

BOLD VISIONS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

A Performatory Approach to Teaching, Learning and Technology

Jaime E. Martinez



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A Performatory Approach to Teaching, Learning and Technology

Bold Visions in Educational Research
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Bold Visions in Educational Research is international in scope and includes books from two areas: *teaching and learning to teach* and *research methods in education*. Each area contains multi-authored handbooks of approximately 200,000 words and monographs (authored and edited collections) of approximately 130,000 words. All books are scholarly, written to engage specified readers and catalyze changes in policies and practices. Defining characteristics of books in the series are their explicit uses of theory and associated methodologies to address important problems. We invite books from across a theoretical and methodological spectrum from scholars employing quantitative, statistical, experimental, ethnographic, semiotic, hermeneutic, historical, ethnomethodological, phenomenological, case studies, action, cultural studies, content analysis, rhetorical, deconstructive, critical, literary, aesthetic and other research methods.

Books on *teaching and learning to teach* focus on any of the curriculum areas (e.g., literacy, science, mathematics, social science), in and out of school settings, and points along the age continuum (pre K to adult). The purpose of books on *research methods in education* is **not** to present generalized and abstract procedures but to show how research is undertaken, highlighting the particulars that pertain to a study. Each book brings to the foreground those details that must be considered at every step on the way to doing a good study. The goal is **not** to show how generalizable methods are but to present rich descriptions to show how research is enacted. The books focus on methodology, within a context of substantive results so that methods, theory, and the processes leading to empirical analyses and outcomes are juxtaposed. In this way method is not reified, but is explored within well-described contexts and the emergent research outcomes. Three illustrative examples of books are those that allow proponents of particular perspectives to interact and debate, comprehensive handbooks where leading scholars explore particular genres of inquiry in detail, and introductory texts to particular educational research methods/issues of interest. to novice researchers.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	vii
Acknowledgements	xi
1. Working with what there is	1
2. History of learning in and out of school	17
3. The “problem” in education	33
4. Organizing the learning environment	45
5. Technology rich learning environments	59
6. Producing school	69
7. Building relationships	79
8. Teacher preparation	89
9. Teacher – researcher	97
Glossary	113
References	115
Index	117

FOREWORD

I have a young friend (he's currently four) and while I am not sure what his first word was, his first two-word phrase was, "GooGoo budozer" (Translation: Google bulldozer). Before he could even walk he would crawl under my chair and pull out my laptop, that I had hoped to put out of his reach, and push it towards me saying, "GooGoo budozer," which was my cue to search on Google Images for photographs of hundreds of bulldozers...followed by dumptrucks, cranes, and construction vehicles I had never even heard of. By two he was playing *Angry Birds*, and landing airplanes and helicopters on his mama's iPhone, and at three and a half he had successfully used Youtube videos to learn all the words to the songs *Aquarius* and *Camptown Races*. By now he is an experienced internet researcher and when I tell him that I don't know the answer to one of his infinite "*Why?*" questions he takes us over to the computer to find the answer.

My friend learned to do all of this without a single traditional lesson, not unlike how he learned to walk, talk, sit up at the dinner table and ride the subway (another one of his fascinations). Long before he could actually manipulate the mouse or hold the phone to his ear the adults around him related to him as a becoming member of a technology using species. And over the course of many experiences he quickly became not only a member, but also someone who is beginning to show *us* how to utilize technology in new ways.

Flash-forward four years into an imagined future and my friend, now age 8, is starting the third grade. His classroom has two computers, but they are 5 years old and they often crash when the children try to run anything other than the word processing program. Moreover, his teacher describes herself as "not very good with technology," and the computers are rarely used during ordinary lessons. However, the school has received a grant to hire a technology teacher and from third grade on each class receives one hour of instruction a week.

Imagine that today is my friend's first day of computer class. He and his classmates walk excitedly into the "lab" where there are 30 computers sitting a top traditional desks and facing the front of the room. As soon as the children sit down they start to play with the computers. Some children, like my friend, appear to have a great deal of experience and they start to show the others how to get started. The teacher quickly claps his hands and says, "All eyes on me and hands in your laps." He tells them to sit quietly with their hands folded while he explains the rules of the classroom. For the next 20 minutes he talks about what they are *not* allowed to do (touch the computers without permission, share computers without permission, explore the internet without permission, or go to certain programs that are reserved for the upper grades). After these warnings he announces that he is going to begin by teaching them how to work the computers and he turns on a projector and starts an animated film on what a computer is ...

We are at an interesting moment in the field of education. For centuries learning and schooling have been almost synonymous. Over time, with the advent of

FOREWORD

capitalism and industrialization there was a move away from the informal learning that had previously happened in fields and kitchens, or the semi-formal apprenticeship model of workshops and clerk offices, towards a form of learning that separated children from adult work, and made learning a prerequisite to doing. There have been great gains made by that shift for children in particular and humanity in general—a much more literate population, a safer and more humane place for children to spend their days, and an opportunity for families to move up the class ladder by having access to higher paid jobs.

However, there is also evidence that schools are failing to be a place of learning for large numbers of children, particularly poor children and children of color. The high school graduation rate for the country hovers around 75%, but for African-Americans it is 62% (Rampell, 2010, June 2), and for African-American males it's reported as below 50% (Schott Foundation, 2008). In addition in the key subjects of math and reading some reports show 48% of African Americans and 43% of Latino students as “below basic” (McKinsey and Co., 2009).

While schools appear to be declining in effectiveness it is also the case that there is an explosion of innovations happening in the field of teaching and learning, almost all outside of school, and many of them making use of the continuous technological revolution we are in. There is evidence that the most innovative, most effective, and just most interesting teaching and learning is happening outside of schools. All one has to do is watch any number of TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) Talks to see that there is no shortage of wonderful ideas and projects springing up that make use of children's fascination with technology, and give children and youth opportunities to be in contact with people and ideas from around the world, in other words that make their worlds bigger and support them to develop as learners (Holzman, 2009; Lobman, 2011).

I am a fan of these TED Talks, the 20-minute videos that feature people talking about almost anything that has a ring of innovation or creativity. As a lifelong educator, my favorite ones have to do with learning (see Mitra, 2010 or Robinson, 2006). I am also a proponent and researcher of outside of school programs, many of which have been very successful in supporting the growth and development of young people (Heath, 2000; Lobman, 2011; Vadeboncoeur, 2006). If you watch enough of these videos or explore the world of outside of school programming *and* you spend time in schools a disturbing realization begins to emerge. There is a huge gap between the amount, type, and quality of the ideas and practices that exist in the world, and that are actually working to transform the learning lives of children and adults, even those living in remote places and under impoverished conditions, and what is happening in many classrooms of the richest country in the world. Schools, the place where most children are expected to do most of their learning, are often the least effective environments for doing just that.

There are a lot of things one could do about that, including despair. Or give up on the six or seven hours children spend in school and concentrate entirely on their outside of school time. However, there are other choices, and in *A Performatory Approach to Teaching, Learning, and Technology* Jaime Martinez shows us one of them. Martinez came out of the world of business technology and, after a

successful career; he chose to become a teacher in order to give his expertise to the next generation. Then, when he was confronted with the realities of inner city schools, he did not despair, instead he did what teachers have to do in a broken system—create with what you have, with the emphasis being on create.

In *A Performatory Approach to Teaching, Learning, and Technology*, Martinez shares how he has been able to bring the kind of creative, innovative, and rigorous learning that is happening outside of school into his (and others) public school classrooms. And he shares it in a way that is accessible, playful, and most of all real. In the stories that he tells there are no illusions about what life in schools is like, but by sharing what he was been able to accomplish he puts a demand on teachers to recognize that they are not just *in school* they are also *in the world*. And the world offers multiple approaches to learning, many of which are more effective for developing young people as learners than the dominant model.

Throughout the book Martinez shares a variety of classes that he has worked with. What these stories have in common is that, whether in the South Bronx, New Jersey, or Manhattan, Martinez and the children are performing as technology experts and in the course of that their expertise is able to develop. One could argue he is not so much teaching technology, as he is modeling/teaching an approach to learning—an approach that does not separate learning from the creating of the environment for learning. When I read this book it gave me hope. Hope for the hundreds of children that have been taught by Martinez, hope for the thousands upon thousands of students of the teachers who will read this book, and hope for my young friend, who I want to continue to relate to technology as one of his many playthings.

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CHAPTER 1

WORKING WITH WHAT THERE IS

AN INTRODUCTION

This book is about becoming a better teacher. For me, that process included learning to take responsibility for creating learning environments. In doing so, I developed as a leader and I learned to support the development of others by working with groups. My history as a technology professional, philanthropist and New York City Teaching Fellow generated my interests in creating learning environments in public schools. There are very specific meanings that I attach to the phrase “creating learning environments” that will be explored at length.

The audience for this book includes urban educators in teacher preparation programs and first year doctoral students with an interest in incorporating technology into teaching and learning activities. If you don’t happen to be in graduate school, but you are interested in a cutting edge educational practice, this book is for you as well. The narratives and vignettes illustrate life in school and the theory behind my pedagogical approach is grounded in experience. Hopefully, that will make what is being presented accessible to someone who is not in graduate school. While this is not a “how to” book and there are no methods or lesson plans, you will get a practitioner’s view on how to create new possibilities in a technology rich classroom. Undergraduate students and practitioners who have been in the classroom for a few years may feel challenged by some of the terminology and theory. I’ve included a glossary, chapter highlights and questions for extra support.

My teaching practice integrates technology into instruction using a collaborative performance-based approach to teaching and learning. What does performance have to do with technology? Well, that’s what the rest of this book is about. I’ll start by stating that I have learned that we are all performers and we can use our capacity to perform to change ourselves and to change the social scenes we live in. This discovery has turned out to be very useful in my attempts to create positive learning environments for my students and myself. My process for becoming a better teacher also included teaching in public schools, examining my uses of technology, working with others in diverse settings, earning a Ph.D., and creating this book.

Ethnography, in social science, is a description of the lives, events and customs of people that has some scientific rigor to it. The stories, vignettes and scenes in ethnography should be plausible and peers should be able to verify the authenticity of the narratives. An ethnography describes life as it unfolds, the reader may at times wonder why I tell a certain story at a certain time in an effort to see the logic of what I am presenting. Logic gives you a particular way to see