

(Dis)Connection: Toward a more nuanced understanding of young people's learning and new media practices in 2016

A review of: Livingstone, S. & Sefton-Green, J. (2016). *The Class: Living and Learning in the Digital Age*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

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In the field of research on learning and development, the past few decades have been characterized by growing consensus on the nature of learning itself. Theorized by many in the neo-Vygotskian tradition as transforming participation in changing practices over time (Rogoff, 1990; Lave & Wenger, 1991), learning is now often conceptualized as “movement” (Gutiérrez, 2008) – as a socially, relationally, and culturally mediated phenomena that inheres within and across the ‘everyday’ (Scribner & Cole, 1973). But what exactly is the ‘everyday’ of 2016? In what ways does people’s participation in society look and feel different than it did ten, twenty, or even fifty years ago? What role does school and technology play, or can they play, in supporting young people to become active participants in the rapidly changing world around them? In *The Class: Living and Learning in the Digital Age*, Livingstone and Sefton-Green take on these important questions of what it means to live and to learn in today’s market-driven socioeconomic climate.

Attempting to authentically illustrate the texture of students’ everyday lives, Livingstone and Sefton-Green offer a descriptive and highly captivating picture of what it means to be a student and a young person living in a Western democracy in the year 2016. Bringing together their in- and out-of-school research expertise, the authors of *The Class* present their findings from a year of ethnographically informed fieldwork in a typical public secondary school in the London suburbs. Strategic about writing in a way that is accessible to parents, teachers, and policy makers, Livingstone and Sefton-Green address the prominent public and policy discussions linking digital media and young people, by situating everyday interactions within broader sociopolitical, socioeconomic patterns of late modernity.

The authors articulate an intention of their book as getting “beyond the many fearful claims circulating among adults about today’s youth” in order to prevent the

restriction of what they understand as potentially fruitful opportunities for learning and participation in contemporary society. Accordingly, their argument proceeds in the following way: an initial orientation for the reader as to the authors' rationale for writing this book, an overview of their theoretical perspectives on learning, a methods section, and an analysis of data that highlights issues of identity development, social worlds, and networks. Then, in chapters 5, 6, and 7, the authors take a deep dive into exploring their guiding questions of what it means to live and to learn in late modernity, illustrating the (dis)connectedness that exists amongst the young people's school, home, and digitally mediated spheres of being. Informed in part by theories of social capital, chapters 8 and 9 investigate the variety of lived realities that exist for the students of *The Class*, shaped largely by various race and class-based lines of difference. And in their final chapters, Livingstone and Sefton-Green tell a story of both social possibility and social reproduction, highlighting the complicated and often contradictory pathways that are navigated by young people today.

Cognizant of the fast-paced, highly interdependent yet disconnected world in which students' lives are embedded, Livingstone and Sefton-Green designed a multi-sited ethnographic study that would allow them to document students' learning and ways of being across both space and time. From observing the students inside and outside of the classroom, to interviewing family members in their homes, and getting tours of their online social media platforms, the authors took care in crafting a study that provided multiple vantage points from which to see the ways students went about their daily lives – from the choices they made, to the friends they kept, to their strategies for participation in their community and at school. Their methodological approach to the investigation of learning, then, aligns well with their theoretical perspective on learning – arguably one of the notable strengths of this book, and one that makes it a must-read for those in the field interested in pursuing similar strains of research that is at once interdisciplinary and humanistic. And of particular import for those interested in better understanding learning as a vehicle for equity, *The Class* serves as a modern day example of how to uplift and unpack the interwoven nature of the individual-in-society.

References

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