

**ACTION RESEARCH COMIX  
PRESENTS:**

# **RSVPS TO READING: GENDERED RESPONSES TO THE PERMEABLE CURRICLLUM**

**BY  
SEAN KOTTKE,  
THE ROBERT B. MILLER COLLEGE**



**WITH SPECIAL  
GUEST  
COMMENTATOR  
JOHN  
DEWEY!!!\***

## **ABSTRACT**

**THIS COMIC REPORTS FINDINGS FROM A STUDY DESIGNED TO DOCUMENT, ANALYZE AND COMPARE THE TEXT SELECTIONS MADE FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES BY A GROUP OF SIXTH-GRADE BOYS & GIRLS OVER THE COURSE OF ONE YEAR IN A PERMEABLE LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM WITH THOSE THEY MADE FOR RECREATIONAL PURPOSES. THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE FULL RANGE OF STUDENTS' VERNACULAR LITERACY PRACTICES, PARTICULARLY THOSE INVOLVING NONPRINT MEDIA, BECAME VISIBLE WITHIN THE ACADEMIC SETTING IS DISCUSSED.**

## **PROLOGUE: LET'S HAVE A HAND FOR READING**

**WE COME TO LANGUAGE ARTS INSTRUCTION WITH THE BEST OF INTENTIONS ...**



**... THAT WITH THE POWER OF GREAT LITERATURE, WE WILL SPARK NEW LIFE IN OUR STUDENTS.**



**HOWEVER, MANY OF OUR STUDENTS, LIKE ADAM, HAVE A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON THIS SCENARIO ...**



**... AND LIKE ADAM, SOME STUDENTS MAY OFFER A LESS THAN ENTHUSIASTIC REACTION TO OUR EFFORTS.**



**AS A RESULT, STUDENTS' FAILURE TO EMBRACE THE LITERATURE WE OFFER MAY LEAD TO OTHER FAILURES.**



**IS THERE A BETTER WAY, ONE THAT STARTS WITH MEETING STUDENTS WHERE THEY ARE? READ ON ...**



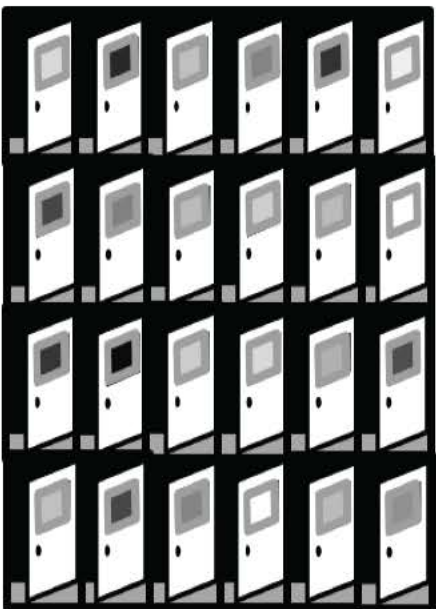
**\* UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED BY IN-TEXT CITATION, DR. DEWEY'S COMMENTARIES ARE CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS OF THE AUTHOR'S PROGRESSIVE CONSCIENCE, NOT DEWEY'S ACTUAL WORDS.**

## I. DOORS

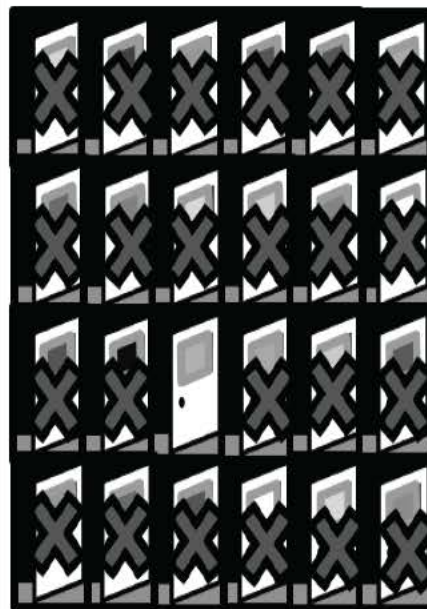


TRADITIONALLY, CLASSROOMS ARE PHYSICAL SPACES THAT HAVE JUST ONE DOOR. TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ALIKE COME AND GO THROUGH IT.

BUT CLASSROOMS ARE ALSO PSYCHOLOGICAL SPACES, ACCESSIBLE BY ANY NUMBER OF METAPHORICAL DOORS. TEACHERS AND STUDENTS MAY COME AND GO THROUGH POTENTIALLY LIMITLESS DOORS AS THEY TRAVERSE BETWEEN THEIR ACADEMIC AND EXTRACURRICULAR WORLDS.



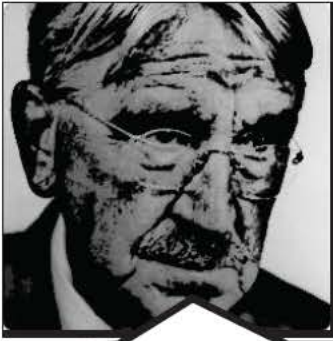
HOWEVER, IN THE TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM, ALL BUT ONE OF THESE PSYCHOLOGICAL DOORS IS CLOSED, THE ONE REMAINING OPEN ZEALOUSLY GUARDED BY THE TEACHER TO ENSURE THAT STUDENTS TAKE A "PROPER" STANCE TOWARD THE CURRICULUM. THIS IS THE PEDAGOGY OF CONTROL (O'BRIEN, STEWART, & MOJE, 1995).



THIS IS BY NO MEANS A NEW OBSERVATION. IN THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV, WE MEET KOLYA KRASSOTKIN, AN OUTSPOKEN SCHOOLBOY WHO HAS FIGURED OUT THAT THE SINGLE PSYCHOLOGICAL DOOR INTO THE 19<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY RUSSIAN CLASSROOM MAY NOT BE GOOD FOR LEARNING LANGUAGE, BUT IS EFFECTIVE FOR ACHIEVING OTHER GOALS.



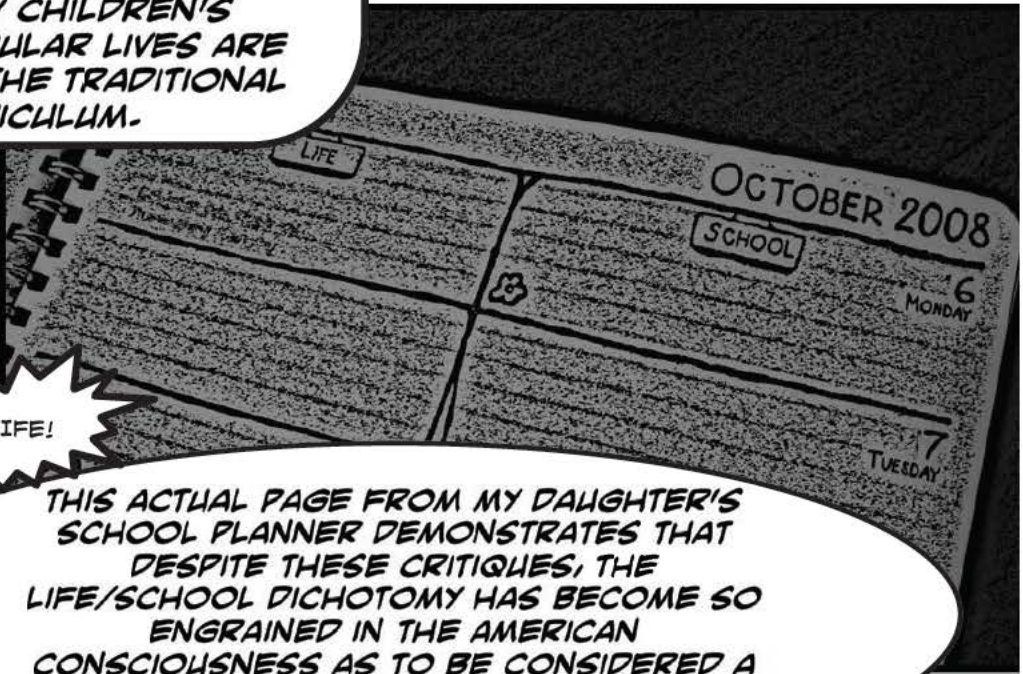
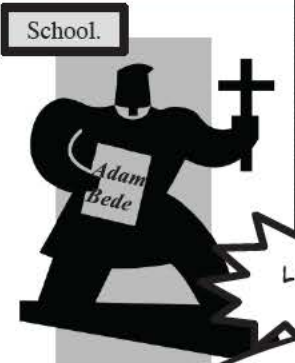
"IT IS SIMPLY A POLICE MEASURE . . . GREEK AND LATIN WERE INTRODUCED BECAUSE THEY ARE A BORE AND BECAUSE THEY STUPEFY THE INTELLECT." (DOSTOEVSKY, 1880/1952, P. 292)



A FEW DECADES LATER, IN THE SCHOOL AND SOCIETY, JOHN DEWEY HAD A SIMILAR CRITIQUE, ARGUING THAT THE NOTION THAT SCHOOL IS SOME SORT OF PREPARATION FOR "REAL LIFE" CREATES AN ARTIFICIAL BARRIER BETWEEN SCHOOL AND SOCIETY THAT MAY ULTIMATELY UNDERMINE THE FOUNDATIONS OF DEMOCRATIC, PARTICIPATORY GOVERNMENT.

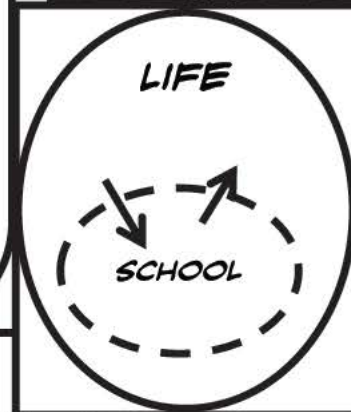
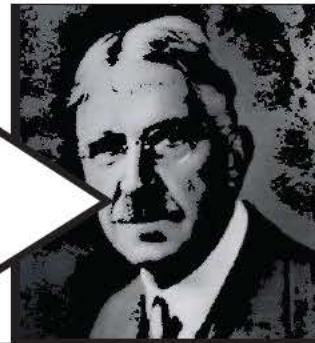
I DEEPLY OPPOSED WHAT LATER EDUCATORS WHO SHARED MY VISION WOULD CALL A PEDAGOGY OF CONTROL, IN WHICH SCHOOLS TAKE ON THE MISSION OF MANUFACTURING PRODUCTIVE CITIZENS BY STAMPING OUT STUDENTS' NATURAL INTERESTS AND INCLINATIONS AND GRANTING LEGITIMACY TO A NARROW RANGE OF DISCIPLINES AND TEXTS. IT WOULD BE ABSURD TO REGARD CHILDREN AS HEATHENS IN NEED OF CONVERSION TO THE ONE TRUE FAITH, YET THIS IS PRECISELY HOW MANY CHILDREN'S EXTRACURRICULAR LIVES ARE TREATED BY THE TRADITIONAL CURRICULUM.

"THE CENTER OF GRAVITY IS OUTSIDE THE CHILD. IT IS IN THE TEACHER, THE TEXTBOOK, ANYWHERE AND EVERYWHERE YOU PLEASE EXCEPT IN THE IMMEDIATE INSTINCTS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE CHILD HIMSELF. . . - WHEN THE CHILD GETS INTO THE SCHOOLROOM HE HAS TO PUT OUT OF HIS MIND A LARGE PART OF THE IDEAS, INTERESTS, AND ACTIVITIES THAT PREDOMINATE IN HIS HOME AND NEIGHBORHOOD."  
(DEWEY, 1915/1990, P. 34)



THIS ACTUAL PAGE FROM MY DAUGHTER'S SCHOOL PLANNER DEMONSTRATES THAT DESPITE THESE CRITQUES, THE LIFE/SCHOOL DICHOTOMY HAS BECOME SO ENGRAINED IN THE AMERICAN CONSCIOUSNESS AS TO BE CONSIDERED A NATURAL FEATURE OF ADOLESCENCE. DEWEY WOULD NOT BE PLEASED.

HOWEVER, ALL IS NOT LOST! I HAVE BEEN EXCITED IN RECENT YEARS TO WITNESS A GROWING MOVEMENT TOWARD EMBRACING THE LITERACIES & PASSIONS THAT CHILDREN BRING WITH THEM TO SCHOOL. TALENTED EDUCATORS HAVE BEGUN TO RECOGNIZE THE POWER OF SCAFFOLDING INSTRUCTION ON CHILDREN'S STRENGTHS & INTERESTS, OPENING LIMITLESS PSYCHOLOGICAL DOORS ONTO THE CURRICULUM FOR THE TEXTS & TOPICS THAT MOST ENGAGE CHILDREN IN THEIR EXTRACURRICULAR PURSUITS. SUCH A PERMEABLE CURRICULUM HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BREAK DOWN THE WALL THAT STUDENTS PERCEIVE BETWEEN SCHOOL & THE "REAL WORLD," AS THE SCHOOL GRANTS LEGITIMACY TO THE PASSIONS THAT DEFINE WHAT COUNTS AS REALITY IN THE STUDENTS' WORLD.



THE MOST EXTENSIVE RESEARCH ON PERMEABLE CLASSROOMS HAS TAKEN PLACE IN EARLY LITERACY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS. ANNE HAAS DYSON'S WORK (1993, 2003) DEMONSTRATES THAT AN OPENNESS TO THE NARRATIVES THAT EARLY WRITERS EMBRACE OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL PROVIDES AN EFFECTIVE SCAFFOLD UPON WHICH TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S MASTERY OF ACADEMIC LITERACY PRACTICES. HOW PERMEABLE STRUCTURES MIGHT WORK IN MIDDLE & SECONDARY CLASSROOMS IS LESS EXPLORED IN THE LITERATURE.



I CAN'T WAIT TO WRITE ABOUT THIS TODAY IN MY DRAFTBOOK!



THOMAS NEWKIRK (2002, 2009) ARGUES THAT A PERMEABLE CLASSROOM MIGHT BE ESPECIALLY EFFECTIVE FOR SUPPORTING BOYS' ENGAGEMENT WITH READING. HOWEVER, WHILE THERE IS MUCH RECENT RESEARCH INTO BOYS & LITERACY, THE LITERATURE IS SILENT ON HOW BOYS & GIRLS MIGHT RESPOND DIFFERENTLY TO A PERMEABLE CURRICULUM. FINALLY, DONNA ALVERMANN & HER COLLEAGUES (2007) NOTE THAT IN ORDER FOR PERMEABLE APPROACHES TO WORK WITH ADOLESCENTS, TEACHERS NEED TO BETTER UNDERSTAND WHAT KINDS OF NARRATIVES CHARACTERIZE THEIR VERNACULAR LITERACY LIVES AS WELL AS HOW THEY ENGAGE WITH THOSE NARRATIVES.

## II. APPROACHES

WHEN I FIRST STARTED THINKING ABOUT THESE ISSUES IN THE CONTEXT OF AN INVESTIGATION INTO BOYS' READING PREFERENCES AS REVEALED BY THEIR BOOKSTORE BROWSING BEHAVIORS (CAVAZOS-KOTTKE, 2006), MY DAUGHTER WAS ATTENDING HARWELL MIDDLE SCHOOL,\* A 5<sup>TH</sup>- & 6<sup>TH</sup>-GRADE CAMPUS IN A SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT IN CENTRAL LOWER MICHIGAN. FOR LANGUAGE ARTS, SHE WAS PLACED WITH MR. ED CONNORS, WHO ALSO HAPPENED TO BE INTERESTED IN ISSUES OF PERMEABILITY.

INSTEAD OF TEACHING LANGUAGE ARTS THROUGH WHOLE-CLASS TEXTS, CONNORS STRUCTURED HIS CURRICULUM AROUND STUDENTS' SELF-SELECTION OF PERSONALLY INTERESTING READING MATERIALS THROUGH INDEPENDENT READING PROJECTS, REGULAR SUSTAINED SILENT READING, & READER'S WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES. CONNORS WANTED TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT MOST ENGAGED MIDDLE SCHOOL READERS—PARTICULARLY BOYS—OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL IN ORDER TO CREATE MORE ENGAGING LITERACY EXPERIENCES IN SCHOOL. I PROPOSED A CASE STUDY TO SYSTEMATICALLY ANALYZE HIS STUDENTS' CHOICES OVER THE COURSE OF A FULL ACADEMIC YEAR.

THREE RESEARCH QUESTIONS GUIDED THIS STUDY:

1. WHAT ARE THE VERNACULAR LITERACY PRACTICES OF A CLASS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL BOYS & WITH WHAT KINDS OF TEXTS DO THESE BOYS ENGAGE IN THOSE PRACTICES?
2. HOW & TO WHAT EXTENT DO THESE BOYS' VERNACULAR LITERACIES BECOME VISIBLE WITHIN A LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAM STRUCTURED AROUND STUDENTS' SELF-SELECTED TEXTS?
3. HOW & TO WHAT EXTENT DO THE LITERACY PRACTICES OF THESE BOYS DIFFER FROM THOSE OF GIRLS WITHIN THE SAME CLASS?

THESE QUESTIONS ADDRESS A CENTRAL CONCERN FOR EVALUATING THE EFFICACY OF A PERMEABLE CLASSROOM WITH ADOLESCENT READERS: WHEN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DOORS TO THE CLASSROOM ARE HELD OPEN FOR STUDENTS' VERNACULAR LITERACY PRACTICES, WHICH DOORS DO THEY TAKE, & WHAT DO THEY BRING WITH THEM?



\*ALL NAMES ARE PSEUDONYMS.



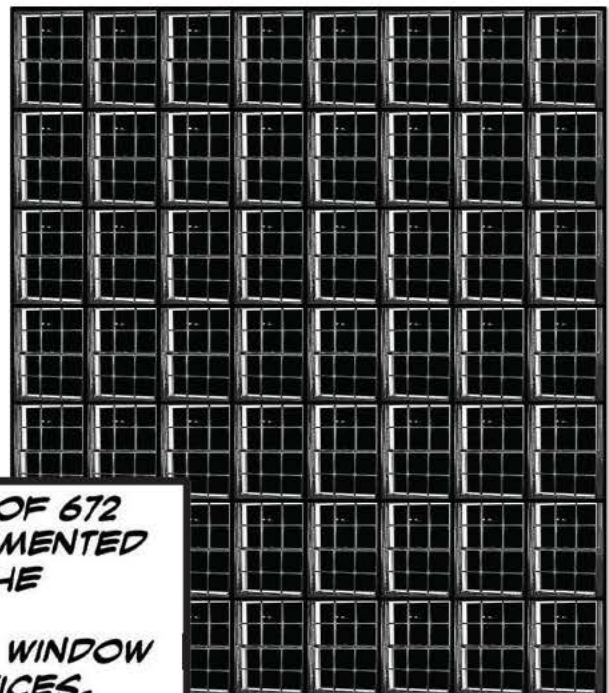
OVER THE COURSE OF THE 2004-2005 SCHOOL YEAR, THE TEXT SELECTIONS MADE BY 48 SIXTH GRADERS (24 BOYS, 24 GIRLS) FOR INDEPENDENT READING PROJECTS, DAILY "DROP EVERYTHING AND READ" (DEAR) PERIODS, AND READER'S WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES WERE DOCUMENTED AND ANALYZED. DATA WAS GATHERED THROUGH CLASSROOM OBSERVATION (MINIMUM OF TWO TIMES PER WEEK FOR THE FULL YEAR) AND ANALYSIS OF ARCHIVAL WORK (READING LOGS, BOOK REPORTS) SAVED BY CONNORS FOR INCLUSION IN STUDENT PORTFOLIOS.



IN SUBSEQUENT ROUNDS OF INTERVIEWS, PARTICIPANTS WERE ASKED TO DISCUSS THE TEXTS THEY HAD SELECTED FOR VARIOUS ACTIVITIES IN THE LANGUAGE ARTS CLASS AND THE TEXTS WITH WHICH THEY HAD BEEN INTERACTING OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL. IN THE FINAL INTERVIEW, SIX PARTICIPANTS (3 BOYS AND 3 GIRLS) FROM THE SUBGROUP OF FOCAL STUDENTS WERE OBSERVED BROWSING FOR PERSONALLY INTERESTING TEXTS AT A LOCAL BOOK STORE AND AT A SCHOOL-SPONSORED BOOK FAIR, FOLLOWING AN OBSERVATION & INTERVIEW PROTOCOL THAT I DEVELOPED IN A PRIOR STUDY.

THESE METHODS YIELDED A DATASET OF 672 TEXT SELECTIONS, WHICH WERE DOCUMENTED & ANALYZED OVER THE COURSE OF THE SCHOOL YEAR ACROSS ACADEMIC & VERNACULAR CONTEXTS, EACH TEXT A WINDOW ONTO ADOLESCENTS' LITERACY PRACTICES.

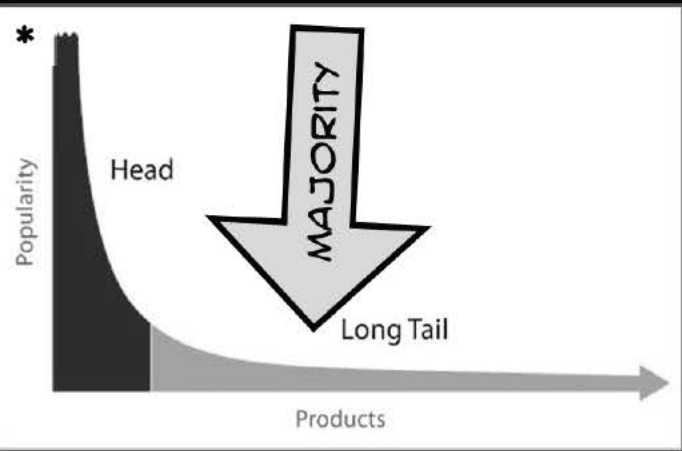
TO DOCUMENT TEXTS SELECTED BY STUDENTS FOR EXTRACURRICULAR, VERNACULAR PURPOSES, & TO GATHER MORE IN-DEPTH INFORMATION ABOUT THE TEXTS STUDENTS SELECTED FOR IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES, A SUBGROUP OF 22 FOCAL STUDENTS (11 BOYS & 11 GIRLS) WAS INTERVIEWED ON MULTIPLE OCCASIONS OVER THE COURSE OF THE SCHOOL YEAR. THE FIRST ROUND OF INTERVIEWS USED THE CONVERSATIONAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL OF THE MOTIVATION TO READ PROFILE TO ELICIT GENERAL INFORMATION ON THESE STUDENTS' READING HABITS & ATTITUDES.



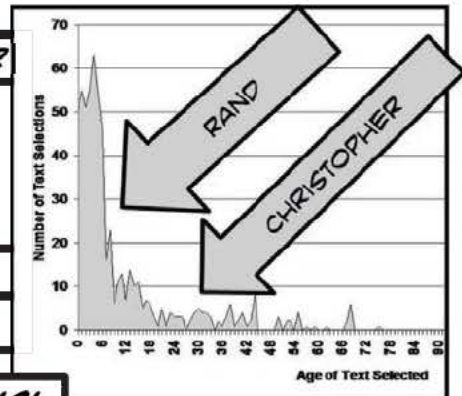
### III. WINDOWS

OF THE 672 OVERALL TEXT SELECTIONS, 368 WERE TITLES THAT WERE SELECTED ONLY ONCE, & THE MOST FREQUENTLY SELECTED TITLES WERE SELECTED BY NO MORE THAN SEVEN STUDENTS. THIS PHENOMENON, IN WHICH THE MAJORITY OF ITEMS ARE REPRESENTED BY SMALL NUMBERS OF SELECTIONS - AS OPPOSED TO THE MAJORITY OF SELECTIONS BEING REPRESENTED BY A SMALL NUMBER OF HIGHLY POPULAR ITEMS - IS CALLED THE "LONG TAIL" (ANDERSON, 2006), & IS A DEFINING CHARACTERISTIC OF MODERN MICROECONOMICS. THIS LOW LEVEL OF OVERLAP HELD AMONG BOTH BOYS & GIRLS, EXPANDING A FINDING FROM AN EARLIER INVESTIGATION INTO TALENTED BOYS' READING SELECTIONS (CAVAZOS-KOTTKE, 2006).

DIVERSITY OF TEXT SELECTIONS SHOULD NOT BE MISTAKEN FOR RANDOMNESS, HOWEVER. SEVERAL STRONG TRENDS WERE APPARENT IN THE TEXT SELECTIONS MADE FOR VERNACULAR PURPOSES BY THE FOCAL BOYS IN THIS STUDY. THE WORKS OF THE TWO MOST POPULAR AUTHORS WHO WERE EXCLUSIVELY SELECTED BY BOYS—JONATHAN RAND & MATT CHRISTOPHER—ILLUSTRATE THESE TRENDS.



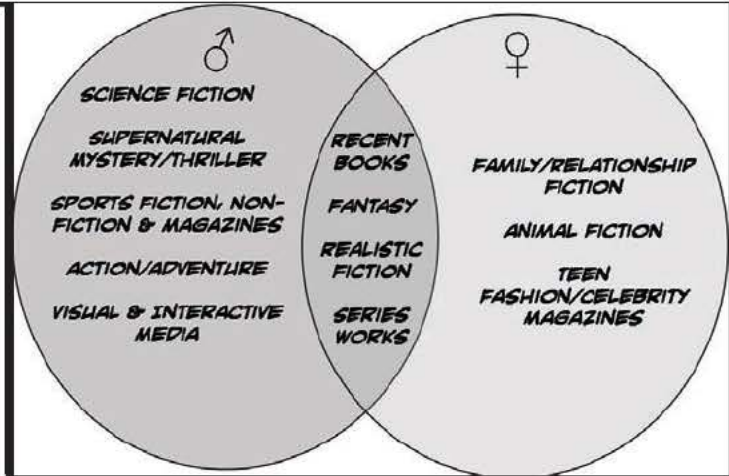
AUTHOR	J. RAND	M. CHRISTOPHER
KNOWN FOR ...	SCI-FI/HORROR SERIES (AMERICAN & MICHIGAN CHILLERS)	SPORTS FICTION/SERIES
WRITTEN FOR ...	YOUNG ADULT	YOUNG ADULT
PUBLISHED IN ...	EARLY 2000S	1960S - 1980S



FOR VERNACULAR PURPOSES, 64% OF THE BOYS' TEXTS WERE FROM A SERIES. IMAGINATIVE FICTION & SPORTS-THEMED TEXTS WERE THE MOST POPULAR GENRE/SUBJECT MATTER CATEGORIES. TEXTS OF RECENT VINTAGE WERE OVERWHELMINGLY POPULAR.

\* IMAGE REPRODUCED FROM ANDERSON (N.D.), PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE GRANTED BY AUTHOR UNDER CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE 2.0.

**COMPARED WITH GIRLS, BOYS ENGAGED WITH TEXTS REPRESENTING A WIDER RANGE OF GENRE, SUBJECT MATTER, & MEDIUM FOR BOTH ACADEMIC & VERNACULAR PURPOSES. WHILE BOTH BOYS & GIRLS WERE DRAWN TO RELATIVELY RECENT SERIES WORKS OF IMAGINATIVE & REALISTIC FICTION, GIRLS WERE DRAWN MORE NARROWLY TOWARD FANTASY NOVELS & STORIES ABOUT FAMILY,**



**SCHOOL, & FRIENDSHIPS. BOYS SELECTED TEXTS ACROSS A BROADER RANGE OF IMAGINATIVE FICTION GENRES, INCLUDING FANTASY, BUT ALSO SCIENCE FICTION & SUPERNATURAL THRILLERS, & THEIR REALISTIC FICTION SELECTIONS WERE PREDOMINANTLY SPORTS STORIES. MAGAZINE SELECTIONS ALSO REFLECTED THIS DIFFERENCE, & BOYS WERE MORE LIKELY THAN GIRLS TO PURSUE INFORMATIONAL TEXTS RELATED TO THEIR INTERESTS. WHILE THESE TRENDS IN BOYS' TEXT SELECTIONS ARE IN LINE WITH MUCH CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP ON YOUNG ADULTS' READING PREFERENCES (BLAIR & SANFORD, 2004; CAVAZOS-KOTTKE, 2006; COLES & HALL, 2002; FARRIS, WERDERICH, NELSON, & FUHLER, 2009; KNOWLES & SMITH, 2005; WORTHY, MOORMAN, & TURNER, 1999), THE FINDING THAT BOYS' PREFERRED READING MATERIALS CAME FROM A WIDER ARRAY OF GENRES THAN DID GIRLS' PREFERRED MATERIALS IS WITHOUT PRECEDENT IN THE RESEARCH LITERATURE. BOYS ALSO SELECTED TEXTS FROM A WIDER RANGE OF MEDIA THAN DID GIRLS. GIRLS' TEXT SELECTIONS WERE ALMOST ENTIRELY PRINT-BASED, CONSISTING**



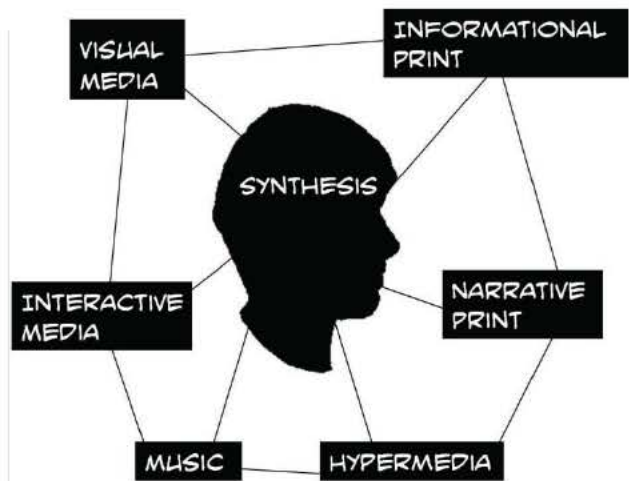
**PRIMARILY OF BOOKS & MAGAZINES. BOYS PURSUED THEIR READING INTERESTS ACROSS MULTIPLE MEDIA PLATFORMS, INCLUDING VIDEO GAMES, TELEVISION PROGRAMS, MOVIES & DVDS, AS WELL AS TRADITIONAL PRINT-BASED MEDIA LIKE BOOKS, MAGAZINES, & COMIC BOOKS. THIS IS NOT TO CLAIM THAT GIRLS HAD ZERO INTEREST IN NONPRINT-BASED MEDIA; THEY SIMPLY DID NOT REPORT SUCH INTERACTIONS IN THIS STUDY NOR DID THEY MAKE SUCH INTERESTS VISIBLE IN THE CLASSROOM ON OCCASIONS WHEN BOYS DID.**





WHILE BOYS' PREFERENCE FOR TEXTS THAT HAVE STRONG VISUAL APPEAL, BOTH IN TERMS OF VIVID LANGUAGE AND GRAPHIC ACCOMPANIMENT, HAS BEEN DOCUMENTED IN PRIOR SCHOLARSHIP (KAJDER, 2006; SMITH & WILHELM, 2002, 2006), THIS IS NOT TO CLAIM THAT THE BOYS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THIS STUDY PREFERRED VISUAL MEDIA OVER PRINT. THE MAJORITY OF TEXT SELECTIONS MADE BY BOYS FOR ANY PURPOSE WERE BOOKS, & BOYS AS A GROUP REPORTED MORE BOOK READING IN THEIR ACADEMIC & EXTRACURRICULAR LITERACY LIVES THAN DID GIRLS.

MORE CRITICAL TO UNDERSTANDING BOYS' LITERACY PRACTICES THAN THE PARTICULAR TEXTS THEY SELECTED IS THE TRANSMEDIAL ORIENTATION THEY TOOK TOWARD THEM. TRANSMEDIATION IS AN INTERTEXTUAL READING PRACTICE IN WHICH READERS SYNTHESIZE A KNOWLEDGE BASE FROM INFORMATION GATHERED IN MULTIPLE TEXTS (GOLDMAN, 2004; JENKINS, 2006; SEMALI & FUEYO, 2001). SEVERAL BOYS IN THIS STUDY PURSUED THEIR INTERESTS ACROSS CONSTELLATIONS OF TEXTS FROM MULTIPLE MEDIA, BUILDING ELABORATE SCHEMAS OF NARRATIVE & INFORMATIONAL WORLDS.



A CONCRETE EXAMPLE OF TRANSMEDIATION IN ACTION IS WARRANTED. ON THE LEFT, MEET

GATORADE, A FOCAL BOY WHO DESCRIBES HIMSELF AS "A MAJOR STAR WARS FAN." OVER THE COURSE OF THE SCHOOL YEAR, HE SELECTED GAMES, VIDEOS, MOVIES, & BOOKS RELATING TO STAR WARS TO ENGAGE WITH BOTH IN & OUT OF SCHOOL. HIS UNDERSTANDING OF THE STAR WARS UNIVERSE COMES NOT FROM INFORMATION FOUND IN ANY SINGLE TEXT, BUT FROM A PERSONAL SYNTHESIS OF EVENTS & IDEAS CONTAINED IN SEVERAL TEXTS ACROSS MULTIPLE MEDIA.





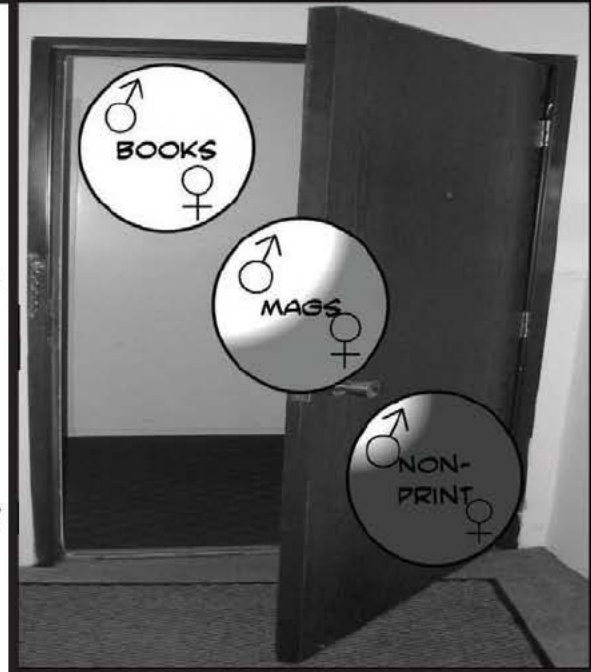


IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THIS TRANSMEDIATION BUSINESS WOULD BE QUITE A USEFUL CONCEPT FOR TEACHERS TO UNDERSTAND. IT APPEARS TO INVOLVE A SOPHISTICATED COORDINATION OF MANY OF THE READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES THAT WE SPEND YEARS TEACHING CHILDREN TO USE—INFERRING, VISUALIZATION, MAKING TEXT-SELF & TEXT-TEXT CONNECTIONS, QUESTIONING—YET THEY EMPLOY THEM ALMOST NATURALLY, WITHOUT HAVING TO BE TOLD HOW. FURTHERMORE, THEY EMPLOY THEM IN AN ENGAGING SOCIAL CONTEXT. WHAT A POTENTIALLY TERRIFIC SCAFFOLD THAT COULD BOTH RESTORE CHILDREN'S IMMEDIATE INTERESTS TO THE CENTER OF THE CURRICULUM & PROVIDE AN AVENUE FOR SUPPORTING MASTERY OF THE READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS WE WOULD LIKE THEM TO DEVELOP! I'M EAGER TO LEARN WHAT MR. CONNORS DID WITH THIS!

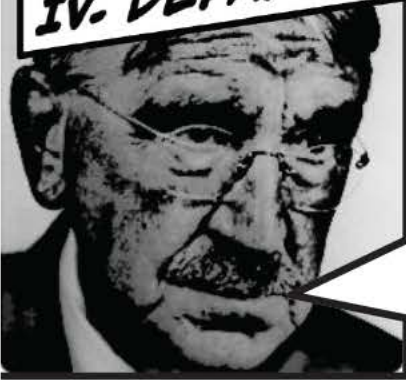
AH, WELCOME BACK TO THE COMIC BOOK, DR. DEWEY! YOUR PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE REMINDS US THAT OF THE THREE RESEARCH QUESTIONS POSED EARLIER, WE HAVE YET TO ADDRESS THE ONE MOST CENTRAL TO YOUR CONCERNS: WHAT CAME THROUGH THE OPEN DOORS OF CONNORS'S PERMEABLE CURRICULUM? HERE IS WHERE THINGS GET A BIT COMPLICATED...

THE DOORS OF CONNORS'S CLASSROOM WERE FULLY OPEN TO THE BOOKS THAT MARKED STUDENTS' VERNACULAR LITERACY INTERESTS, & THERE WAS GREAT CONGRUENCE BETWEEN THE KINDS OF BOOKS THAT BOTH BOYS & GIRLS SELECTED TO READ IN & OUT OF SCHOOL IN TERMS OF GENRE. WHILE BOYS WERE OBSERVED READING MAGAZINES & COMICS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR DURING DEAR TIME & OTHER READER'S WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES, GIRLS WERE ONLY OBSERVED READING MAGAZINES DURING A SINGLE READER'S WORKSHOP ACTIVITY AND NEVER DURING DEAR TIME. WHILE FOCAL BOYS & GIRLS ALIKE DID REPORT AVID MAGAZINE & COMIC READING OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL, GIRLS APPEARED TO BE MORE RELUCTANT THAN BOYS TO MAKE THAT READING VISIBLE AT SCHOOL. LAST, THE CLASSROOM WAS RELATIVELY IMPERMEABLE TO NONPRINT

TEXTS; ALTHOUGH NO RESTRICTIONS WERE PLACED ON WHAT STUDENTS COULD BRING DURING DEAR TIME, THE CLASSROOM DID NOT OFFER THE MEANS FOR STUDENTS TO ENGAGE WITH SUCH TEXTS, & THUS NO SUCH TEXTS APPEARED DURING THESE PERIODS. FOR ONE READER'S WORKSHOP ACTIVITY, CONNORS EXPLICITLY INVITED STUDENTS TO BRING NONPRINT TEXTS, & A FEW STUDENTS—ALMOST ALL BOYS—RESPONDED WITH DVDS & VIDEOGAMES. ALTHOUGH NONPRINT TEXTS RARELY PERMEATED THE CURRICULUM, THOSE THAT DID WERE CONNECTED TO THOSE STUDENTS' VERNACULAR LITERACY PRACTICES. FOR EXAMPLE, B-RAD, WHO IDENTIFIED HIMSELF AS A FAN OF "BLUE COLLAR COMEDY," BROUGHT A LARRY THE CABLE GUY DVD FOR THAT READER'S WORKSHOP.

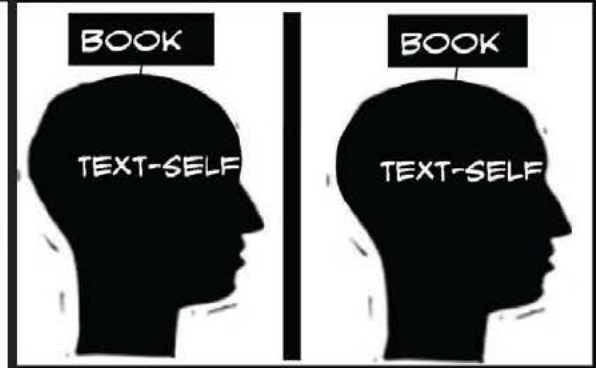


## IV. DEPARTURES

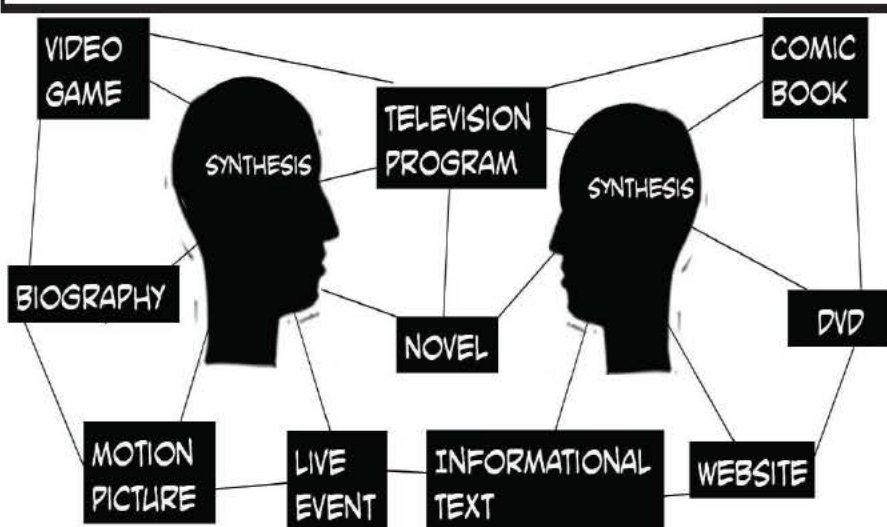


SO, WHILE IT APPEARS THAT THE TEXT SELECTIONS MADE BY BOYS & GIRLS IN THIS STUDY PROVIDE IMPORTANT WINDOWS ONTO ADOLESCENTS' VERNACULAR LITERACY PRACTICES, PLACING CHILDREN'S BOOK CHOICES AT THE CENTER OF THE CURRICULUM AS MR. CONNORS DID MAY BE A NECESSARY, YET NOT ENTIRELY SUFFICIENT MEANS OF OPENING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DOORS OF THE CLASSROOM TO CHILDREN. MORE MAY BE NEEDED TO FULLY DISPENSE WITH THIS PERNICIOUS SCHOOL/LIFE DICHOTOMY.

WHILE THE DOORS OF THE PERMEABLE CLASSROOM ALLOWED STUDENTS TO EXPRESS THEIR VERNACULAR LITERACY PRACTICES THROUGH THE BOOKS THEY SELECTED FOR IN-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, THEY REMAINED LARGELY CLOSED TO OTHER TEXT FORMS. THE POSSIBILITIES FOR TRANSMEDIATION, THE MOST ENGAGING LITERACY PRACTICE IN MANY BOYS' VERNACULAR REPERTOIRE & A POTENTIAL NEXUS OF LITERACY &



IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT, WERE THEREBY LIMITED. BECAUSE TRANSMEDIATION INVOLVES COGNITIVE NAVIGATION OF A CONSTELLATION OF TEXTS, CLASSROOM PRACTICES THAT ENGAGE STUDENTS IN THE CONSIDERATION OF ONE TEXT AT A TIME FURTHER LIMIT THE POSSIBILITIES FOR ENGAGING THIS PROCESS. ALL OF CONNORS' INDEPENDENT READING PROJECTS INVOLVED MAKING TEXT-SELF CONNECTIONS WITH INDIVIDUAL BOOKS. THE "READING CLUB" PROGRAM, PIONEERED FOR EARLY ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS, OFFERS A STRUCTURE THAT MIGHT BETTER AFFORD TRANSMEDIAL READING THAN



THE MORE TRADITIONAL SINGLE BOOK PROJECT APPROACH (COLLINS, 2008). AN OPENNESS TO STUDENTS' SELF-SELECTED TEXTS MUST BE COUPLED WITH AN OPENNESS TO THE WAYS THAT STUDENTS ENGAGE WITH THEM (ALVERMANN, ET AL., 2007).

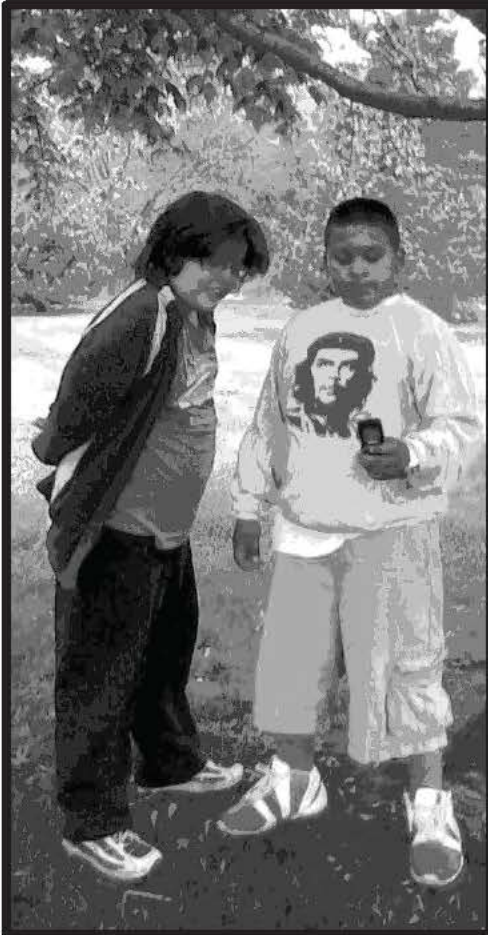


ANOTHER ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF A PERMEABLE CLASSROOM THAT WAS ABSENT IN THIS STUDY & MAY HAVE HAD UNINTENTIONALLY IMPERMEABLE CONSEQUENCES IS SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN TEACHER & STUDENTS. WHILE THERE WAS STRONG EVIDENCE THAT SOME FOCAL GIRLS HAD AS DEEP AN INTEREST IN BASKETBALL AS DID ANY BOYS IN THE CLASSROOM, THAT INTEREST NEVER MANIFESTED ITSELF IN ANY ACADEMIC LITERACY EVENTS. WHY THESE GIRLS FELT LESS COMPELLED THAN BOYS TO BRING THEIR EXTRACURRICULAR SPORTING INTERESTS THROUGH THE CLASSROOM DOORS IS NOT CLEAR. WHAT IS CERTAIN IS THAT THESE GIRLS, QUIET & ACADEMICALLY SUCCESSFUL, NEVER DREW THEIR TEACHER'S ATTENTION IN THE TEXT SELECTION PROCESS. IF A STUDENT VISIBLY STRUGGLED IN SELECTING SOMETHING TO READ, THE TEACHER WAS QUICK TO INTERVENE WITH GUIDING QUESTIONS & THOUGHTFUL RECOMMENDATIONS. HOWEVER, STUDENTS WHO QUIETLY SELECTED BOOKS THAT SEEMED APPROPRIATE FOR THEIR ASSESSED READING LEVEL WERE LARGELY LEFT ALONE, & LITTLE SUBSTANTIVE COMMENT WAS MADE REGARDING THEIR CHOICES OR INTERESTS.



IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THE UNFULFILLED PROMISE OF THE PERMEABLE CLASSROOM PARADIGM AS ENACTED IN THIS CLASSROOM RESIDES IN THE RELATIVE LACK OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT WITH STUDENTS' INTERESTS. THIS IS INDEED A MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR CREATING TRULY EDUCATIVE LITERACY EXPERIENCES. A SUCCESSFUL STUDENT'S LOVE OF BASEBALL OR THE CIVIL WAR COULD BE CAPITALIZED UPON TO ORIENT THE STUDENT TO MORE IN-DEPTH & ENRICHING LEARNING IN MULTIPLE DISCIPLINES. JUST BECAUSE THE GAME LOOKS GRACEFUL FROM THE NOSEBLEED SECTION DOES NOT MEAN THAT IT'S ENTIRELY EFFORTLESS OR COULDN'T BENEFIT FROM SUPPORTIVE COACHING.





**PERMEABLE CLASSROOMS OF THE PRESENT & FUTURE MUST CONSTANTLY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT ADOLESCENT LITERACY PRACTICES ARE A CONTINUALLY MOVING TARGET. WHEN DATA GATHERING BEGAN FOR THIS STUDY, FEW YOUNG PEOPLE HAD IPODS, YOUTUBE HAD NOT YET BEEN INVENTED, FACEBOOK WAS ONLY AVAILABLE TO SELECTED COLLEGE STUDENTS, & BARACK OBAMA WAS RUNNING TO BECOME THE JUNIOR SENATOR FROM ILLINOIS. AT THE TIME OF THIS WRITING, JUST FOUR YEARS LATER, ALL OF THESE ENTITIES HAVE BECOME VITAL COMPONENTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S LITERACY PRACTICES. WHAT KINDS OF TEXTS & LITERACY EVENTS WILL BE MOST COMPELLING TO ADOLESCENTS AS SOON AS THE END OF THIS VERY SCHOOL YEAR MAY EVEN BE DIFFICULT TO PREDICT. MY POINT IS THAT IF EDUCATORS ARE COMMITTED TO BREAKING DOWN THE SCHOOL/LIFE DIVIDE THAT CONTINUES TO ALIENATE SO MANY CHILDREN FROM THE CURRICULUM, WE MUST MAKE A STRONG EFFORT TO MAINTAIN DEEP ENGAGEMENT WITH THE CHILDREN WE SERVE, THE TEXTS THAT CAPTIVATE THEM, & THE LITERACY PRACTICES THEY UTILIZE TO MAKE SENSE OF THOSE TEXTS. TO DO ANYTHING LESS IS TO CONTINUE TO OSTRACIZE OUR CHILDREN FROM THEIR RIGHTFUL PLACE AT THE CENTER OF THE CURRICULUM. THEIR FUTURE COMPELS US TO DO BETTER.**



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR: A FORMER HIGH SCHOOL HUMANITIES TEACHER & JEOPARDY! CONTESTANT, DR. SEAN KOTTKE RECEIVED HIS PH.D. IN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY & EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY FROM MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY. HE CURRENTLY SERVES AS CHAIR OF THE BINDA SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AT THE ROBERT B. MILLER COLLEGE IN BATTLE CREEK, MICHIGAN. HE IS THE PROUD PARENT OF TWO TEENAGERS, BOTH OF WHOM APPEAR IN THIS COMIC. EMAIL: KOTTKES@MILLERCOLLEGE.EDU**

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