrogate this important connection between theoretical frameworks and practical strategies and applications, we deploy popular culture theory and narrative theory to develop a popular culture pedagogy, which explores the manner in which we can create and re-create communal narratives within a higher education classroom. In order to accomplish the goal of developing a popular culture pedagogy we must foster praxis. Paulo Freire argued in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that praxis requires both reflection and action and is the means of implementing a transformative liberating education (54). Freire maintained that praxis is found in the dialogue between students and teachers in the classroom. In their dialogue they engage in a co-intentional education in which they come to critically understand reality and co-create knowledge (69). Instructors may facilitate this co-creation using popular culture and a strategic awareness of narrative.

Popular Culture and Narrative

In Ray B. Browne's classic essay "Popular Culture: Notes toward a Definition" he argued for an inclusive definition of popular culture that embraces all culture except elite culture (21). He explored the ways in which popular culture functions as an action or a "thrust" that can use the trivial and profound moments of life to explore the depths of human experience (16-17). As Marshall W. Fishwick demonstrates in "Popular Culture: Cavespce to Cyberspace" that no matter the focus (or time period) of popular culture, people and their collective lives are at heart of the study of popular culture (7). Communities share their collective lives through artifacts, icons, ideas, language, rituals, and symbols (14). In the

first edition of *The Popular Culture Studies Journal* Bob Batchelor argued that, at its most basic level, popular culture is "the connections that form between individuals and objects" (1). These connections trace their history back to early humans who "experienced some kind of emotion, feeling, or information-sharing based on cultural interaction" (2). In order for connections to constitute a form of interaction, the objects being connected with must in some way reflect the emotions, feelings, or knowledge of the person or group who crafted the object. Popular culture exists as the connections between people and *cultural artifacts* – objects that are physical manifestations of the structured experiences of other people. Thus, popular culture is centered on understanding the collective experiences via cultural artifacts that connect us as humans and can allow us as Fishwick stated "to see *underneath* the surface – of our society, our technology, our kitsch – and identify new wellsprings of energy, technique, and faith" (20).

Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm provides a way to understand this relationship between people using cultural artifacts. Fisher considered homo narrans to be the master metaphor in characterizing human nature. To Fisher, all human communication is based on the selection, arrangement, and organization of signs and symbols. Such arrangements constitute narratives. Narratives function as more than just stories they are ways in which we can see underneath the surface to common human experiences. Jay Allison extended Fisher's thought and summarized this argument by defining narrative as "particular structure[s] whereby humans organize experience" (109). Using the narrative paradigm, Fisher reminded us that "humans as rhetorical beings are as much valuing as they are reasoning animals" (376). Both values and reasons, then, are significant elements of human communication to consider. Human communication as narration is "a dialectical synthesis of two traditional strands in history and rhetoric: the argumentative, persuasive theme and the literary, aesthetic theme" (2).

Narrative is a useful lens for understanding popular culture for a number of reasons. First, popular culture, having the ontological quality of existing as a part of relationships between people and objects (and other people) (Browne xii), must be intimately related to communication. Studies in human communication describe relationships between people as they structure and coordinate meaning through signs and symbols. The narrative paradigm is a communicative lens that lends itself to understanding the relationships between people, symbols, and culture. Secondly, cultural objects are literal manifestations of experiences that have been crafted or structured. They are organized experiences that are interpreted and, therefore, again organized, selected, and arranged. Simply put, cultural objects offer narratives. These cultural narratives become popular when they are shared and become connectors between people or groups. To study popular culture must be to study communication through narrative and to teach [with] popular culture must be to teach through the process of story sharing.

In some sense, then, narrative is always what is being shared through popular culture – manifestations of experience being shared with others. Although, the exact meaning of these narratives may be contested. Once a person's experience is externalized and shared, it becomes open to the interpretation of others. Brooker gave an excellent example of popular culture and the contested nature of narration in his book on the cultural history of Batman (17-32). In the book's introduction, Brooker relied on interpretive strategies from Stanley Fish to explain Batman #250 as a case study. In *Batman* #250, several children encounter the superhero Batman and argue about who he is and what he can do (i.e., What qualities constitute Batman?). The fictional children face the same difficulty as true life consumers of popular culture: particularly, who gets to decide what the object of cultural interest means? Batman attempts to describe himself to the children; the children, in disbelief that they are speaking with the real Batman, reject the authorial meaning of Batman (as a symbol or icon).

Brooker noted that "no reading, however absurd it seems to [Batman], can be ruled out. It merely requires, in Fish's term, an interpretative strategy to enable or activate it" (23). Individuals do not make interpretations in a void, though; individuals draw from communicative experiences to understand to make meaning of popular culture. As Brooker explained, "We should also note that all the readings listed… are not generated from a single individual outside of society, but from what Fish calls an interpretive community, or a subject within that community" (25). Again, Brooker highlighted a theme of cultural stories about cultural stories – meta-narration that creates the boundaries of cultural groups.

As with all communication, popular culture gains its significance from being accepted in interpretive communities and being meta-narrated about within those communities. Meaning is not inherent to popular culture, but negotiated among and between the people connected to particular objects. Or as Fishwick explained "Popular culture is a mirror held up to life", but the "great mystery is the audience" (18). The meaning of the cultural object is not held in the object itself, but in the interpretation of the popular culture, the internationalization of the narrative, and the meaning we can find underneath the surface.

Identity, Popular Culture, and Narrative

Not only is the meaning of popular culture negotiated in interpretive communities, but these communities use popular culture to develop their own sense of identity. One aspect of narrative which is significant to pedagogy, but often overlooked in popular culture research, is its relationship to group identity. In his research with community theater members, Kramer used a bona fide group perspective to understand role negotiation in temporary groups. Part of this role negotiation involved determining group boundaries using communication. Kramer found that the formation of social roles among group members involves "social talk" regarding "unique topic[s] of conversation" (157, 158). People use social

talk that is particular to the group role they are playing at the time. Kramer also found that "members [of community theater groups] did not discuss with outsiders the internal working of the group" (168). The reason for limiting communication regarding particular group roles with "outsiders" may be that "the uniqueness of groups… prevents much in depth communication of internal group processes to those outside the group unless the group has a similar function" (168). Similarly, Dougherty and Smythe, in their study of sexual harassment in organizational settings, found that "water-cooler type conversations" – social talk in and, sometimes, about the workplace in the form of informal anecdotes – was significant in the development of group norms and organizational culture (305). Basically, group communication research reiterates over and over again that an important marker of group identity and group boundaries are the stories that are unique to the group. Narration about unique times, places, people, and experiences marks in-group and out-group members for each social role that we play.

As related to popular culture, group identity and association with "popular culture" is formed when people meta-narrate about cultural objects. These meta-narrations constitute communicative relationships formed between people through popular stories. Often this meta-narration is used to interpret and negotiate the meaning and significance of certain artifacts – an important aspect of popular culture pedagogy. We posit that classroom groups may be considered situated in popular culture when one of the class' group identity boundaries is its meta-communicative functions regarding a shared (popular) object or objects.

Popular culture teachers should also consider the processes by which these group identities are developed. A way that people start to communicate identity is through personal narrative – talk about the self. A sense of self-identity is often produced as a result of group membership. In learning communities, the way that students narrate about the self becomes a significant factor in the development of both their personal

sense of identity and their group membership. Sfard and Prusak distinguished between two types of narrative identities: actual and designated. An actual identity extends out of stories that a person tells about the self in the present. Designated identity extends out of future-oriented stories about the self. Wojecki found that narrative identities are significant in learning situations because an individuals' beliefs about the self and their ability or desire to learn (actual identity) influence the way that they imagine their future learning experiences (designated identity). Individuals' imagination regarding the future is also important to their present behaviors by influencing their perception of what they are capable of accomplishing. Other narrative scholars have contributed to discussions on narrative identity by explaining that narrative identity relates to life stories - or narratizations (Allison; Gravley, et al) - which rely on the perception of self in the stream of time. In short, perceptions of the self are based on evaluations of recursively interacting imaginings of the self in a broad temporal field, including the past, present, and future. We make sense of these imaginings through the selection and arrangement of data in narrative form (Allison).

Narratization and narrative identity are noteworthy topics in pedagogical studies because people are more willing to engage in learning activities and imagine their own future educational success if they can conceptualize themselves as capable learners in the present (Wojecki). Further, fictional stories – such as those which may be found in popular culture – provide a space for learners to theorize and conceive of situations in which they may apply knowledge from previous experiences. For instance, Botzakis concluded from his qualitative study of adult comic book readers that comic books involve "an array of meaning making activities that are bound in reading popular culture texts," including "reading practices [that have] critical, moral, literary and dialogic dimensions" (113, abstract). Botzakis found that adult comic book readers "read texts looking for usable parts… searching for answers from texts,

particularly comic books, but… also look[ing] within [the self] to operationalize… found knowledge" (119). In short, "Comic book stories… helped [interviewees] make sense of life events… The interrelated stories and characters created contexts that helped [the reader] reflect on his own social world" (119).

At its best, popular culture pedagogy should turn classes into interpretative communities, bound together by meta-narratives constructed by the class as they make sense of popular culture objects and theorizing about those objects using course concepts. These dialogues should allow students and teachers to draw connections beyond the popular culture artifacts themselves to other contexts. Popular culture artifacts should be operationalized by the instructor to provide space for exploring topics that inspire students to learn about themselves. Such an approach may function as to what educators John Dewey and Paulo Friere called a "problem-posing" technique – an educational situation that challenges students to use previous experiences to solve problems presented to them by instructors. In the case of popular culture, popular narratives may be applied cases that represent social problems for students to theorize about.

Popular Culture Pedagogy

One significant risk of teaching with shared story systems is that the importance of *story-sharing* will be lost in a process of mere *story-telling*. While story-telling may certainly have important social functions and pedagogical potential, the act of story-telling also risks keeping knowledge static and located in the past. After recognizing this "fundamentally narrative character" of most learning environments, critical educator Paulo Freire warned that pedagogical content may "tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified" (71). Freire saw the tendency of teachers to emphasize *telling* over showing and dialoging as a "narrative sickness" (71). The problems of mere telling are explained in detail by Freire:

"The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to 'fill' the students with the contents of his narration – contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity."

The teacher who utilizes a "banking model" of education creates narrative sickness by attempting to fill the mind of others with their own thoughts – to replicate the self. Such educators commit violence against their students by attempting to destroy otherness. Freire described the type of education that allows for these sorts of oppressive practices as "necrophilic behavior" (65). When educators force their thoughts on others, they try to replace the consciousness of the other with that of the self, effectively "killing" the other and using them (an act of consumption) as an object instead of treating them as a subject (an act of communion).

We posit that the cure lies in difference between story-telling (consuming the other) and story-sharing (jointly participating with the other). As has been already established, popular culture pedagogy must include acts of narration. However, to be truly successful, popular culture pedagogues must do more than tell. Popular culture pedagogy is a pedagogy of communion: one in which a group becomes attached to particular cultural object[s] and meta-narrates about the object[s] in unique ways – all sharing in the narrative and all sharing in the process of meta-narration. The development meta-narrative takes place in the process of dialogue. One example of a popular culture pedagogy at work may come from a case study of a course that we, the authors, developed with the principles of a pedagogy of communion in mind.

Case Study in Narrative and Popular Culture Pedagogy

Our work as instructors includes teaching an introduction to human communication course – the "basic course" for communication studies at a large, southwestern university. The faculty and staff involved in teaching the basic course employ a critical communication approach (Fassett and Warren). Therefore, in addition to teaching skills such as the basics of public speaking, approaches for interpersonal conflict resolution, and strategies for effective group communication, we also encourage students to think about how power is used and structures of power may be manifested in our everyday communication. We often use popular culture to begin discussion on course topics (e.g., demonstrate interpersonal interactions; power of language; stereotypes; cultural differences). For this study we explored, Frank Miller's Batman: *Year One* to introduce themes of social action and explore conceptions of justice. Additionally, we assigned supplemental course readings on comics theory. The supplemental readings (Langley; McCloud; Rhodes and Johnson; White and Arp) were used to link comics theory to course content.

A comic book story was brought to the class out of a shared belief with Sousanis that, "Stories sustain us and offer spaces of freedom. They let us reach across time and space to share in another's viewpoint, touch another's thoughts, and make them part of our own stories." (95) We agree with Sousanis that "reaching across the gap to experience another's way of knowing takes a leap of imagination" and embrace popular story-sharing in the classroom to engage this mode of empathy (89). Generally speaking, our experience was that students in the "Batman Class" indeed felt more comfortable first discussing critical / cultural topics in the context of fiction and then personal examples than students who just shared personal examples.

We argue that *Year One* served as a semester long case study, problem-posing situation, and context for theorization. As a case study,

Year One was ultimately a popular and commonly accessible narrative that students could refer to for examples of communication concepts throughout the semester. By starting discussions with a common example, we were able to observe that students during the "Batman semester" more easily navigated controversial and potentially painful / difficult cultural topics. Personal stories from students' previous cultural experiences seemed to be more clearly and easily understood if the related communication theory was paired to a common, fictional example before personal self-disclosures began. For example, discussing police corruption and brutality in *Year One* before discussing real-life social conflicts related to #blacklivesmatter and #blueslivesmatter.

In the Batman class, students read *Year One*, theory-based text books, and short articles or excerpts of articles linking questions associated with course content (communication studies) and the shared story. Perhaps the clearest example of these elements at work would be a persuasive speech assignment ("The Hero's Journey") in which students must advocate for action regarding a social issue of their choice. As a way of introducing persuasive strategies, the students read about models of argument – such as Fisher's narrative paradigm, Toulmin's model, and Monroe's motivated sequence – and selected stories and arguments from characters in *Year One* to assess using the previously studied models. Students evaluated both the dialogue of the characters in *Year One* and Frank Miller's overall narrative in *Year One* using the various theoretical models. After this assessment, students were assigned an argumentation model to use when completing the persuasive speech assignment. With the "Hero's Journey" speech, we ask students to narratize (Allison) – tell future-oriented stories – about true-life uses for communication theory. This was, by-and-large, successful as a bridge between the fiction/reality gap in discussion of critical communication praxis. Students were able to interrogate a number of critical social issues including homelessness, poverty, police violence, socio-economic privilege, drugs, criminal violence, racism, and sexism.

Their work demonstrated an ability to critical examine the cultural artifact (*Year One*) and connect their critiques to true-life cultural experiences they had researched and/or personally experienced.

Significantly, students in the Batman class used popular culture artifacts (Miller's book) as a place to make sense of information from the textbook and a space to discuss applications for otherwise a-contextual concepts. The joint story-telling and story-sharing about the popular culture artifact contributed to student understanding of course concepts. In short, we engaged in a popular or communion-oriented pedagogy by being committed to using course content to interpret or relate to a cultural object in order to reach a particular end, such as a class learning objective.

Beyond attention to common cultural narrative[s] and group-development through meta-narration, popular culture pedagogues should be willing to narratize the course based on the common stories in the class. That is, if an instructor hopes to situate an entire course in popular culture, the course should be designed so that students' participation in the communal story-sharing regarding the cultural object will affect how they pursue goals in the class. To return to the Batman class example: the "Hero's Journey" speech is one of several major assignments in the class. Students move from early assignments – such as an informative speech asking, "Who are you and what is your 'superpower'"? – to later assignments that connect dots between concepts (e.g., the "Hero's Journey" speech asking students to apply their "superpower", or special interests and talents, toward resolving a social problem). As the semester progressed, students' interpretation of the popular story evolved and to they could apply course material to new types of problems and contexts.

In popular culture pedagogy, students should rely on what they have learned / negotiated in relation to classmates and the cultural object[s] to complete future class assignments and engage in further class discussion. A class' learning "journey" will be reflected in their ability to make new deductions based on ongoing meta-narration paired with challenging new

educational experiences (i.e., problem-posing situations). Classes situated in popular culture will narratize class goals together based on a shared exposure to popular culture narratives and their meta-communication about them.

Discussion

In this article, we extend on lived narrative theory to develop a generalizable theory of popular culture pedagogy. Particularly, popular culture teachers should engage in a pedagogy of communion to emphasize the unique potential of "popular" stories in the classroom. As a part of this theorization, we hope to highlight specific implications for studies in narrative theory, popular culture, and pedagogy.

First, narrative does not merely act as an abstract concept or lens for understanding – narrative structures are functional pedagogical tools. When classes narratize goals together, they "plot" their future trajectory in a course and apply narrative structure to their life-stories in the class. Instructors and students embody story-living in the process of narratization. Allison explained that, in narratization, a person participates in an "ongoing mediation of his/her own physical and/or verbal actions within a temporally configured field in order to achieve an envisioned but, as yet, unrealized end" (109). In this way, a person - or, as we argue: a class – may live out futures that follow the structures of narratives imagined in the present or that extend from the past. To act out such structures is to participate in a life-story. Instructors in any discipline would do well to consider the ways that their selection of class materials may facilitate joint narratization processes among students. Further, these narratizations should be facilitated in such a way as to work toward course objectives and cultivate understanding of discipline-specific content. While productively facilitating group narratization may be challenging, instructors and classes may benefit from joint enactment of communal

narrative in everyday life as a community building tool. Our "pedagogy of communion" extends on Allison's narratization by realizing new advantages associated with attention to story-living in pedagogy. Specifically, we advocate that awareness of communal narratives allow strategic engagement of them toward productive narratization.

Additionally, the implications of a pedagogy of communion are multi-faceted. This theory is demonstrative of ways in which popular culture narratives function as pedagogical tools by building community through story-sharing. Teachers engaged in story-sharing through popular culture as a method of learning participate in an iteration of Freire's dialogue by establishing an environment of communal exchange. As Batchelor argued, popular culture is the connection[s] between people and artifacts – and these connections may be used to encourage Sousanis' conception of imaginative empathy in a classroom setting. Such pedagogy meets the call of bell hooks – who has written much about her use of popular culture in the classroom – for an engaged pedagogy in which teachers and students "embrace the challenge of self-actualization" and are willing to be vulnerable by disclosing their own subjective experiences (22). Ultimately, we believe that what hooks understood about movies and engaged pedagogy is also true of other forms of popular culture: "folks… go to movies to learn stuff" and "often what we learn is life transforming in some way" (2). From a teaching standpoint, a communal narrative approach to popular culture pedagogy challenges faculty to understand and dissect the narrative structures of our communal experiences in and with popular culture in the development of our curriculum and our dialogue with students.

Finally, we wish to emphasize that a popular culture pedagogy should be aimed toward praxis. We believe a pedagogy of communion may be a useful practical framework for a variety of instructional areas, despite our primary example in this article being a semester-long endeavor. Engaging popular culture as a semester-long situation has clear unique advantages,

as previously discussed, but we maintain that using popular culture may also have positive impacts for instructors in their approaches to individual assignment strategies and unit strategies as well as curriculum design. In each application, the key to productively accessing advantages of popular culture lies in extremely purposeful modification to assignments and content so as to facilitate dialogue through the communal narrative. This strategy stands opposed to pedagogical planning that is driven by textbook selection or commonly discussed topics in a given subject area. Popular culture pedagogy should challenge students to follow threads through communal stories. Given the possible influence of following story threads when discussing topics in class, instructors should treat the selection of a story or stories for the framing of class discussions to be of paramount value. Instructors must challenge our students to look underneath the surface of popular culture (Fishwick) to explore the deeper cultural meanings of these communal narratives.

We argue for three significant characteristics of praxis in popular culture pedagogy: temporal currency, elicitation of relevant topics, and problem-posing potential. Temporal currency is related to students' ability to connect with or understand a particular narrative. In order for a popular culture narrative to effectively engage students, teachers must select artifacts that are timely. For instance, in the "Batman Class," our use of Miller's *Year One* was strategic in several ways. First, *Year One* features a popular American icon: Batman. Even so, not every student is familiar with details of Batman's character; therefore, *Year One* was purposely selected because it is an origin story that gets everyone "on the same page" in terms of understanding Batman's iconic framework. Additionally, *Year One* connects themes from the 1980s – specifically regarding police corruption – to contemporary media discourse and ongoing debate about corruption and brutality in law enforcement. We capitalized on great temporal currency by ensuring that every student was familiar the same story (relevance in the context of the class) and by

facilitating discussions connecting the popular culture material to external discourses (relevance to "real world" interests). In other words: having temporal currency means that a popular culture artifact speaks to students' lived experience and/or the lived experiences of others. Popular culture should be strategically selected to engage student imagination and empathy.

Instructors may also utilize popular culture to engage students through elicitation of topics that are connected to the course learning outcomes. If teachers have a clear idea of what skills and/or bodies of knowledge they would like students to "walk away" with at the end of the course, selection of popular culture artifacts may be used to guide activities and discussions relevant to such skills and/or knowledge. To again draw an example from our "Batman Class," the book *Year One* is an origin story that is concerned with the construction of a hero (or heroes) in the midst of a corrupt environment. The authors designed the course with the intention that students would explore conceptions of what makes a person "heroic" and how they could use communication to advocate for social justice on a community level. Topics such as police corruption, racism, hegemony, and privilege were all interrogated using meta-narration which combined the narrative of *Year One*, the course material, and the individual, real-world examples disclosed by students and instructors. The meta-narration produced in the dialogue from the "Batman class" demonstrated ways in which this approach to popular culture pedagogy elicits Giroux's "counter narratives." Giroux argued that narratives which focus on the othering of groups or individuals in the margins may provide means of engaging in problem-solving projects and discussion of social issues in public arenas (46). For example, in the "Batman class," the students' critical analysis of the behaviors of characters in *Year One* resulted in counter-hegemonic meta-narration in which the class interrogated contemporary social issues of racial injustice and police brutality. In sum, popular culture pedagogy fosters communal narrative by allowing students to draw personal and

social connections between the topics of the course and the course content. *Year One* was employed as a way to begin joint participation in semester long conversations on the relationship between communication and social justice.

Finally, teachers should select popular culture artifacts that offer problem-posing scenarios for students. We extend on Botzakis' findings regarding comics as a space for challenge and for theorization by arguing that all popular culture provides the potential for such space (119). Our argument comes from the place of our own lived experience in using various forms of popular culture in the classroom as well as from the well documented experiences of other teachers using popular culture (e.g., hooks). In our "Batman Class," *Year One* was not merely a case study for understanding content-related concepts, but also a tool for provoking a response from students. Particularly, Frank Miller is a famously controversial writer and his approach to Batman, while perhaps entertaining in some ways, also contains representations that many people may find to be problematic. Therefore, we used course content to highlight both the advantages and the disadvantages of Miller's work in order facilitate reflexive commentary in our course. In other words, *Year One* contained both examples of course theory at work and offered social problems for the class to consider. Following in the steps of Dewey and Freire, we believe that problem-posing education encourages students to theorize on their own and deduce unique applications of that theory. Popular culture seems especially appropriate as a problem-posing tool due to the fact that authors ranging back as far as Aristotle have observed that tension and conflict are inherent in narrative structure. Teachers may tap into the special advantages of popular culture by introducing students to narrative tensions and then facilitating a collective problem-solving. Of course, the challenge is to find popular culture which poses problems related to relevant course content and topical questions.

In summary, we have extended on Allison's narratization by examining phenomenological approaches to group narration as it relates to group goal-setting and story-living, specifically in the classroom. We also elaborated on possible strategic uses of communal story-sharing as a pedagogical tactic related to student story-living. Finally, we concluded that, based on theorizing regarding narrative, popular culture, and pedagogy, there are three important characteristics of praxis in popular culture pedagogy: temporal currency, elicitation of relevant topics, and problem-posing potential.

Conclusion

Popular culture offers many unique possibilities in the classroom. The narrative nature of popular culture contains inherent problem-posing potential as well as a space for class-wide meta-narration and narratization regarding the understanding of course content as well as productive directions for the future of the class. We perceive that such advantages may be best utilized by situating entire courses in popular culture. We hold this position based on our experiences with "one-off" applications of popular culture in which there was limited time for students to engage in dialogue and develop communal (meta)narratives for themselves. However, we believe that limited (single lesson or unit-long) assignments featuring popular culture would still reap some of the benefits of a pedagogy of communion. Limited exposure to popular culture or exposure to various types of popular culture artifacts over time may still capitalize on problem-posing potential and be used to facilitate types of class discussions as related to course content. Even without a semester-long situation in a particular popular narrative, teachers and students may still meta-narrate about popular culture and further develop group identity associated with that meta-narration.

Additionally, even though our case study focused on the use of comics in the classroom, we fully believe other forms of popular culture could easily be situated in a pedagogy of communion and would offer similar advantages to those we experienced in our "Batman Class." Future research in popular culture pedagogy may include investigations of semester-long situating of classes with forms besides comics. Another productive area for future research may be a study of ways in which artifacts may gain or lose temporal currency and how high-currency artifacts go about evoking relevant meaning[s] with students.

We offer a pedagogy of communion as a framework for incorporating popular culture into classrooms – regardless of discipline. Instructors of popular culture are unified in their use of cultural narratives in pedagogical contexts. On its own popular culture is pedagogical (Bowman), we argue when combined with course specific content the power of the communal narratives of popular culture can be fully realized. We hope our theoretical framework may be useful for popular culture scholars to incorporate these cultural narratives into classes on an individual assignment, unit-based, or semester-long level.

Work Cited

Allison, John M. "Narrative and time: A phenomenological reconsideration." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 14 (1994): 108-125. Print.

Apperley, Tom. "Understanding Digital Games as Educational Technologies: Capitalizing on Popular Culture." *Popular Culture, Pedagogy and Teacher Education: International Perspectives*. Ed. Phil Benson and Alice Chik, 2014. Print.

Aronstein, Susan L., and Laurie A. Finke. "Discipline and Pleasure: The Pedagogical Work of Disneyland." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 45.6 (2013): 610-24. Print.

Batchelor, Bob. "Editorial: What is popular culture?" *The Popular Culture Studies Journal* (2013). 1-5. Web.

Benson, Phil. "Popular Culture as Education: How it Teaches and How We Learn." *Popular Culture, Pedagogy and Teacher Education: International Perspectives*. Ed. Phil Benson and Alice Chik, 2014. Print.

Botzakis, Stergios. "To be a part of the dialogue: American adults reading comic books." *Journal of Graphic Novels & Comics* 2.2 (2011). 113-123. Print.

Bowman, Paul. "Popular Cultural Pedagogy, in Theory; Or: What Can Cultural Theory Learn about Learning from Popular Culture?" *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 45.6 (2013): 601-09. Print.

Brooker, Will. *Batman unmasked: Analyzing a cultural icon*. London: Continuum, 2000/2005. Print.

Browne, Ray B. "Popular Culture: Notes towards a definition." *Popular Culture Theory and Methodology: An Introduction*. Ed. Harold E. Hinds, Jr., Marilyn F. Motz, Angela M. S. Nelson, 2006. Print.

Browne, Ray B. "Foreword" *Popular Culture: Cavespace to Cyberspace*. Marshall W. Fishwick. New York, Hayworth Press, 1999. Print.

Culver, Jennifer. "How Does This Sound? Using Language to Characterize Race in Middle Earth." *The Pedagogy of Pop:*

Theoretical and Practical Strategies for Success. Ed. Edward A. Janak and Denise F. Blum, 2013. Print.

Dewey, John. *Experience and education*. New York: Macmillan, 1938. Print.

Dunne, Éamonn. "Love Foolosophy: Pedagogy, Parable, Perversion." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 45.6 (2013): 625-36. Print.

Dougherty, Debbie, and Mary Jeanette Smythe. "Sensemaking, Organizational Culture, and Sexual Harassment." *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 32.4 (2004): 293-317. Print.

Eisenhardt, Kathleen M. "Building Theories from Case Study Research." *The Academy of Management Review* 14.4 (1989): 532-550. Print.

Ellefritz, Richard. "Editorial Cartoons as Education: Political Cartoons as Pathways to the Pedagogy of Popular Culture." *The Pedagogy of Pop: Theoretical and Practical*

Strategies for Success. Ed. Edward A. Janak and Denise F. Blum, 2013. Print.

Fassett, Deanna, and John Warren. *Critical communication pedagogy*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007. Print.

Fisher, Walter R. "Toward a logic of good reasons." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 64.4 (1978): 376-384. Print.

Fisher, Walter R. "Narration as a human communication paradigm: The case of public moral argument." *Communication Monographs* 51 (1984): 1-22. Print.

Fishwick, Marshall W. *Popular Culture: Cavespace to Cyberspace*. New
    York: Haworth Press, 1999. Print

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.). New
    York: Continuum, 1968 / 2000. Print.

Giroux, Henry A., and Peter McLaren. *Between Borders: Pedagogy and
    the Politics of Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.

Giroux, Henry A. *Counternarratives: Cultural Studies and Critical
    Pedagogies in Postmodern Spaces*. New York: Routledge, 1996. Print.

Giroux, Henry A. "Is There a Place for Cultural Studies in Colleges of
    Education?" *Counternarratives: Cultural Studies and Critical
    Pedagogies in Postmodern Spaces*. Ed. Henry A. Giroux. New York:
    Routledge, 1996. Print.

Gravley, Dianne, Brian K. Richardson, and John M. Allison "Navigating
    the 'abyss': A narrative analysis of whistle-blowing, retaliation, and
    identity within Texas public school systems." *Management
    Communication Quarterly* 29.2 (2015): 171-197. Print.

hooks, bell. *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*.
    New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.

---. *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies*. New York, NY:
    Routledge, 1996. Print.

Janak, Edward A., and Denise F. Blum. *The Pedagogy of Pop: Theoretical
    and Practical Strategies for Success*, 2013. Print.

Kramer, Michael W. "Communication in a community theatre group:
    Managing multiple group roles." *Communication Studies*. 53.2 (2002).
    Print.

Langley, Travis. Beneath the cowl: Who is batman? In Batman and psychology: A dark and stormy knight. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2012. Print.

Leahy, Deana and Emily M. Gray. "Popular Pedagogical Assemblages in the Health Education Classroom." *Popular Culture, Pedagogy and Teacher Education: International Perspectives*. Ed. Phil Benson and Alice Chik, 2014. Print.

McCloud, Scott. Blood in the gutter. In *Understanding comics: The invisible art*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1994. Print.

Miller, Frank. *Batman: Year One*. New York: DC Comics, 1988/2007. Print.

O'shea, Alan. "A Special Relationship? Cultural Studies, Academia and Pedagogy." *Cultural Studies* 12.4 (1998): 513-27. Print.

Parke, Michelle. "World Goin' One Way, People Another: Using *The Wire* and Other Popular Culture Texts to Teach College Writing." *The Pedagogy of Pop: Theoretical and*

Practical Strategies for Success. Ed. Edward A. Janak and Denise F. Blum, 2013. Print.

Rhodes, Ryan I. and David K. Johnson. What would batman do? Bruce wayne as moral exemplar. *Batman and philosophy: The dark knight of the soul*. Ed. Mark D. White and Robert Arp, Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2008. Print.

Sfard, Anna, and Anna Prusak. "Telling Identities: In Search of an Analytic Tool for Investigating Learning as a Culturally Shaped Activity." *Educational Researcher* 34.4 (2005): 14-22. Print.

Sourdot, Ludovic A. "Popular Culture and Teacher Education in the Twenty-First Century: The Pedagogical Possibilities of *Aliens in America*." *The Pedagogy of Pop: Theoretical and Practical Strategies for Success*. Ed. Edward A. Janak and Denise F. Blum, 2013. Print.

Sousanis, Nick. *Unflattening*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2015. Print.

White, Mark D. and Robert Arp. Introduction: Riddle me this... . In M. White & R. Arp (Eds.), *Batman and philosophy: The dark knight of the soul*. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2008. Print.

Wojecki, Andrew. "What's identity got to do with it anyway? Constructing adult learner identities in the workplace" *Studies in the Education of Adults,* 39.1 (2007). Print.

Waweru, Fred N. and Mwenda Ntarangwi. "Amending Eurocentric Narratives of African History in the U.S. Classroom: A Popular Culture Approach." *The Pedagogy of Pop: Theoretical and Practical Strategies for Success*. Ed. Edward A. Janak and Denise F. Blum, 2013. Print.

Yin, Robert K. *Applications of case study research* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2012. Print.

Yin, Robert K. *Case study research design and methods* (5th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2014. Print.