



Toward a Transformative Education within Youth Media Production

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Jocson, Korina M. *Youth Media Matters: Participatory Cultures and Literacies in Education*. U of Minnesota P, 2018. 208 pp. \$32.50 pb. ISBN 9780816691869.

In our contemporary society, a young person may enter the education system already competent in digital literacies and influenced by the problematic world of social media. Korina M. Jocson, however, through a “connective analysis” (3), presents the case for understanding how young people are using new digital technologies to affect and transform their educations. *Youth Media Matters: Participatory Cultures and Literacies in Education* examines how young people are creating, sharing, and distributing their stories and why those stories are critical to all of society. Jocson’s inquiry begins with the following question: “How do youth media shape culture, and vice versa” (4)? Over the course of her book, she answers that, by participating, learning, and educating within youth media, young people produce knowledge that has the potential for a transformative education. She offers multiple perspectives on how the work “foregrounds social difference and confronts uneven relations of power” (42), which illuminates the intersection between young people’s interests and technological competencies and informs her argument that the educational potential of youth media lies in understanding it “as assemblage, as critical solidarity, as place-making, and as pedagogy . . .” (8).

The structure of *Youth Media Matters* combines case studies and examples of artistic productions, linked together critically within her theory, method, and analysis of understanding the significance of *new media literacies* in youth culture and education. Jocson defines new media literacies as “emergent thinking” and “emergent concepts” (9) in three different areas: new media, new literacies, and media literacies. The case studies and artistic examples highlight Jocson’s teaching projects, and involvement with artists working, at the intersection of literary and media arts. Although the case

studies focus on the US education system and its related scholarship, Jocson's discussion of theory and methods and her literature review are transdisciplinary and thus potentially applicable across the humanities and social sciences in most Western-based systems of education. From Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome analogies, to Gruenewald's pedagogy of place, to recent discourses on technology literacy in the classroom, this book should find an audience not only with educators and researchers working with youth but students as well, as she provides meticulous citations for every theory and method she synthesizes. Her bibliography alone is an excellent resource for critical theory, both historically in the humanities and social sciences and in current educational scholarship in media literacies and pedagogies.

Jocson introduces the book, and each chapter, with a story and a question. The stories and questions go to the heart of her research as she presents young people of high school and college age creating new media productions and asks: "[W]hat types of media texts are produced and distributed by youth, and . . . what do media texts suggest about youth culture in the digital age" (47)? She offers readers several keywords that connect and define the polyvalent world of youth media: assemblage, critical solidarity, place-making, and pedagogy. Along with her conceptions of youth media, she suggests that as young people harness their stories within new media literacies, they become more competent and contribute to "an ethos of collaboration, participation, and distributed expertise . . ." (14). This last element is important as throughout the book Jocson circles back within each chapter to how youth media production contributes to the pedagogy of media technology in the classroom and to participatory cultures in the larger communities where young people dwell.

Jocson's use of a keyword at the start of each chapter thematically locates that chapter's case study within her overall argument. Chapter 1, for instance, uses the term assemblage, with a gesture towards Levi-Strauss's *bricolage*, to discuss do-it-yourself and do-it-together productions where students were challenged to offer their stories of identity and self-representation in multimodal platforms. Using everyday objects and oral histories, students created short one-to-three-minute films about how their families came to California. Telling the often-untold stories of the students in an ethnically diverse class in this format reduced

the privilege of expository writing and elevated the power of multimodal representation. In discussing these student projects, Jocson's analysis matrix considered the modes of script, image, and sound across their technical, conceptual, and aesthetic elements. The analysis matrix also revealed how the opportunity for sharing histories and cultures among the students encouraged creation based on organizing and manipulating existing texts into new ones (41).

Chapter 2 introduces the reader to the theme of critical solidarity and the notion that youth media is situated at the intersection of literary arts and media arts. An ethnographic study of two video poem projects demonstrates how youth engage in remix and multimodal practices that reinforce critical solidarity as "a means by which we acknowledge the social dimensions of our thinking and analyses" (52). Cultural and material remixes make concrete the social worlds of youths as they find creative ways to appropriate, design, and produce other texts. Jocson suggests that the collaborative nature of youth media brings together young people in their shared interests and social critiques and that the success of these two video poem projects challenges educators to understand how young people are disrupting conventional ways of learning and teaching literary texts.

With the notions of assemblage and critical solidarity firmly in place, Jocson demonstrates in chapter 3 how place is integral to youth media production. Her case study involves high school students enrolled in a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program that created a television broadcast. She describes the significance of establishing a classroom learning ecology, which in this case included the classroom television studio, a community resource centre, and the school district's television station. Place becomes "relational and contingent upon relationships . . ." as the students operate within the learning ecology (72). Jocson references the new materialist, spatial, and postmodern theoretical turns in social research in her discussion of how place is "practiced" and "shaped by a constellation of networks . . ." (74). Jocson also provides a history of the school program and a brief exposition on the binary between academic and applied learning. In ranging from case studies involving literature and poetry in chapter 2, to that of an applied technical education program—or what her colleague referred to as "SMTE (science, math, technology, and engineering)" (80)—in chapter 3, Jocson argues that media technologies are "dynamic matter that can produce and enact ontologies in

relation to each other” (84). By producing these ontologies, students place themselves in the social imagination of their communities.

Chapter 4 describes Jocson’s own pedagogy in her new media literacies classroom, a pedagogy based in theory-building and grounded practice. Her place as teacher, researcher, and ethnographer facilitated students’ social action projects—video documentaries and interactive websites—that raised awareness of social issues within historically segregated midwestern US towns. Her description of the projects, with her analysis of students’ production notes and reflection papers, suggest that the “participatory politics” of this work, which is based on “interest-driven and peer-based acts . . .” has the potential to be “pedagogically operational in critical education” (105). As a “learning partner” in the classroom, Jocson describes “an ethos that developed through *collaboration, participation, and distributed expertise*” (105) that she suggests not only contributed to knowledge production, but also reveals how young people each see themselves “as a member in the larger cultural milieu” of the world through their interactions with digital technologies (118). Jocson began the course with critical theory readings in media pedagogy, remix and youth media, copyright and fair use in education, and popular culture and teaching in urban schools. She suggests the theoretical framing was generative for her students as they began to understand their place and influence within the cultural milieu. The students then began the work of finding and interviewing participants willing to be documented, transcribing and scripting, filming, and creating an interactive website. Jocson details the new media literacies that students became adept at in this process, which moved from “tinkering or experimenting with digital media technologies (*play*) . . . [to] expanding one’s mental capacities through new tools and new experiences (*distributed cognition*) . . . [to] traveling across different communities and respecting multiple perspectives (*negotiation*)” (124). She suggests that this work can offer insight into youth media pedagogy and its relationship to participatory politics and knowledge production (128).

In the final chapter, Jocson brings all her themes—assemblage, critical solidarity, place-making, and pedagogy—together as keys to understanding youth media in participatory cultures. She ties everything together with the notion of the “translocal assemblage” of media

produced by young people (129). The “translocal” has the potential for assemblage as youth are engaged across space and time. It is “culturally responsive pedagogy” (134) through remix in social media spaces, in particular the ability to “remix cultural material with a commitment to social alliance and social action” (146). Young people use the visual landscape of new media to enact critical solidarity online and offline, which in turn inserts their issues into the larger community and disrupts the dominant voices.

At the end of this final chapter, Jocson offers up further questions, such as, “in what ways is critical media ethnography similar to or different from other methodological approaches?” (150-51) and “[i]n what ways can the objects of study involving multiple modes be known and inscribed? Should they be” (151)? She offers these questions as an indication that youth media is a dynamic force that is continually changing and responding to the world of young people and thus research within this field must also continually adapt. She suggests that by examining and actively incorporating such youth media as digital storytelling, PSAs, short videos, podcasts, and interactive websites into her teaching practice, she has expanded her critical pedagogy and decolonized her classroom, as her students use new media literacies to comment on, and participate in, the world. Ultimately, Jocson creates a compelling case for youth media as a pedagogy capable of influencing and transforming education. Her expansive inclusion of critical theory, detailed methodology, and analysis within her case studies ground her argument that young people, engaged in their learning by using new media literacies, are actively transforming their own educations. Educators, researchers, and scholars would do well to take notice.

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