Social media play an increasing role in our everyday lives and in education. Teachers and administrators may use social media for professional learning, to find materials for use in the classroom, and as a vehicle for engaging students with each other or with the world at large. As this body of scholarship continues to grow, now is the time to reflect on where the field might go from here to conduct the most impactful scholarship on education and social media. Accordingly, this chapter proposes research directions and approaches that promise to advance this expanding field, grounded in insights from the long history of studying technology in education, including over a decade of research on social media. We summarize insights from reviews of the existing research literature on learning and teaching with social media in education. Next, we apply a typology of the kind of studies needed to advance the field of education and educational technology as a useful lens for assessing prior work, identifying gaps in the knowledge base, and envisioning potential research directions. The chapter argues that new scholarly work is needed into three main areas: (1) research focus, or the subjects or topics of research that are needed; (2) methodological work, or new or underutilized approaches to studying education and social media; and (3) conceptual work, or theorization or framing of studies in education and beyond. We provide specifics in each of these areas in the final section.

Social media play an increasingly large role, not only in our everyday lives, but also in K–12 and higher education (Greenhow & Askari, 2017; Rehm, Manca, Brandon, & Greenhow, 2019, this yearbook). For
instance, school leaders and administrators are using social media to access resources toward achieving educational outcomes (Daly, Liou, Del Fresno, Rehm, & Bjorklund, 2019, this yearbook), for various communication purposes (Chapman & Greenhow, 2019), and to impact educational politics and policy making (Daly, Supovitz, & Del Fresno, 2019, this yearbook). Teachers are leveraging social media for professional learning (Carpenter & Krutka, 2014; Greenhow, Li, & Mai, 2019; Macià, & Garcia, 2017; Sauers & Richardson, 2015), to find materials for use in their classrooms (Hu, Torphy, & Opperman, 2019, this yearbook; Torphy, Hu, Liu, & Chen, 2017), as a tool for students to provide each other with social supports (Greenhow, Burton, & Robelia, 2011; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009a, 2009b), and as a vehicle for students to engage with the world at large (Ito et al., 2013). Moreover, as social media become part of our learning ecology, or the “the set of contexts found in physical or virtual spaces that provide opportunities for learning” (Barron, 2004, p. 195; Barron, 2006), researchers have documented both the informal learning and intentional and active community building that students, teachers, and administrators are engaging in beyond formal activities in schools (Greenhow, Menzer, & Gibbins, 2015; Rutledge, Dennen, & Bagdy, 2019, this yearbook). As this body of scholarship continues to grow, now is the time to reflect on where the field might go from here to conduct the most impactful scholarship on social media and education.

In her AERA presidential address “mapping the terrain” of professional development research, Hilda Borko (2004) noted the prevalence at that time of “existence proofs.” These are studies describing or evaluating a particular use, case, or program within a particular context. Generally, existence proofs in technology research might be said to employ the following logic: Technology X was used under condition Y, and Z was observed. For example, preservice teachers in the context of a teacher preparation program are observed using videos of themselves teaching to reflect on their practices, thus resulting in greater attunement to their classroom management practices and personas (Snoeyink, 2010).

In general, this tier of research is helpful for mapping terrain, such as when a field is first trying to understand a new type of tool, practice, or intervention. Additional research is often needed to draw generalizations or to better understand how certain contexts or conditions might influence particular outcomes. Adding complexity to technology research, those contexts and conditions may include not only school or classroom settings, but also the particular platforms used and their application outside of formal education. For example, to nonusers, platforms like Twitter or Facebook could appear to be very similar, even though their users, uses, and purposes might be quite different. Furthermore,
people engage in selective use of tool functions and use tools in different ways. As Orlikowski (2000) suggested, technologies-in-practice can be somewhat like supermarkets; individuals may habitually gravitate toward certain spaces but not others. For example, people in different school districts or different departments may have identical access to a technological tool, but make use of different slivers of that tool’s total affordances in different ways (Cho & Wayman, 2014; Leonardi, 2013). In this way, existence proofs can highlight examples of practices or examples of complicating conditions, but additional empirical and theoretical work is needed to understand what might be true across classrooms, schools, users, and platforms.

As the presence of social media grows in the larger culture, it is important for educators, educational researchers, and policy makers to better understand the multiple roles and relationships that exist for social media in education, as well as the challenges and opportunities it poses for learning, teaching, school leadership, policy, and research. Accordingly, this article proposes research directions and approaches that promise to advance the study of social media in education, grounded in insights from the long history of studying technology in education, including more than a decade of research on social media. To begin our discussion of where research on social media in education might go, we present a brief overview of where it has been to date, mapping the terrain of current research in this area with a summary of findings from recent literature reviews (Greenhow & Askari, 2017; Greenhow, Galvin, Brandon, & Askari, 2018; Greenhow, Galvin, Brandon, & Askari, in press; Rehm et al., 2019, this yearbook). We employ a heuristic (Roblyer et al., 2005) that helps us understand the types of research needed to advance the field of education, and we categorize existing studies by type to identify gaps and opportunities for future research. Next, we discuss the kinds of studies still needed to guide this growing field.

MAPPING THE TERRAIN OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA RESEARCH

Research about social media and its potential roles in education has continued to blossom. Published literature reviews relating to social media in education have focused mainly on learning or teaching with a particular social media type (e.g., social network sites; Alnujaidi, 2017; Greenhow & Askari, 2017; Rodríguez-Hoyos, Salmón, & Fernández-Díaz, 2015). The two most commonly studied platforms are Facebook and Twitter (e.g., Aydin, 2012; Chugh & Ruhi, 2018; Gao, Luo, & Zhang, 2012; Tang & Hew, 2017).
In terms of the education sector, the lion’s share of studies have focused on social media in higher education (Guy, 2012; Perez & Mairead, 2018; Zachos, Paraskevopoulou-Kollia, & Anagnostopoulo, 2018). Examples include studies of the perceptions and experiences of college students and of higher education faculty (e.g., Forkosh-Baruch & Hershovitz, 2012; Manca & Ranieri, 2013; Tess, 2013). In higher education, research on the benefits and challenges for teaching and learning with social media was mixed. For example, although some studies suggested that platforms such as Facebook could encourage information sharing, critical thinking, and peer support (e.g., Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008; DiVall & Kirwin, 2012; Mazman & Usluel, 2010), others cautioned about the potentially negative impact of social media on student outcomes such as college GPA (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010; Junco & Cotton, 2013).

Research in K–12 education, though steadily increasing over the past decade, is still in early stages (Rehm et al., 2019, this yearbook). For instance, a systematic literature review of more than a decade of research (2004–2018) on K–12 teachers’ use of social media in education revealed a growing number of studies over the last 15 years (Greenhow et al., 2018; Greenhow et al., in press). Moreover, of the 58 studies identified in this review, only one quarter addressed K–12 teaching with social media; the majority addressed K–12 teachers’ professional learning, and largely in informal settings not tied to a formal professional development program or organization. Greenhow and Askari (2017) reviewed research on K–12 teaching and learning with social network sites specifically (e.g., Facebook, Edmodo, Ning, MySpace) and found similar themes. Next, we introduce a typology of studies needed to advance the field of education and educational technology. Because one focuses on social media in education research specifically, this typology serves as a useful lens for taking stock of prior work and for envisioning potential next steps.

**TYPOLOGY OF STUDIES NEEDED TO ADVANCE THE FIELD**

Roblyer (2005) argued that there are four types of studies that will significantly advance education generally, and educational technology research in particular: (1) studies that establish the technology’s effectiveness at improving student learning; (2) studies that investigate implementation strategies, or how technologies already in use in formal education are being implemented; (3) studies that report on common uses to shape educational practices; and (4) studies that monitor impact on important societal goals (e.g., equity goals, citizenship goals).

First, research that establishes the technology’s effectiveness at improving student learning helps to examine and problematize the theorized
benefits or impact of technologies and consider their relative advantages for education. Moving beyond anecdotal accounts, such research aims to establish if schooling is really any better with technology. In their review of the research on education with social network sites (2004–2014), Greenhow and Askari (2017) found that studies that established the technology’s effectiveness at improving student learning outcomes were nonexistent in their data corpus. Similarly, a more recent review of social media in K–12 education (2004–2017) found only two studies that measured the technology’s impact on student learning in classrooms (Greenhow et al., 2018; Greenhow et al., in press). For instance, Van Vooren and Bess (2013) evaluated the impact of reminder tweets from teachers on the performance of 86 U.S. students, as measured by their scores on homework and tests. In a control classroom, teachers employed more traditional reminding techniques, such as writing on the board and giving spoken reminders. Van Vooren and Bess (2013) found that the teachers’ reminder tweets were effective in increasing student performance.

A second type of research needed to advance education and educational technology, according to Roblyer’s typology (2005), is that which investigates implementation strategies; that is, we need studies that examine educational technology approaches that are in use and likely to increase (e.g., Roblyer uses the examples of word processing in writing instruction or online learning). Implementation studies attempt to explain how, why, and for whom the technological approach works well in given situations (Roblyer, 2005). Greenhow and Askari (2017) found that implementation studies were the most common type in their review of research on education with social network sites, comprising about a third of reviewed studies. For instance, in one study, Callaghan and Bower (2012) examined the type of thinking evidenced by students’ contributions to a social network site in 10th-grade commerce classes in Australia. They found that while using the social network site enhanced students’ motivation, higher order thinking, and digital literacy development in these classes, this was mediated by how the teacher created an online presence and emphasized learning over socializing on the platform.

Third, studies that monitor and report on common uses to shape practice are needed to provide evidence of the impact new technologies are having on school life to help predict or suggest negative (or positive) side effects. We might then use their predictions to shape pedagogy or policy in ways that minimize the negatives and make their impact more positive. Roblyer (2005) provided the example of studies focused on mobile online technologies; studies might address whether integration of these technologies in school life promotes cheating, as well as sharing data quickly, and, if so, what should schools do to implement them differently? Greenhow
and Askari (2017) found that studies reporting on common uses to shape practice were the second most common type of study in their review. For instance, Fewkes and McCabe (2012) explored how Ontario high school students used Facebook after it became available to them in school. They found that the majority of students perceived Facebook as beneficial for learning and had used it for various educational purposes (e.g., receiving reminders and important updates from teachers, group collaboration, communicating with classmates, homework help), but most teachers had not integrated this technology into their teaching. Fewkes and McCabe suggested steps to scaffold pedagogy at the school level.

Fourth, Roblyer (2005) argued that we need educational and informational technology research to monitor impact on important societal goals, such as equity and access goals (e.g., whether or not students, teachers, and other stakeholders are able to access the benefits that technology makes possible and which individuals or groups are not benefiting). In the 2017 literature review, only a handful of studies monitored societal impact, looking at differences among learners or teachers, or differential access to technology (Greenhow & Askari, 2017). For instance, Kale and Goh (2014) surveyed 161 teachers at West Virginia middle and high schools to understand their teaching style, experience with information and communication technologies (ICT), and their attitudes toward teaching with social media. Age, self-efficacy, workload, and views about social media in teaching were found to be significant factors predicting teachers’ likelihood of using social media in their teaching. Kale and Goh concluded that infrastructural improvements (e.g., students’ not having computers or Internet access at home), workload adjustments, and increased professional development opportunities are needed to promote social media integration in teaching practices. A similarly low incidence of studies that examine social media’s impact on students’ learning or that monitor impact on important societal goals (e.g., differential access and use) was found in a more recent review of the literature on social media in education (2004–2017; N= 58 studies) (Greenhow et al., 2018; Greenhow et al., in press).

Moreover, Roblyer’s (2005) typology emphasizes studies of technology integration in formal learning environments, but today’s students and teachers have rich opportunities for technology-supported learning beyond school. In fact, Greenhow and Askari (2017) found that 7 out of 24 reviewed studies in their literature review characterized students’ informal learning with social media outside of school and therefore did not fit into any of the four categories on Roblyer’s typology, which was conceived more than a decade ago. Moreover, this finding aligns with what other more recent literature reviews concerned with education and social media
have reported: A sizable proportion of studies are focused on students’ or teachers’ informal learning, not tied to any classroom, curricula, professional development program, or school site (Greenhow et al., 2018; Greenhow et al., in press; Manca & Ranieri, 2013, 2016).

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS FOR EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

This overview of the education and social media scholarship, presented through the lens of one typology of research needed to advance the field of education and educational technology, reveals several gaps in the knowledge base. Moreover, as mobile social media pervade many aspects of our lives—social media that were not designed primarily for education—we find that these technologies-in-use push against the parameters of Roblyer’s typology, constructed more than a decade earlier; today’s technologies-in-use highlight the typology’s limited emphasis on the integration of educational technology within schools and curricula, for the purposes of increasing students’ learning outcomes rather than across the broader learning ecology within which formal and informal education occur today. These gaps highlight opportunities for research and practice and foreground the kinds of scholarship needed to guide and advance this growing subfield. Future directions for scholarly work can be organized into three main areas, all of which are essential: (1) research focus, or the subjects or topics of research that are needed; (2) methodological work, or the opportunities for new or underused approaches to studying education and social media; and (3) conceptual work, or the theorization or framing of studies and their connection to larger discourses in education and beyond. All three aspects—research focus, methodological work, and conceptualization of research—are needed to enrich this terrain. Next, we present our description and explanation of the specific work needed in each of the three main areas.

RESEARCH FOCUS

Research About Practices, Not Just Tools

As noted earlier, social media researchers have focused on “existence proofs,” or uses of particular tools or platforms such as Twitter (Denker, Manning, Heuett, & Summers, 2018; Tang & Hew, 2017) and Facebook (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018). This type of research is useful for helping the field to discover new tools and the affordances they might offer. However, an important next step is to also recognize that these activities are actually framed by broader sets of practices and needs. In other words, we suggest that the field might be served by examining not only technological
artifacts in use but also the forces driving how and why they might be used. There may be at least two benefits to turning toward practice as the object of interest.

First, doing so opens up to debate questions about the universality or interchangeability of particular platforms and functionalities. To the uninitiated, a screwdriver is just a screwdriver, but to an insider, there are differences between a flat head, a Phillips head, and a Swiss army knife. Dropped into the practice of furniture assembly, one might work, another might not, and another might be both sufficient and frustrating. By turning toward issues of practice, researchers can better understand how instructional, social, and technical forces intersect. For example, although ultrasounds and CT scans might seem similar to X-rays, radiology departments that adopted these technologies in the 1980s experienced marked shifts in social dynamics and collaborative problem solving (Barley, 1990). In essence, these tools were tied not only to the direct goal of creating images but also to issues involving the expertise and social ties needed to accurately generate and interpret those images. Thus, although the temptation is to assume that genericized ends (such as interpersonal communication, content sharing, or tagging) might make social media tools interchangeable, the question is actually researchable. It may be that a message is a just a message, but in the milieu of work and social practices, that message may also be surrounded by forces such as the capacity to reach the right audiences, the potential for public scrutiny, or the need to incorporate additional technologies or strategies in order to achieve one’s goal (Cho & Snodgrass Rangel, 2016; Watson-Manheim & Bélanger, 2007).

Second, turning toward practice facilitates the work of instructional design, which emphasizes that goals and strategies should be the primary drivers of instruction, not particular strategies or technologies. Mishra and Koehler’s (2006) concern that technology integration in school settings does not sufficiently reflect pedagogical needs remains an issue in the era of social media; it is tempting to adopt a tool without fully considering how it will fulfill student learning needs. In other words, by making practice the object of interest, the field is better prepared to highlight the extent to which and the ways in which particular practices or instructional needs might be served. On this note, it also avoids the pitfall of treating tools as ways to motivate learners. Although some new technologies might initially spark students’ interest, the novelty may also fade over time (Keller & Suzuki, 2004). In contrast, long-term motivational effects might be attributed to the pedagogical benefits of the practices (Jeno, Vandvik, Eliassen, & Grytnes, 2019). For example, computerized alternatives to textbooks (e.g., digital books) might seem more novel than hard copies, but
the staying power of a resource is linked to whether students are learning. The idea that research needs to shift from a tool focus to a practice-based one does not nullify the value of the tool-focused research conducted to date. However, future researchers should be encouraged to extrapolate effective learning designs from existing studies of individual tools and view them as initial steps for developing conceptual frameworks and theories that will guide technology-facilitated learning (Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

“Measure” Learning Process or Outcomes

Whereas Roblyer’s (2005) typology focuses attention on student outcomes (e.g., increased cultural awareness or increased reading comprehension), our sense is that social media research would benefit from also considering additional, perhaps intermediary, sorts of outcomes. For instance, Desimone (2009) described three areas meriting examination when it comes to evaluating changes that are theorized as leading to student outcomes: educator knowledge, educator attitudes, and educator practices. These three areas may also serve as guideposts for evaluating the potential impacts of social media, thus creating bridges toward eventually assessing effects on student outcomes.

For example, in line with the premise that improvements in educator knowledge might benefit student learning, research has begun to investigate the ways in which social media may provide an important venue for educators to share knowledge and support each other around problems of practice. For example, teachers and administrators alike have been found to increasingly turn toward a variety of social media platforms, including, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Teachers Pay Teachers (Carpenter & Krutka, 2014; Gao & Li, 2017; Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Opfer, Kaufman, & Thompson, 2016; Sauers & Richardson, 2015; Shelton & Archambault, 2018; Torphy et al., 2017). Although such accounts provide descriptive evidence that some educators might see social media as an avenue toward professional learning, the step would be to call into question whether such uses actually improve their knowledge or skills. As a first step toward this goal, Cho (2016) examined school leaders’ uses of Twitter for professional learning, comparing interview data about participants’ Twitter use with their actual tweets. This study found that although school leaders were largely enthusiastic about Twitter’s potential to enhance their knowledge and skills, they were rarely able to identify actual changes in practice spurred by Twitter. This dissonance between perceptions about Twitter and its actual benefits was further underlined by analysis of the tweets. Leaders’ tweets mostly pertained to technology, announcements, and small talk; issues relating to problems of practice
(e.g., leadership, teaching and learning, educational policies) were relatively infrequent. Echoing this, Frank and Torphy (2019, this yearbook) describe similar patterns among teachers. Moving forward, studies in this realm—that is, examinations of social media’s relative advantage when it comes to educators’ knowledge, attitudes, and practices—will need to shift their focus from “Are educators attempting to learn via social media?” to “What are educators attempting to learn, and why and how? Is it of any value? And are they actually learning it?”

Studies Within and Across Learning Contexts

To best support practice, research needs to reflect the complexity of the school environment. Individual studies of social media use in education tend to home in on specific educational uses or issues. For example, studies have examined how social media supports classroom learning (Greenhow & Askari, 2017), how it is used for teacher professional development (Gao & Li, 2017; Greenhalgh & Koehler, 2017), and how its use affects academic performance (Flanigan & Babchuk, 2015; Lau, 2017). These studies and others like them make valuable contributions to the field and further our understanding of social media use in relatively well-defined instances. However, if one walks into a school to observe or discuss social media among students, teachers, or administrators, it readily becomes apparent that social media is a cross-cutting technology, used in a fluid, systemic manner across many aspects of the school context (Rutledge et al., 2019, this yearbook), and in life more generally (Rainie & Wellman, 2012). In support of formal student learning, social media is used by teachers outside the classroom to locate and share learning materials and advice with peers, and inside the classroom to share learning materials and interact with students. Students use it to facilitate group work and seek homework assistance through their peer networks. Beyond support for formal classroom learning, students, teachers, and administrators use social media to facilitate a variety of communication, sharing and networking activities across the school context; uses range from the pursuit of personal interests via informal learning to the organization of extracurricular activities (Greenhow & Gleason, 2012). Of particular note are informal learning activities that represent self-directed forays into knowledge and skill development and provide insight into ways that people naturally build and explore through learning networks. All of this activity occurs in a milieu through which individuals reckon with issues such as context collapse (Dennen & Burner, 2017) and identity development (Cho & Jimerson, 2016). Context collapse occurs when people from different contexts in an individual’s life come together, whether intentionally
or by chance, in a social network (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014), and people often shape and monitor their social media identities to avoid related discomforts. Treating school-led uses of social media in isolation ignores the disruptive, pervasive nature of the technology; other uses and activities are just a click or alert away, providing easy connections and diversions. At this juncture, it is important to widen the researcher’s lens and find greater points of connection among studies of social media within and across school contexts. This can be achieved both through ethnographic studies that examine how social media affects school activities and culture, and by situating studies of learning-focused social media uses within this larger sociocultural context.

**METHODOLOGICAL WORK**

*Employing Different Methods for Different Research Goals*

In the preceding passages, we have highlighted several promising directions for research involving social media in education. As the field heads toward these new horizons, it may also be fruitful to consider the kinds of methodologies that have been employed in prior research and the ways in which future endeavors might be supported by these and alternative methodologies. For example, Greenhow et al. (2018) reviewed the methodologies used in studies about K–12 teachers and their uses of social media. In terms of data sources, the bulk of these studies relied on surveys of teachers, interviews with teachers, or a combination of surveys and interviews. Although there were a few exceptions, rarely did these studies incorporate social media analytics or include student data (e.g., attitudinal, achievement). One study employed an experimental design (Van Vooren & Bess, 2013), and two studies drew on data sets with users numbering in the thousands (Rehm & Notten, 2016; Rosenberg, Greenhalgh, Koehler, Hamilton, & Akcaoglu, 2016).

However, recent social media research has also begun to push on methodological traditions in exciting ways. For example, Karimi, Derr, Torphy, Frank, and Tang (2019, this yearbook) provide an overview of resources relating to big data techniques, including, but not limited to, data scraping and machine learning. Blending big data techniques with social network analysis, Supovitz, Daly, and Del Fresno (2018) were able to map patterns in discourse about the Common Core State Standards among approximately 53,000 distinct actors on Twitter.

Moreover, Latzko-Toth, Bonneau, and Millette (2016) described approaches to strengthening qualitative social media research. These include ethnographic strategies, having participants talk out loud as they
use social media, and enlivening interviews by presenting participants with visualizations or other data about their own social media activities. For example, Hurst (2018) modified photo-elicitation techniques to help superintendents explain and reflect on their engagement in political discourse on Twitter.

These and other endeavors serve as important examples of how researchers may address issues of data collection, analysis, and design in the future. On this note, we would also encourage the field to consider the potential contributions of design-based research, which focuses on the collaborative and iterative development of interventions in context, to future scholarship (Brown, 1992; Collins, 1992). Such scholarship views education as a design science akin to engineering. In so doing, it aligns closely with our position that social media research in education needs to address the practices, contexts, and conditions leading to particular outcomes. However, it does so by encouraging researchers and practitioners to work closely together in order to develop, adjust, and evaluate new practices. This is because design-based research aims to inform theory and practice through the design of interventions that put theory “in harm’s way” (Cobb, Confrey, diSessa, Lehrer, & Schausble, 2003, p. 10). It involves iterative cycles of design, implementation, and study in real-world classrooms (or other naturalistic settings). Techniques such as conjecture mapping (Sandoval, 2014) can be applied to guide iterative development that contributes to both practice and further theory development around the tools and practices.

For example, a researcher might conjecture that a tool like Twitter can support the development of student argumentation skills, and define this as the ability to use Twitter to engage in argument on issues of concern or to employ different argumentation styles using Twitter. Working together with teacher(s), the researchers would develop a set of activities or resources they believe support the desired outcomes and devise observation or measurement techniques to determine if the designed activities are producing the outcomes. A key in this process is that all components can be examined, and if the expected outcomes are not realized, the research team engages in evidence-supported changes to the embodiment, the mediating processes, or even the initial conjecture in a tuning process. The result is an intervention that can reliably lead to outcomes, which might then be compared to other possible interventions or that might be used as a design theory in the development of further interventions.
CONCEPTUAL WORK

Expanding the Theorization and Framing of Scholarship

Recent reviews of the research on social media in education have reported that existing studies are largely framed by a small number of learning, teaching, and educational technology theories. These include participatory, constructivist, and social learning frameworks, which were frequently cited in studies featured in recent literature reviews of social media in education research (Greenhow et al., 2018; Greenhow et al., in press; Manca & Ranieri, 2016). For instance, specific oft-cited frameworks in this research literature include professional learning networks theory, communities of practice theory, and social capital theory (see Daly, Liou, et al., 2019, this yearbook, for an overview of this theory and an example of its application). Other oft-used theoretical frameworks reported in the literature include theories of teachers’ technology integration (i.e., technological pedagogical content knowledge [TPACK] framework; Mishra & Koehler, 2006), self-efficacy, digital literacies, affinity spaces, conceptualizations of identity (Robson, 2017), cultural historical activity theory (Trust, 2016), global citizenship (Carpenter & Justice, 2018) and self-regulated learning theories (Matzat & Vrieling, 2016). We need more empirical work that is grounded in—but also pushes against—existing learning, teaching, and educational technology theories to advance this growing field of education. Thus, technologies-in-use can both amplify educational phenomena and disrupt them, throwing our theorizations into question and generating new conceptualizations because educational theories and technologies are in reciprocal relationship with one another (Salomon & Perkins, 2005).

Connecting Scholarship on Social Media to Larger Discourses in Education Research

A challenge for research in general is keeping individual studies or lines of scholarship connected to larger discourses or conversations in the field. This is a tension between specificity and generalizability. Observational or descriptive studies of a particular technology used in specific circumstances often lean toward evaluation as opposed to research. As many have put it, “evaluation particularizes; research generalizes” (Mathison, 2008, p. 189). Beyond encouraging research on social media in education that is generalizable, we also encourage research that helps the field understand how uses of social media in education can relate to and support larger key issues. Examples of such issues include social and emotional development, school improvement, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.
Given societal concerns about “screen time” and youth development and behavior (e.g., Chassiakos et al., 2016), studies of social media in education should be cognizant of the current state of this conversation and make sure that the designed uses of social media in the study conform to currently understood “best practices” for screen time. Furthermore, research on social media in education could contribute to the larger conversation with studies that focus explicitly on how positive uses of social media, like technology in general (Kolb, 2011), relate to students’ overall relationship with these increasingly ubiquitous tools and spaces. On the other hand, we must move beyond techno-optimism to critically evaluate social media in education and its potentially negative uses and impacts, such as the spread of false information, cyberbullying, manipulation of user attention, unethical data-sharing, and more (Krutka et al., 2019, this yearbook).

An overall goal of education research is school improvement. A growing number of studies in this area focus on school leadership (e.g., Cobb & Jackson, 2011) and school organization (e.g., Honig, 2008) as they relate to school improvement. Some studies employ social network analysis methods to understand how influence within networks of people affects school change or teacher learning (Penuel, Riel, Krause, & Frank, 2009). Social media tools and approaches fit well with these ways of understanding organizational change for school improvement, as evidenced by the work of Daly, Liou, et al. (2019, this yearbook).

Issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion lie at the heart of the educational enterprise. Which children’s lives are advanced through schooling, and which are left behind? How do issues of identity—national, cultural, gender, etc.—relate to learning and development? Whose voices are privileged or silenced? Research on social media in education should be sensitive to these issues, be aware of how individual and group differences might relate to outcomes, and attempt to provide insights into how to improve the lives of all learners.

**Interdisciplinary Research**

Bullough (2006) suggested that educational researchers need to read widely and beyond their own fields of study in order to develop an “expansive vision” of education. To set up disciplinary boundaries and remain within them is to ignore scholarship with clear implications for educational practices. Social media is a technology that does not respect disciplinary boundaries, but rather transcends them. Education cannot avoid the context collapse that is inherent in social media use, whether employed as a classroom tool or as a means of connecting classrooms to
larger contexts. Students, teachers, and administrators carry over their personal knowledge about, skills with, and beliefs about social media when it is integrated in the school context, as well as their professional and personal relationships, networks, and stories. Although educational researchers may not be interested in studying all these dimensions of social media themselves, our work can be advanced by building on the work of those who do. Reading widely in social media means exploring what has been published by researchers in psychology, communication, information studies, sociology, and an array of health-related and professional disciplines. These researchers have explored how social media affects identity, friendship, and mental health. Additionally, research conducted on teenagers outside school settings has found that they have rich, self-directed learning experiences within their social media networks (Halverson & Shapiro, 2013; Scolari, Masanet, Guerrero-Pico, & Establés, 2018). These studies provide a platform from which educational researchers can develop a fuller understanding of the complexity of social media, the various effects it has on students’ and teachers’ lives, and how they independently use it to support knowledge activities. However, reading across disciplines is not enough. Educational research on social media use would benefit from an interdisciplinary approach involving collaborations with scholars who understand the social and psychological ramifications of its use. It is through interdisciplinary work that we can come to truly understand the impact that social media has on both learning and, more broadly, school systems.

CONCLUSION

Social media technologies are part of a long history of technologies that offer tantalizing potential for educational practice. But that history is also characterized by little change in either the underlying structure(s) of education or its outcomes for learners (e.g., Cuban, 1986, 2001). We argue that the recurring failures of technology to have a meaningful impact on education is often due to our tendency to focus on the technology itself instead of on how the technology is used. The answer to questions such as “How does technology X affect learning outcomes?” is always, “It depends” (Fishman & Dede, 2016). It depends on how the learning environment is designed. It depends on the curriculum and activities designed to foster learning. It depends on the teacher, and on the students.

Social media is and can be many things within both classrooms and the larger system of education. There have been promising developments in research over the past decade on social media and research on social
media in education, such as the work represented by the other articles in this yearbook (Brandon, 2019, this yearbook; Rehm et al., 2019, this yearbook; also Greenhow et al., in press). However, too much of the work remains focused on the technology itself. In this article, we offered suggestions for the future of research on social media in education in three main areas: the focus of social media research, the methodologies employed, and the broader conceptualization of the research. We look forward to research—in many different forms—that will help to shape the way(s) in which social media contributes to accomplishing our larger educational goals.
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