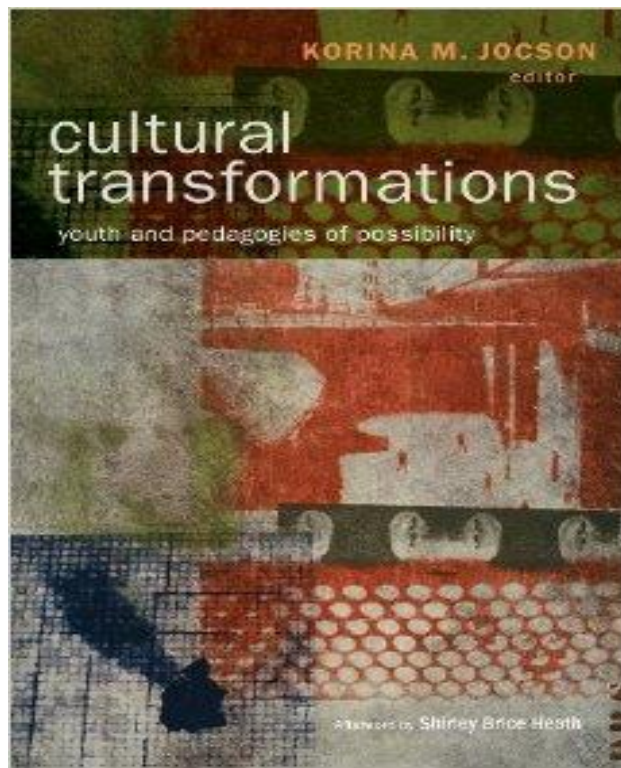


Review of Cultural Transformations: Youth and Pedagogies of Possibility

Mary Elizabeth Hayes
The University of Georgia, Athens, GA



Jocson, K. (Eds.). (2013). *Cultural transformations: Youth and pedagogies of possibility*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

ISBN: 978-1-61250-614-2

Pages: 288

In this volume, various educators, counselors, and other pedagogues come together to present an imaginative text that explores creative pedagogies at intersections of youth identity and cultures. *Cultural Transformations: Youth and Pedagogies of Possibility*, edited by Korina M. Jocson, focuses on applied and ongoing multi-media cultural projects that serve young adults at the fringes of already marginalized social identity groups, demonstrating how such projects can be transformative and opportunity-creating for those youths involved (p. 3).

Jocson introduces the volume by retelling a chance conversation with a classroom educator. This encounter inspired Jocson to inquire into artistic, creative projects going on in “contested terrains of schooling, work, and life” (p. 4) with the purpose of helping youths to meaningfully interact with their social realities. *Cultural Transformations* is a step down this path of inquiry, being preceded by a seminar series and special journal edition.

Also in the introduction, Jocson identifies and defines key terms that tie the chapters of the volume together. Her introduction also serves to strengthen the title of the book by edifying the concept of pedagogies of possibility by drawing from educational theorist such as Maxine Greene, Roger Simon, Henry Giroux, and William Ayers. For Jocson and the authors featured in this book, pedagogy “enables young people to pursue meanings and effect change in their life trajectories,” and it “implies a struggle—over realities, over tensions and modes of expression, and over versions of self” (p. 7). For the purposes of this volume, *youths* are individuals ranging in age from twelve to twenty-four, and refers “racial minorities, immigrants, and transgender youth” (p. 4). The authors collectively strive to highlight the individuality of the young people with whom they are working, and are careful to reiterate that their approaches may not be generalizable at certain levels, but that pedagogies promoting openness and self-expression can be transformative in any situation.

The chapters themselves vary in approach, learning context, and youth demographic. This range in approaches and communities is a definite strength for this volume, making it widely accessible while

simultaneously challenging for readers who may not have experience with such diverse populations. For example, chapters 2, 6, and 8 feature projects supporting African American youth. In keeping with the theme of intersectionality in identity, however, each of these chapters relates the application of pedagogies of possibility in specific communities within this larger African American demographic. Chapter 2 is a transcript of discussion between two authors involved in an urban arts festival, *Life is Living*, that uncovers the theoretical and pedagogical underpinnings of their work. Chapter 6 is situated within a more traditional school setting and focuses on student-parent interactions in navigating race in classrooms and afterschool programs. Chapter 8 highlights a unique demographic and takes on the difficult issue of youth sexuality by exploring the experiences of two transgender African American young adults as participants at an HIV/AIDS prevention center. Other chapters focus on Native American youths (chapter 7), post-incarcerated young women involved theater projects (chapter 3), youths in Cuba and interaction with musical movements (chapter 9), and poetry and remix (chapter 2), to highlight a few of the ten total chapters in demonstration of the volume’s diversity.

Also of interest is the book’s afterword, written by Shirley Brice Heath—author of titles such as *On Ethnography: Approaches to Language and Literacy Research* (2008) and *Handbook for Literacy Educators: Research in the Visual and Communicative Arts* (1997, with a second volume in 2008). The afterword highlights what Brice Heath considers to be the three largest contributions of this volume: the individual participant-learners “were not targets towards which outsiders directed their curricula or methods”, the volume focused on the involvement of youth in the arts for “transformational learning”, and—along the same thread as the previous two contributions—the volume demonstrates that learning need not be “centrally owned or controlled by formal schooling” (p. 228). To conclude the volume, Brice Heath recommends future lines of inquiry for further research concerning transformative learning across age groups, as well as social and developmental factors that influence such learning in youth, specifically (p. 229).

The volume is an accessible and pleasant read that gleams much of its strength from the diversity of the participant groups and pedagogical practices presented. While the volume itself was born from a chance encounter with a classroom teacher, the majority of the chapters are not set in traditional classrooms, and may not at first read seem directly applicable to classroom or institutional pedagogy. What is entirely applicable to classrooms, however, is the opening of spaces for these diverse and specific—perhaps even underrepresented in the research to date—intersections of youth cultures. The data and experiences presented in this book could serve both pre-service and in-service teachers alike, facilitating imaginative multi-modal pedagogies that create transformative learning environments for youths with unique needs springing from unique and interacting identities.

Two additional yet related strengths of the volume are brought by the chapter authors. As can be seen through reading, the majority of the authors were involved in the experiences that bore data, either as concurrent pedagogues or volunteers, or previous to conducting their various studies. This proximity to the experiences being studied shines through in their narration and retelling. Each chapter is unique in how it chooses to represent transformative learning, with some taking a more traditional structured essay

approach, while others share artifacts embedded in theory, and yet another is a discussion between two project leaders. This variation in representation embodies the message of the volume, as does the authors' reiteration in their chapters that the youths with whom they work and of whom they write are individual, and that their experiences are not necessarily generalizable. This is not pointed out as a weakness, but rather is noted as an opportunity for pedagogues in the readership to be creatively sensitive to their own learners and environments.

Jocson's volume sets out with the clearly defined purpose of exploring the application of pedagogies of possibility across various identifiers—language, race, gender, etc.—while maintaining a strong theoretical bearing. The book achieves its purpose, although it (purposefully) does not in most instances make specific suggestions for classroom application, nor do the chapters spend much space explicating the theories upon which they draw. The authors and editor seem to assume a certain familiarity with teaching practice, the current state of education and education research, as well as general social and education theory, making it a volume recommendable for the experienced pedagogue with an interest in bridging the perceived gap between theory and application.