



Jocson, K. M. (2018). *Youth media matters: Participatory cultures and literacies in education*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

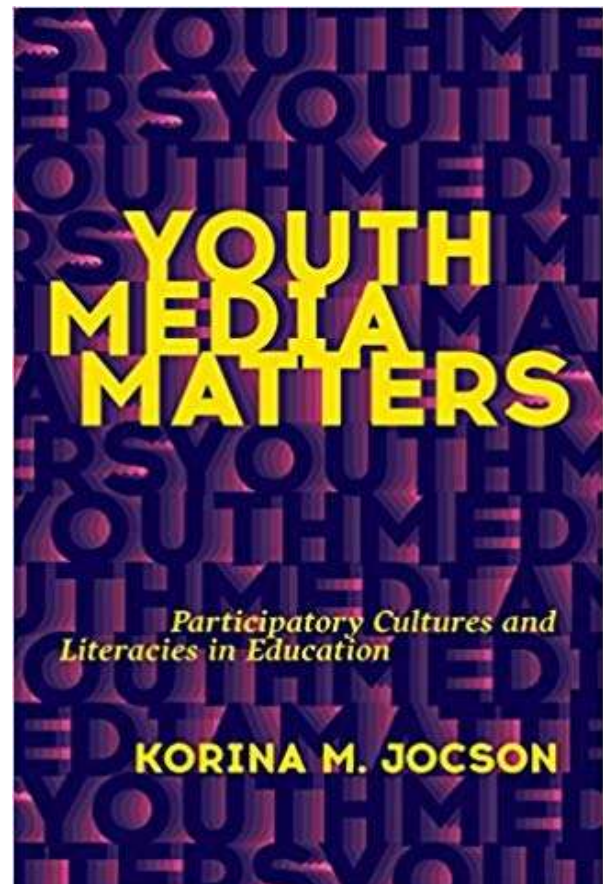
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Many authors have investigated the interaction of screens and literacy in the past two decades. Korina M. Jocson acknowledges this long line of academic work at the outset of her book, *Youth Media Matters: Participatory Cultures and Literacies in Education*. This historical background sets the stage for a book that is situated in a wider world of reading and literacy education, especially in terms of what counts as written text. Jocson discusses her own media-inspired pedagogy at the university and high school-level. She moves the conversation beyond the typical theoretical or classroom-based case study approach so common when considering digital and media literacies.

Jocson focuses on a particular aspect of relatively unmined inquiry: the use of participatory media with marginalized populations, referring to the media that is “embedded in the everyday lives of young people who are engaging in media production on their own” (p. 11). What is more, Jocson accomplishes this consideration through the



lens of high school instruction, artistic work, and self-reflection. While the literacy practices of marginalized students have been addressed before, the field is ripe for further discussion and exploration, particularly on the part of the teacher's practices.

Jocson begins by offering clear and rich descriptions of literacy practices among marginalized students in classrooms. Marginalized students are defined in the first chapter as students "at an urban high school" in East Oakland, California, who were "from low-income backgrounds" (p. 17) and faced challenges of migration and immigration. Students were part of a ninth-grade class. By approaching the work with this sample in mind, the author carves out a unique and necessary niche, offering voices to populations that often lack voice in the larger world of literacy education counter-narratives. This sense of giving voice helps the work emerge from a simple description of reading and writing habits to an important commentary on social practices and meaning-making.

Jocson hangs her hat on the importance of narrative, as well as the potential for collaboration that exists in new literacy practices, including digital storytelling, multimedia composition, and the use of art and narrative in these processes. Her focus on multiculturalism in this section highlights the importance of considering a wider range of voices than those in dominant culture groups. The book's introduction includes a succinct, five-point definition of what Jocson means by participatory cultures, drawing on the work of Jenkins (2006). The author then elucidates the possibility for participation among youth in a variety of ways, including "affiliations, expressions, [and] collaborative problem-solving" (p. 6). This definition includes considerations of artistic expression, the amount of support for student creation, and possibilities for mentorship. Jenkins (2006) is the kind of voice we would expect to lend credence to this cultural conversation, and

building on this work, Jocson proves herself to be a reliable and well-read resource.

Jocson goes on to point out Hobbs's (2011) argument that there is a potential gap in access for some young learners and thus a need for continuous learning and practice in new literacies. She then echoes the ever-changing ontology of these practices, based on the work of other scholars. This lack of access experienced by some populations supports the necessity of this book and serves as the author's cultural moral compass. Bezemer and Kress (2016) illuminated the social and political possibilities of digital and multimedia texts, commenting on the ways that the audience become authors in new literacies. Jocson takes these concepts and applies them in concrete ways, citing examples of products created in classrooms by real students. An example that springs to mind is the video, "Slip of the Tongue," described in chapter two. This production, created by a ninth grader, was "cut down to four minutes and streamlined in order to appeal to a broader audience" (Jocson, p. 56). This inclusion of a real media product shows, rather than tells, the reader about the possibilities that exist when working with screens.

Moving from the descriptions of practices, the book includes an established theoretical foundation. Another item of note in the text is Jocson's insightful discussion of assemblage. This term is defined "as the creative and dynamic nature of how things become yet remain connected to one another" (p. 19). We know that new literacy practices draw on a variety of artistic sources as authors create meaning. Assemblage is used as a way of talking about how those layers of meaning can be formed and work together. Here, Jocson grounds the conversation in the *rhizome* concept of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), reminding us of the deep systems of connections that can be made between and among texts and individuals. Jocson's bridging of theory with contemporary practice is a hallmark of the text and helps the reader to see

the interconnectedness of literacy theory. The use of such robust theory further supports the complexity of the new literacies practices and helps us make sense of what is happening when students work with these texts. As Jocson points out, these assemblages function in social ways to shape learning and experience in classroom environments. Furthermore, the author uses Levi-Strauss's (1966) concept of *bricolage*, which points us back in time to address how students continue moving forward with reading and writing tasks, building representations of "social and cultural" experiences into artistic multimedia products. The student becomes artist and creator when creating and editing digitally.

In discussing terms like new literacies and youth media literacy practices, Jocson builds on the scholarly foundation of literacy authors like Kress (2003), Lankshear and Knobel (2006), and Street (1995). By drawing on the work of these as well as other scholars, Jocson builds a strong theoretical basis for her own work. At the same time, she establishes her own authority on the nature and experience of literacy by extending this prior scholarship in new directions.

Youth Media Matters is a study in the linking of good thinking and good practice for teaching adolescent learners. Jocson's intended audience includes "students, academics, cultural workers, and partners in education" (p. 11). She provides information that would appeal to each of these parties. The foundation she offers in cultural studies would appeal to these cultural workers, including "youth advocates and practitioners outside of education" and "social workers and artists" (p. 11). The vivid descriptions of classroom practices would speak to the experiences of educators and students and application for scholars and theorists. As heir to the work of authors like Hobbs (2007), Jocson includes links to many new literacies theorists in the discussion (Lankshear and Knobel, for example), along with fleshed-out examples of what new literacies look like when real

students practice them in real classrooms. Indeed, both theory and practice feature heavily in this text.

For this reason, it is especially noteworthy that Jocson describes these real-life contexts for us, showing what she means by diversity and marginalization. Even the arrangement of items in the room as students are working makes its way into these chapters, lending an ethnographic feel to the work, aligned with the author's stated methodological approach (p. 53). Adding to this ethnographic approach was her incorporation of fieldwork data like interviews, "field notes from participant observations, collections of media or related products such as written poems....audio and video recordings of spoken word performances and DVD copies of completed videos" (Jocson, p. 53). The author also included director and producer commentaries in her data analysis. We the readers are the beneficiaries of the multivariate and detailed data collection, and the result is that we can peer into these practices, having the new literacies theoretical basis firmly in place. In short, one gets the sense that the author has really *been there*, and so too can we travel there through her accounts. Moreover, Jocson gives us the sense that she has considered her positionalities and subjectivities as an ethnographic researcher. The object of her study has been observed, but has also been incorporated into classroom application. The level of description speaks to the possibility of replication in classroom practice for other educators, as well as the priority that Jocson has given to maintaining quality and authenticity in representing her participants' voices.

Discussion of the products students create is of note here as well. For example, we are given a commentary on projects like the "Black Bruins" YouTube page (p. 138), a product that includes notions of intertextuality and collaboration. What makes this particular product all the more relevant is its location in Jocson's own educational work at the college

level. The project presents the work of “African American male students” (p. 138) who have been underrepresented on college campuses. These descriptions of practices and products in actual settings give life to theory. Examples range from high school to post-secondary classrooms, as the intended focus on youth participatory cultures excludes examples of young children.¹

Finally, we readers can begin to think about next steps for multimedia studies with youth. At the end of the text, the author includes helpful appendices with information about text analysis in one place, alongside summed up findings from the projects included in the chapters. Most impactful, however, is the way Jocson closes her book with a brief discussion of “Now What?” This seems to be the primary question in new literacies – having demonstrated the complexity of these practices, located their affordances in other scholarly work, and described their application in actual classrooms, we are left with the wise observation that “cultural material” contains

many “entangled layers.” Sifting through and understanding these layers is a difficult and nearly impossible task. This is ongoing, iterative work, and *Youth Media Matters* offers a useful, well-packaged, and thoughtfully developed contribution to the conversation.

The word that resonates with this reviewer in the concluding section is “opportunities” (p. 153). The notion of continuing opportunities addresses the importance of allowing youth from all cultural communities the chance to explore literacy in multimedia spaces and across new platforms. Jocson vividly encourages educators to bring culture into a wide range of reading and writing practices in meaningful ways. The book is accessible and useful for readers who are encountering new literacies for the first time, or for those who have been reading in this field for quite a while. Educators and students alike can benefit from exploring this text and considering ways to implement these digital practices in daily life and in the classroom.

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¹ Yet authors like Marsh (2006) and Mills (2010) have provided relevant work in these areas that can be considered.

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