



Visual Pedagogy: Media Cultures in and beyond the Classroom. Brian Goldfarb.
Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002. 264 pp.

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Goldfarb lays out fascinating tenets in this book, positing that in the second half of the 20th century, a revolution has shaken the very foundation of societies globally. He argues that this revolution, resulting from the rapid expansion of global communications media and visual culture, has radically altered the dissemination and production of information and knowledge. This is not a new idea—historians and economists have been discussing the "Information Revolution" for years. What is unique is Goldfarb's suggestion that the revolution is fundamentally transforming—and at that same time challenging—our notions of education, and I would argue, learning.

Goldfarb presents his thesis in the introduction, then walks the reader through seven chapters describing this educational transformation, beginning with efforts to integrate new technologies such as television and video into schooling in the United States and elsewhere, and ultimately discussing the impacts of the digital revolution on schools in the 1990s. He suggests that the potential power of these media has evolved in ways that empower learners, and when used as a tool by students, they enable a level of interactivity and critical thinking heretofore not seen in schooling. The unique aspect of Goldfarb's thesis is his proposition that these changes in education and learning are not merely transforming formal education settings, such as schools and universities, but also educational settings, such as museums and public television, outside the formal arena.

This fascinating thesis is presented effectively through a number of rich case studies. In particular, Goldfarb's analysis of how this revolution is transforming the relationship among learners, learning situations, and the material/ideas to be learned is tremendously provocative. His references to Paolo Freire, Brazilian theorist of education, are timely. Fortunately, Freire's writings are being rediscovered. His notions that literacy is not just about reading and writing, but about thinking critically and knowing how to use language as a tool for improving one's life, are germane to the issues societies face worldwide as they try to create educational systems that support lifelong learning. *Visual Pedagogy* contains an excellent annotated appendix, which includes a list of media organizations, distributors, and other resources referred to in the rich case studies, enabling a reader to follow up any individual case study. The book does a fairly admirable job of walking the difficult line between theory and practice, always a slippery slope: only at a few points does the book become so technical and jargon-filled that it may put off practitioners



working in these arenas.

My only criticism is that I would have liked some ideas to be developed further. For example, the book might benefit from an eighth chapter to pull together the various ideas presented, and suggest new directions for investigation and practice. I would have also liked to read more about pedagogy beyond schooling. Learning across the lifespan has become a necessity for maintaining one's place in the global information economy, however, this phenomenon is limited when only viewed through the lens of schooling and traditional institutional overlays to learning, as seemed to be the case here. To the author's credit, at least half of the book is devoted to out-of-school learning: even so, I would have appreciated more. Work by John Falk and myself suggests that a quiet revolution in education is occurring worldwide as societies rapidly become nations of life-long learners. This learning is supported by a vast infrastructure of free-choice learning resources including museums, libraries, television, community-based organizations, film, books, and increasingly the Internet—rather than the educational establishment of schools and universities (*Lessons without Limit: How Free-choice Learning is Transforming Education*. John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, AltaMira Books, 2002).

Goldfarb initiates a discussion of these issues in chapter 5, The Blockbuster Exhibition as Educational Technology, but in my opinion does not quite go far enough.

Clearly, the traditional boundaries and roles that have distinguished various groups of educators and learners are disappearing. If as educators in the 21st Century we truly want to move beyond the rhetoric of supporting lifelong learning, it is critical that we recognize, understand, and learn how to facilitate free-choice learning as a powerful vehicle for lifelong learning. To not understand and embrace free-choice learning institutions as valuable players in the education infrastructure of a community is to seriously impede our ability to enhance education and learning worldwide. I think Goldfarb would agree, and I hope that when he writes his next volume, he is able to focus additional space on those ideas.

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