Reviews

The Class: Living and Learning in the Digital Age, by Sonia Livingstone and Julian Sefton-Green. (2016) New York: New York University Press. Available to read online – http://connectedyouth.nyupress.org/details/9781479824243/

By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism, by Henry Jenkins, Sangita Shresthova, Liana Gamber-Thompson, Neta Kligler-Vilenchik, Arely Zimmerman (2016) New York: New York University Press. Available to read online – http://connectedyouth.nyupress.org/book/9781479899982/

These two recent books in the Connected Youth and Digital Futures series are both outcomes of projects enabled by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Digital Media and Learning (DML) Initiative. Both books are available to read online via a commons licence, and this review responds to the books and some 'bonus features' in the form of a launch event for both publications at the London School of Economics, with presentations by and discussions with all three authors and a further presentation by Julian Sefton-Green to the Creative and Media Education doctoral cohort at CEMP.

The significance of the two publications for media educators hardly needs stating. As well as being the latest works by several of the most prominent scholars in the field, the two texts are thematically related and timely, both offering antidotes to generalizing discourses about media, technology, youth and 'engagement'. They come from different angles, Jenkins' collection an optimistic state of the art of mediated youth activism, *The Class* offering a more nuanced and, in places, sobering account of the enduring *dis*connections between education, young people and technology.

Livingstone and Sefton-Green's longitudinal project is an ethnography of a group of 13 to 14-year-old secondary school students in a London neighbourhood. The researchers reported on the various ways in which the lives of the participants were / are shaped by pressures of individualisation and how schools, families and the young people themselves attempt to negotiate the meaning of education in the contexts of digital networks and increasing competition. The project was far broader than the use of digital networks, and yet this provides a conduit for many of the other themes addressed - social stratification, globalization and consumerism, uncertainties about the future, crises of confidence in the family, contested visions of educational goals, anxieties about norms and values:

By prioritizing links over nodes, the network metaphor offers an alternative to research focused either on particular places (such as the small social worlds of home or school or neighbourhood) or on particular individuals. Mapping the networks within and beyond the class also allows us to see the class not as a mere aggregate of individuals or a collection of girls or boys or wealthy or poor children but as a mesh of interconnections. (Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 2016: 61)

The key research questions posed related to social networks including, but not restricted to those mediated digitally and what they imply for sociality, learning and civil relationships; digital media activities and what they tell us about forms of connected (or disconnected) learning and the structure of peers, school, family and community and how this enables social reproduction or social change. The fieldwork was a year long, with a group of students from a non-selective London secondary school, covering in school observations, at home fieldwork, social network analysis and following up on interests, groups, locale and tracking of attainment.

Findings reveal the use of popular (digital) media culture at school as a way of creating forms of shared and common experiences across a diverse population. At home, the project demonstrated how media are used in the domestic context both to create moments of togetherness but simultaneously to allow for family fragmentation and separateness. The participants were active and engaged users of social media, online gaming and mobile phones, mainly to make face-to-face contact or to stay in touch with friends or to download and consume entertainment. However, little connection between after-school media use and school-defined ('schooled') learning was apparent.

Analysing the networks at work in the participants' lives, as related to their learning, the researchers found the participants' 'ego networks' to be divided between a core group, cliques and a periphery aligned in various ways to networks of migration, with each student's configuration of these clusters being unique. Speculative generalizing from the data can suggest this to be a microcosm of contemporary UK society, perhaps more broadly across the connected West – *"they were embedded, more or less securely, within rather tight networks – experienced as coherent small worlds – centred on home, school, locale and diaspora."* (p83) The digital networks engaged with served, in the main, to reinforce rather than create or disrupt relations of popularity and marginalization. Energy was being put into maintaining multiple networks and interconnecting social worlds, but there was no evidence that networked digital media was diversifying or deepening connections. Returning to media education / literacy's current interests, this research is sobering in its account of the lack of third space activity, with the schooled concept of learning being

profoundly disconnected from everyday life and this being accepted as the order of things by the participants and their parents or carers, the writers being surprised by *"the effort that the school and family put into resisting moves to connect learning across sites"* (p240) as *"both teachers and young people have a lot invested in keeping their spheres of interest and identity separate and away from the scrutiny of the other."* (p235).

Summarising the attitudes of the class as 'connected, conservative and competitive'. Livingstone and Sefton-Green's key implication for the media / digital third space is the lack of interest by either the school or parents to look beyond their 'immediate gaze', coupled with rich ethnographic observations of how digital mediations of being together in the home were managed to maintain fragile family bonds and bearing witness to the place of the digital in the 'risk society', in terms of both corporate interests in networked learning and the dangers of 'opening the door' to social inequalities. The danger lies in ignoring the ways in which the physical classroom insists on civility and diversity, to an extent, whilst the network enables hierarchies to pervade or be reconstructed. Following a social network analysis, generating a whole group mapping by eliciting key information from a series of questions about connections and networks, the participants then provided mapping diagrams representing their 'ego networks'. These served to reveal "how the seemingly equivalent links in the network had very different qualities.' (p.69). The diagrams enabled attention to different versions of each self and to ways in which participants took different roles within different sub-networks depending on domestic and social circumstances, as well as eliciting critical incidents and micro-narratives, as in this example (NB pseudonym used by the authors):

> Although Aiden's story is really a sadly familiar one of social disadvantage reproducing itself across generations and across sites, the digital media have complicated matters – on the one hand, creating a new space for at times rapid-fire transgressive peer interaction, while on the other hand, undermining long-established boundaries of authority dividing home and school in ways that can become troubling for all concerned. (p.101)

In the United States, a range of digitally networked media activism is claimed by Jenkins' contributors as a kind of civic pedagogy in itself that appears to offer a sense of transition of symbolic creativity work from the analogue. The cultural is not only the gateway to the political but, perhaps indirectly, to the educational. Learning arises from culturally relevant critical pedagogy combined with digital transmedia production and reflexive, imaginative participation of individuals in communities in practice – learning

as participation. A further justification for converging the themes of the two texts – aside from the publisher already doing so - is offered by Soep, whose community radio work was offered in an earlier report as a not-school case study by Sefton-Green (2013) and also features in Jenkins' collection. For Soep, the 'business of figuring out' (p.291) is shared by analogue media projects and digital networks across both modes. However, and importantly in avoiding the 'naïve advocacy' Sefton-Green warns against, new risks are abundant:

> We don't yet know enough about how to practice culturally relevant critical pedagogy from a precarious position, where self-disclosure, expression and community inquiry can be high-risk activities, and when 'context collapse' can leave makers ill prepared to face life-altering consequences (eg deportation) and possible backlash (eg waves of cruel online comments). (Soep, 2016: 308)

This contemporary manifestation of transmedia engagement seeks, also with difficulties, to challenge the version of participation at work in corporate discourses:

> Critics of participatory politics often see participation as simply another term for co-optation, implying that participating in a neoliberal economy only empowers corporate forces controlling the pipelines through which these new messages flow. Rather, we describe participation in terms of the ability to forge a sense of collective voice and efficacy through larger networks that work together to bring about change. (Jenkins, 2016: 41)

A series of shared approaches bring together these examples of digital activism. Narrative circulation for a kind of voice hitherto excluded; transmedia ways of learning, talking and sharing across modes; the notion of a 'civic imagination' whereby key stakeholders facilitate the ability to project how change would happen, look like, feel like; enabling devices to enable 'lifeworld' skills to cross the membrane into the public sphere (similar to the curational pedagogy we discuss elsewhere in this book) and the explicit connecting of the educational to the political – convering the *"media strategies, creative vision, organizational activities and informal learning practices through which American youth are conducting politics in the early 21st century."* (2016: 56)

Case studies in circulation are captured by Jenkins' co-authors but are already in the public domain. Invisible Children / Kony 2012 is reframed here as hybrid campaign between digital circulation and subsequent 'real world' actions. The Harry Potter Alliance,

Imagine Better and Nerdfighters are spoken to with regard to the affordances of fan activism as a space between schooled literacy and the shared but more plural languages of popular culture as they translate into 'fannish civics' through 'cultural acupuncture' (p.57). At the time of writing, as Donald Trump remains a potential US President, American Muslim Youth offers a compelling example of a more precarious space between authentic voice as counter-script to mainstream media representation and digital surveillance. The DREAM Act, a campaign to bring undocumented youth into formal education offers perhaps the clearest version of the in-between, transitional mode of 'by any media', except that the drive to become educationally 'official' is entirely grassroots, so in this sense this is the opposite of the formal school culture reaching the disengaged, exclusion from education due to legal status is translated into a learning motivation, a further paradox:

> Inequalities in digital media literacy and access to digital technologies have raised concern that the 'digital divide' is widening, especially among racial and lower income communities. On the other hand, there is growing evidence that members of marginalized communities – especially youth – are adopting digital media tools and skills to empower themselves, build social movements, and participate politically. (Gamber-Thompson and Zimmerman, 2016: 193)

For media educators and literacy researchers grappling with the complex configurations of media, culture, technology, education with the objective of the myriad flavours of 'youth engagement', these two contributions together give us great hope for the efficacy and change agency of mediated young people but remind us once again, not that we needed it, of the enduring failure of schooled educational practices to enable such agentive energy to permeate.

Reviewer – Julian McDougall, the Centre for Excellence in Media Practice, Bournemouth University

Note – sections of this review will be re-published, adapted and reworked, in Potter, J and McDougall, J (2017) *Digital Media, Culture and Education: Theorising Third Space Literacies.* London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Exploring the Roots of Digital and Media Literacy through Personal Narrative **by R. Hobbs (ed) (2016). Temple University Press. 9781439911587**

Laughey's Canon

Editor's note: in this series we respond to Dan Laughey's article in MERJ 2.2, where he proposed a canon of 'classic' media and cultural studies texts, by asking contemporary media educators to reappraise the utility of a key text for media teaching and study at the time of writing. As the collection under review here by Antonio Lopez is, itself, such a reappraisal – of key scholars in the field and their formative influence on prominent teacher-writers who contribute the chapters – an interesting double-layering of Laughey's Canon seems to present itself.

There is a Native American proverb that we are all ancestors in training. Logically it follows that we are also apprentices to our ancestors, and as media educators we certainly would not be where we are today without standing on the shoulders of our intellectual grandparents. This is the underlying premise of Rene Hobbs' excellent collection of personal narratives in which key media education practitioners investigate important figures in their personal history and intellectual development. The project also affords Hobbs an opportunity to pen her own interpretation of media literacy's roots in a sweeping introduction that puts the field and its varied paths into a historical context. To be sure, naming intellectual grandparents would be a fun parlor game and serious business for anyone who considers his- or herself a bona fide media literacy geek.

To extend the game metaphor, this book offers several all-star matchups: Henry Jenkins of John Fiske; Douglas Kellner on Herbert Marcuse; Peter Gutierrez on Scott McCloud; and Lance Strate on Marshall McLuhan. Other significant thinkers are explored, including Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Theodor Adorno, Neil Postman, and John Dewey. There are also some pleasant surprises, figures one would not necessarily associate with media education, but certainly deserve some recognition, such as Martin Heidegger, Mikhail Bakhtin, Bertolt Brecht, and Simone de Beauvoir. The book's short, concise chapters offer key insights into why each author chose a particular intellectual ancestor, and their

personal connection to these various thinkers. As readers will experience, it becomes an interesting thought exercise to contemplate the particular role theorists have played in our own lives.

As a group of practitioners, media educators are as eclectic as they come and narrowing down its heritage can be tricky and contentious. Furthermore, the challenge of a book like this is to bridge media and cultural studies with education and psychology, which is no tall order. Likewise, this project has to be manageable and can by no means be an encyclopedic exploration of all the scholarly influences on present-day media literacy. Nonetheless, I do see some key omissions, such as Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams, who don't have their own chapters; however, they do appear substantially in many of the essays, so it's not to say they are absent. But if there were to be Volume II (with a cheeky title like "Deeper Cuts"), Hall and Williams would be prime candidates, along with Noam Chomsky, Walter Benjamin, George Gerbner, John Berger, and Erving Goffman, to name just a few.

There's also a diversity issue that is not necessarily the fault of Hobbs or the other authors. The fact is, media studies and media education historically have been mostly a white male, Euro-American endeavor, something that needs to be addressed by the field in general. While it's true that for the most part, this is our historical heritage, we can also stretch our legs a little and find inspiration in the works of postcolonial theorists, queer theorists, and authors of color. While one criteria for an intellectual grandparent might be that they are dead (or near), the inclusion of a discussion of comic theorist McCloud indicates some generational flexibility, and under the circumstances, bell hooks would be a primary candidate for a future volume. As mentioned, Hall would add some badly needed diversity, as well as Susan Sontag, Laura Mulvey, Paolo Freire, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Ivan Illich, Antonio Gramsci, Nestor Garcia Canclini, Arjun Appadurai, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, and even Malcom X.

Because all of us working in the field are also dealing with aesthetics, visual language, and creativity, a future edition could also expand the cannon to include more artists, filmmakers, musicians and writers. Just as the current edition includes Brecht and McCloud, the list could be expanded to include Sergei Eisenstein, Wassily Kandinsky, and Andy Warhol, all of whom are examples of artists that also penned important philosophical treatises that relate to media. Not to forget, there is the influence of radical experimenters like the Dadaists and Situationists that inspired political art practices like culture jamming (which is often used in media education). Finally, hip hop and punk should be considered an important historical influence on media educators, especially as inspirations for do-it-yourself media practices.

I imagine that you, too, are debating who should be included in the book (and also my

suggestions). As mentioned, it's a fun exercise, but it also focuses our attention on what we consider important for the direction we need to move our field. For example, given the opportunity I would write about Gregory Bateson. His psychological theories, especially those developed in *Ecology of the Mind*, were significant in shifting my own thinking about communication theory from a mechanistic to ecological perspective. Bateson's theories are a meaningful alternative to constructivism, which has far too heavy of an influence on learning theories than I care for. Indeed, constructivist theory is at the heart of most pedagogical approaches in North American media literacy, and as such, Hobbs offers her own chapter on the influence of constructivist psychologist Jerome Bruner.

Aside from the wonderful, personal accounts of the practitioners in this volume, there is another practical byproduct of the collection: we gain a lot from Hobbs' wisdom as an educator, researcher, writer, and public intellectual. Over the past 20 years Hobbs has been in the middle of some of media literacy's biggest debates. As an ancestor in training, both her thoughtful introduction and chapter on the historical roots of media literacy shows the expansion of her thinking. In the introduction, Hobbs acknowledges that while in college she objected to pedantic and politicized professors, which influenced her fight over the years to keep political activism out of media education. But the inclusion of one of the more militant wings of media literacy (as represented by Kellner), I see her softening a bit on this position. To be sure, this is a mature work that is designed to be inclusive, despite my critique of its lack of diversity.

Ultimately, identifying the roots of media education is also an important way of evaluating the present state of the field. As education philosopher C.A. Bowers has argued, the past colonizes the present. As the media landscape changes, we are tasked with how will we responsibly incorporate the past while innovating and becoming responsible ancestors for the future.

Reviewer – Antonio Lopez, John Cabot University.