

Book Review Symposium. The class: living and learning in the digital age

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Published version

MADRIAGA, Manuel (2018). Book Review Symposium. The class: living and learning in the digital age. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 27 (1), 103-105.

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Livingstone, S. and J. Sefton-Green. 2016. *The Class: Living and Learning in the Digital Age*. New York: New York University Press.

This book unpicks and unravels some of the dominant discourses about youth today. For instance, there is a perception that today's youth are not as connected to family, neighborhood and community due to distractions caused by smartphones, gaming and social media. Underlying this perception is a harking back to an idyllic space and time when youth were 'safe' from distractions. However, evidence presented in this book demonstrates that youth are very much connected to family, neighborhood and community. Moreover, such 'distracting' technologies may actually sustain the warmth of family life while simultaneously offering the opportunity for youth to self-develop and explore their own interests.

The authors were able to uncover this finding through conducting an ethnographic study of a 'class' of 13- to 14-year-olds in a secondary school in London. The class was composed of 28 young people. The authors followed the lives of these young people for a year, entering their homes, interviewing their parents, in order to seek how these young people approach life at home and school, how their lives are impacted by living in a so-called 'digital age' and what vision of the future do they think their parents and teachers are preparing them for.

The work will be of interest to those who work across the disciplines of sociology and education, particularly those working in youth studies and new literary studies. Moreover, it will be of interest for those who teach and work with young adults, particularly in considering how to make our own teaching and academic practices *relevant*. As a sociologist in education, I was fascinated with the ethnographic work that was undertaken to excavate a level of depth into the lives of young people. This depth incorporated the life worlds of these young people entailing interactions and interviews with parents and teachers.

The book challenges notions of what constitutes 'digital age' and even sociological concepts such as Giddens' 'late modernity'. Yes, of course, technological advances in mobile technology and the take-up of social media platforms have enhanced interaction and communication beyond the nation-state to across the globe. With this in mind, one can see how Giddens' 'late modernity' coming to fruition with traditional structures of social identities, such as community, neighborhood, religion, national and ethnicity possibly dissipating, becoming less meaningful. However, the evidence presented in the book demonstrates that *tradition* still matters, particularly for those young people living in multicultural London. This was evidenced when the authors of the book had their young respondents draw out their 'ego network'. This entailed their young respondents drawing out on a sheet of paper the most significant people in their lives. While some of these young people had 500+ friends on Facebook, these same young people identified less than 20 people, including their parents and siblings, in their 'ego network'. Other significant people in their ego network were their friends from class who live in the same neighborhood or the same street. Thus, notions of traditional family and neighborhood remains meaningful to this generation of young people in this so-called 'digital age'.

Meanings of family and home may have changed in the 'digital age'. To explain this change and what they observed in the field, the authors of the book introduce the concept of 'living together separately'. The notion is in no way supposed to be pejorative. It highlights a phenomenon that the 'interests and desires of each family member are respected as a matter of individual rights when everyone is in a separate space or using a different technology, they still feel connected to each other' (pp. 244-245).

The book concludes that digital networks, social media, underpin their face-to-face networks rather than create alternative connections and modes of identity. The insights offered from within the book are valuable, particularly in dispelling any borderline moral panics of young people and social media use. Moreover, it does offer insight on the constraints of learning in the classroom. While technological innovations have enhanced auditing of student learning with management information systems, it may not have enhanced student learning or empowerment in the classroom. For me as a university educator who desires to make my teaching culturally relevant, the notion of 'living together separately' is an important one. Students desire face-to-face interaction, feeling empowered in the classroom. This will mean allowing students to seek their own spaces to learn, pursue their own interests and self-develop. It is an ideal, but something that requires consideration.

