



## Hervé Varenne:

# TECHNOLOGY'S LESSONS FOR LEARNING



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**H**OW MANY OF US, watching an apparent expert manipulating a computer, have said, “I’ll never learn to do that!”—only to soon find ourselves performing the very same thing? As an educator and researcher, I am amazed at how easily the ignorant can become knowledgeable about new technologies. Did anybody dare predict in, say, 1980 that so many would learn so much with so little expert guidance? Or that grandmothers would one day learn the art of “friending,” writing on “walls,” and other new skills with odd names? Perhaps the grandmothers were amazed to discover that “LOL” stands for “laughing out loud” rather than “lots of love,” and perhaps their grandchildren did indeed laugh at them, but the grandmothers

persevered to weave new ties across far-flung kin.

There’s a lesson here for schools of education. What if teaching and learning are not specialized activities? What if they are ubiquitous processes regularly activated when conditions require them? Dewey intuited this, but we must investigate a more radical set of opportunities. Could schools simulate the conditions under which newcomers realize that they must learn a skill and find the people who will help them? Perhaps by specifying curricula, pedagogies and the experts one must go through to be certified as knowing something, schools have been unwittingly limiting educational activities and the rewards they produce. Perhaps we should try to imagine schools where teachers really are facilitators of learning, even in areas about which they know little. Like a truly intelligent Google or Wikipedia, teachers could “just” lead students to resources while making sure they are applying themselves. Schools could cease to be involved in assessment—or even degree granting—and instead let students’ friends, neighbors and potential employers decide what they are good at.

True, that vision threatens to overturn much of what education schools currently do. But if, as the technological revolution suggests, better education would result, we should embrace that vision rather than resist it, or else we may find that others are indeed laughing out loud as they bypass us. **tc**