

BOOK REVIEW

Junco, R. (2014). *Engaging Students Through Social Media: Evidence-Based Practices for Use in Student Affairs*. Jossey-Bass, 346 pp. ISBN: 9781118647455. \$40

Review by Marc Cutright, University of North Texas

Reynol Junco's *Engaging Students Through Social Media* brings to mind three classic books. The first, which the author cites, is Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), which introduced much of the world to paradigm shifts. World views hold to a constancy and only incremental change—until they don't. The second is Neil Postman's *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (1992); the author held that technology is not just a system of tools, but a means by which our brains are essentially rewired. The results, Postman asserted and as the subtitle suggests, not so good. New technology often demands the "submission of all forms of cultural life to the sovereignty of technique and technology" (p. 52).

Those books are contextual. The third is more similar to Junco's mission and presentation. Pascarella and Terenzini's *How College Affects Students* is the epic work that reviews extensively informative research on various elements of the college environment, after which the authors draw conclusions from the research. That is the format for Junco's commendable and quite engaging work, but narrowed to the social and educational effects of social media, and how educators can help shape the new media experience to the best outcomes.

Junco early on enunciates his objectives. Summarized, they are: to provide research summaries about how students use these media; to dispel popular myths (e.g., there is no research that supports actual personal disengagement); to describe how social media can both harm and benefit student outcomes; to discuss educationally relevant applications; and to promote social media for educational, civil, and developmental ends (p. xvii).

The author quite usefully differentiates between the adult norma-

tive perspective and the youth normative perspective that shape our preconceptions, our paradigms (Kuhn, 1962) if you will, of the use of social media. The adult normative perspective (which arguably is reflected in Postman, 1992) is illustrated toward selective highlighting of news media reports than conclude on scanty evidence that social media rot the ability to have “normal” relationships. The perspective is “prescriptive and authoritarian” (p. xix).

When student affairs professionals adopt the adult normative perspective, we’ve already lost—we go from being potential allies with our students to parental figures....[W]e are not their parents and should never try to be....[I]f you don’t understand their viewpoint...they are less likely to trust you to help them. If they don’t trust you, then there is no way that you can engage in the important developmental work students need us to do. (p. xix)

A lengthy and quite valuable introductory chapter is followed by Research on Social Media; Social Media and Student Identity Development; Informal Learning Using Social Media; Formal Learning Using Social Media; Planning, Implementing, and Assessing Social Media Interventions; Using Social Media for Professional Development; and the Future of Social Media in Student Affairs.

We can look at one chapter, Informal Learning Using Social Media, to illustrate Junco’s template. He notes, at the beginning, that even 20 years into this revolution, there is insufficient research on the use of social media to support formal learning, and even less on informal learning. But he does consolidate well what does exist. Early in the chapter, he organizes some emergent research factors against Chickering and Gamson’s (1987) principles for best practice in undergraduate education. The use of social media by student affairs practitioners can lead to better and more interactions with students. Supporting student groups this way can enhance the skills of cooperation. Active learning is supported by prompts that encourage students to reflect on their educational experiences. Prompt feedback is important not only in the classroom, but in such matters as financial aid, and social media enables this. Direct communication about behaviors and social media presence that are most appropriate is enabled by the media themselves. The use of such technologies communicates that student affairs professionals and others are approachable,

leading to more interaction (pp. 136-7).

The same chapter details what is known about how student affairs professionals are using social media in their missions. Some 96% of professionals in the area believe students should acquire skills in social media, and so have incorporated it with purpose. Admissions and career services are two areas that have been most active in the area; Facebook was the most popular application, but Twitter, blogs, and LinkedIn were not far behind. Professionals are using social media not just to distribute information to students, or to try to shape their beliefs and behaviors, but to listen to them. Specific functional areas such as housing have benefitted, enabling students to more easily and successfully self match on shared housing, resulting in less staff time devoted to the area, and more student satisfaction with outcomes. The chapter ends, as do the others, with some “practical tips” based on research. The tips for this chapter include the recommendations of identifying learning outcomes for social media interventions, using theoretical models to integrate social media in meaningful ways, and evaluating the effectiveness of structured social media use.

The application of and organization of research literature, to identify themes that emerge from it, and recommendations for practice based in that research, is a consistent and strongly deployed strategy for the book. Yet literature reviews serve more than one purpose. They can tell us what we know (the research findings), how we know it (the research methods employed to derive those findings), and what we don't know (supporting new research directions). The chapter on assessment of social media use provides some of this for those who would research and assess media use, but this book is mostly for scholarly practitioners and less for scholars of practice; there isn't much on the research methods on studies that have led to significant findings utilized by the book. For that purpose, however, researchers will find a great deal for follow-up in the book's extensive references, both classic and new, and by following those trails, will find much of value.

Reynol Junco, an associate professor at Iowa State University, and a fellow of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, has devoted much of his professional career to the issues considered in this book. He has produced work that is important, applicable, current, and quite a joy to read. It is difficult to see how researchers and practitioners on social media and college student

development can go forward without reference to this work.

References

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