

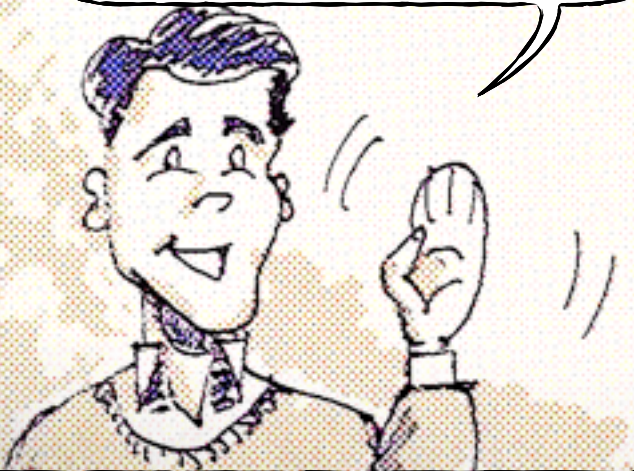
BRIDGING THE GAPS

A MULTIMODAL CASE STUDY

BY

GRAHAM BOLDT

HI, I'M GRAHAM AND IT'S MY DREAM TO BECOME A HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHER.



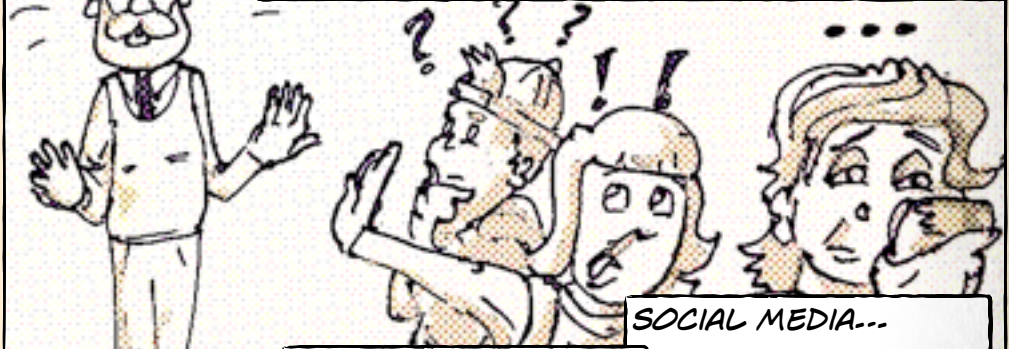
IN THIS COMIC, I'LL ADDRESS SOME OF THE COMMUNICATION GAPS BETWEEN CONTEMPORARY TEACHERS AND THEIR STUDENTS, IDENTIFYING SOME OF THE AREAS WHERE STUDENT LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT BREAKS DOWN.



BASED ON MY OWN INTERACTIONS WITH STUDENTS AND ALSO SOME CUTTING EDGE RESEARCH, I'LL ALSO RECOMMEND SOME STRATEGIES FOR BRIDGING THESE GAPS, SPECIFICALLY THROUGH GRAPHIC MEDIA.



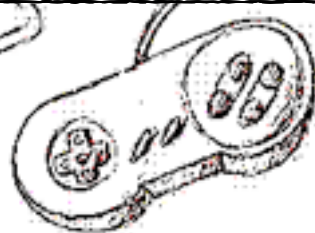
THE RHETORIC THESE DAYS TRIES TO ARGUE THAT BECAUSE OF DIGITAL MEDIA, STUDENTS AND TEACHERS ARE MORE DIFFERENT THAN EVER BEFORE. SOME CRITICS ARGUE THAT TECHNOLOGIES LIKE...



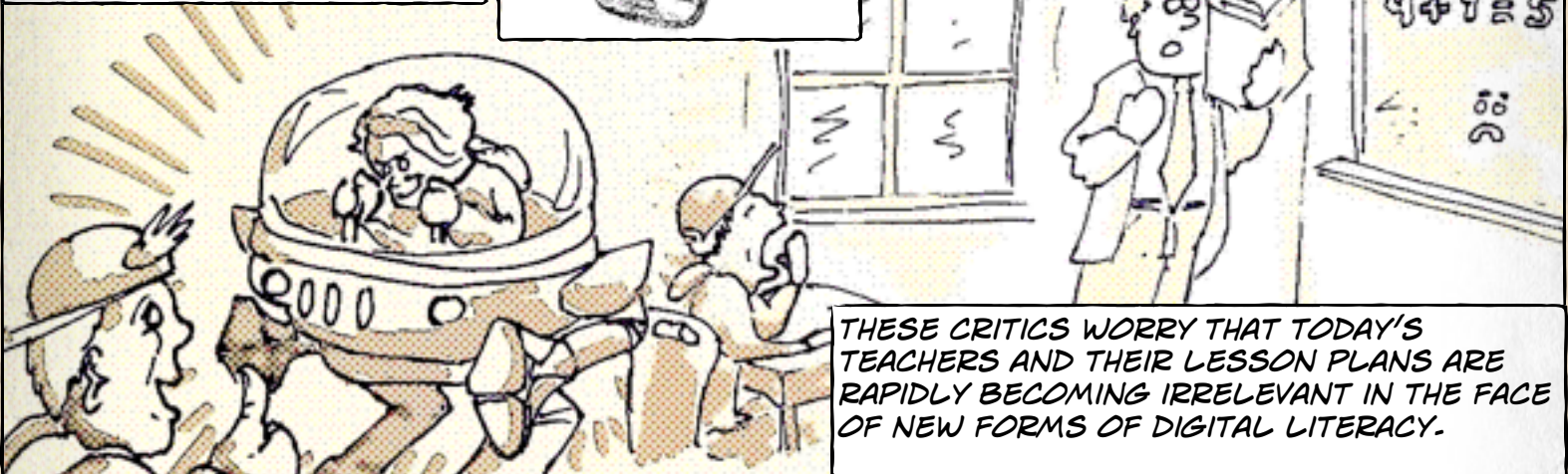
SOCIAL MEDIA...

VIDEO GAMES...

AND CELLPHONES...

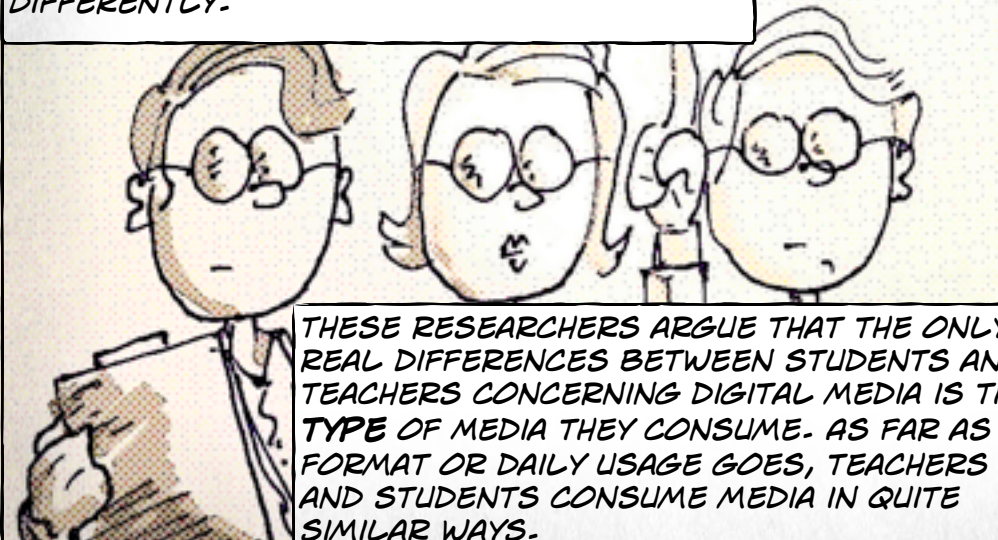


HAVE CHANGED THE WAY STUDENTS SOCIALIZE AND EVEN THEIR VALUES AND BELIEFS.



THESE CRITICS WORRY THAT TODAY'S TEACHERS AND THEIR LESSON PLANS ARE RAPIDLY BECOMING IRRELEVANT IN THE FACE OF NEW FORMS OF DIGITAL LITERACY.

HOWEVER, THERE ARE OTHERS, LIKE ANDREW BURN, DAVID BUCKINGHAM, BECKY PARRY AND MANDY POWELL, WHO SEE THE SITUATION DIFFERENTLY.

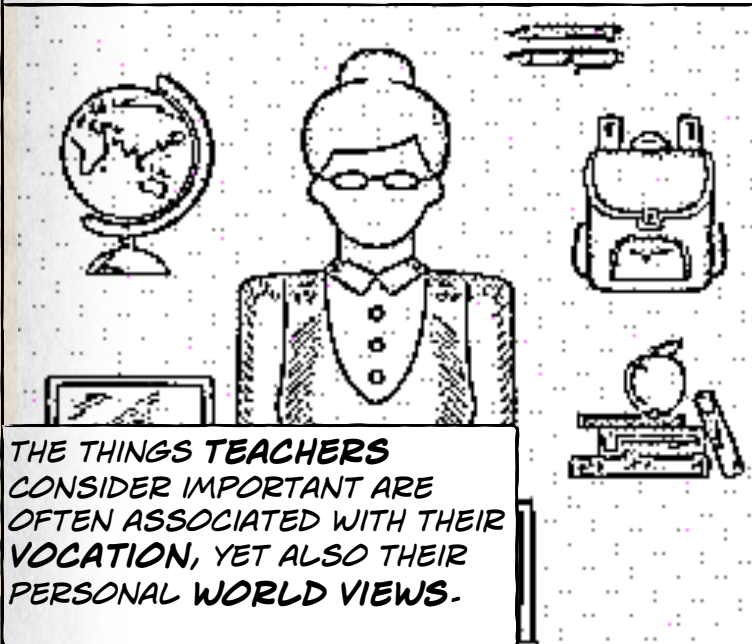


THESE RESEARCHERS ARGUE THAT THE ONLY REAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN STUDENTS AND TEACHERS CONCERNING DIGITAL MEDIA IS THE **TYPE** OF MEDIA THEY CONSUME. AS FAR AS FORMAT OR DAILY USAGE GOES, TEACHERS AND STUDENTS CONSUME MEDIA IN QUITE SIMILAR WAYS.

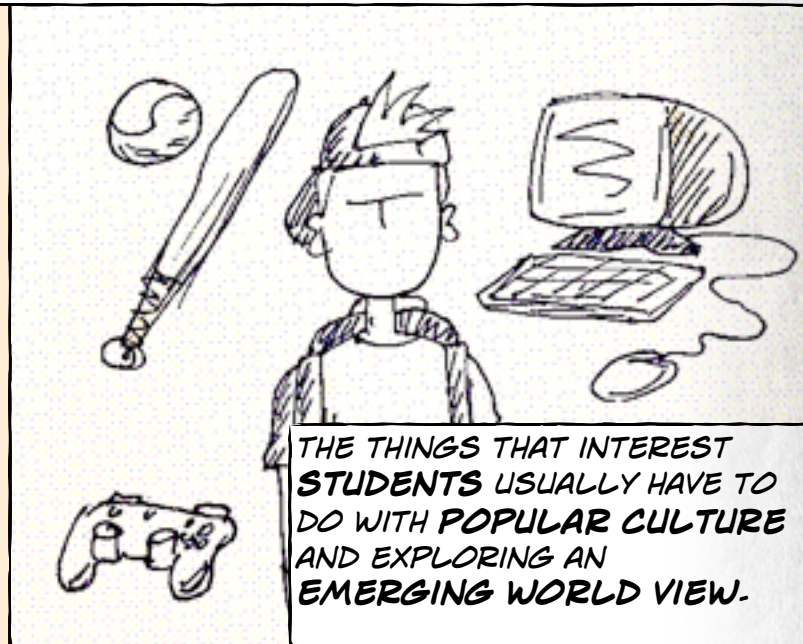
ESSENTIALLY, RATHER THAN DIFFERENT **SPECIES**, TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ARE MORE LIKE DIFFERENT **BREEDS** OF THE SAME MEDIA ANIMAL.



STILL, BURN ET AL. ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THERE REMAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN STUDENTS AND TEACHERS. DRAWING FROM BOURDIEU'S WORK ON "CULTURAL PREFERENCES," THEY ARGUE THAT "BOTH GROUPS REPRESENT PARTICULAR DISPOSITIONS, TASTES AND VALUES RELATED TO THEIR SOCIAL ROLES," MEANING THAT THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN STUDENTS AND TEACHERS ARE THEIR **SOCIAL IDENTITIES**.

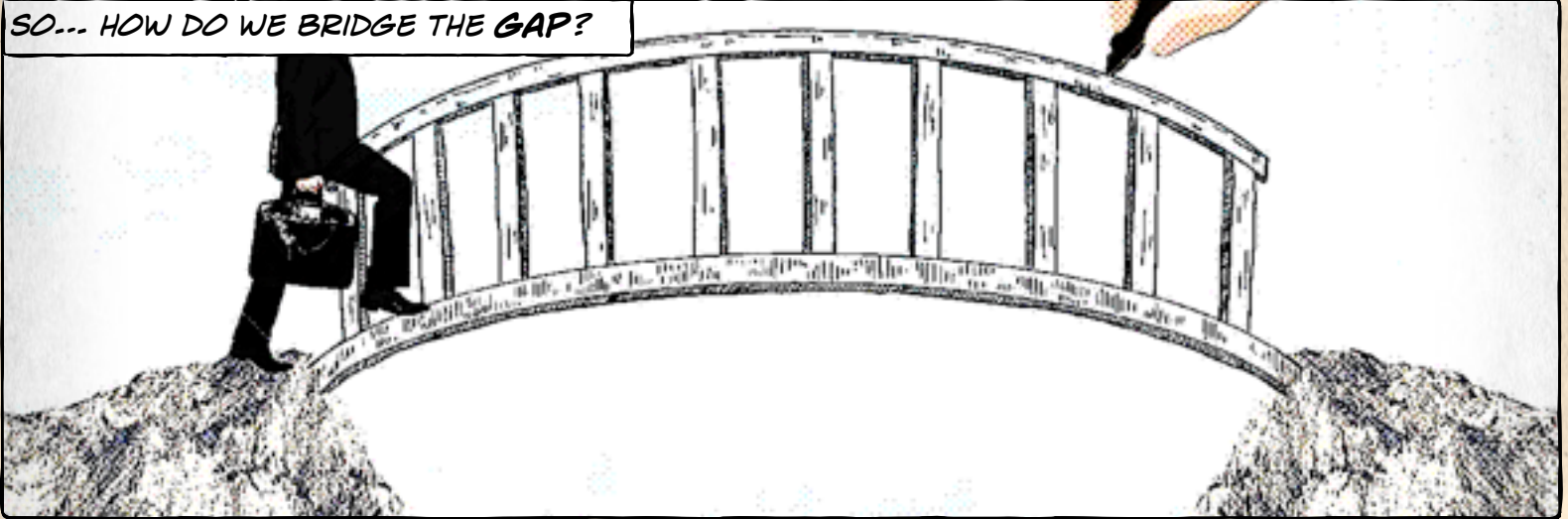


THE THINGS **TEACHERS** CONSIDER IMPORTANT ARE OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH THEIR **VOCATION**, YET ALSO THEIR **PERSONAL WORLD VIEWS**.

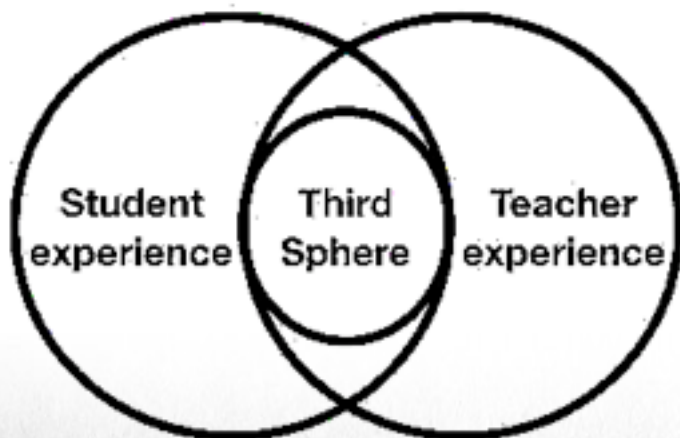


THE THINGS THAT INTEREST **STUDENTS** USUALLY HAVE TO DO WITH **POPULAR CULTURE** AND EXPLORING AN **EMERGING WORLD VIEW**.

SO... HOW DO WE BRIDGE THE **GAP**?



BURN ET AL. SUGGEST THAT TEACHERS ENCOURAGE A "THIRD SPHERE" DYNAMIC IN THEIR CLASSROOMS. THAT IS, THEY SEEK TO FIND AREAS OF CONVERGENCE BETWEEN THE CURRICULUM AND STUDENTS' INTERESTS, ASPIRATIONS AND WORLDVIEWS.



**HOW DO
TEACHERS
LEARN ABOUT
STUDENT
EXPERIENCES?**

...THROUGH SOME INTRODUCTIONS. **MEET BRAD**...

OVER THE PAST FIVE WEDNESDAYS, I'VE VISITED A LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL TO BECOME MORE COMFORTABLE WITH MY FUTURE TEACHING ENVIRONMENT. DURING THIS TIME I'VE COME INTO CONTACT WITH A NUMBER OF STUDENTS; HOWEVER, ONE IN PARTICULAR STANDS OUT. MEET BRAD (NOT HIS REAL NAME)...



HI, I'M BRAD.

MY BACKGROUND IS GERMAN AND METIS, BUT ONLY MY GRANDPARENTS SPEAK GERMAN.


I THINK MY PARENTS ARE CHRISTIAN? I THINK...?




I'M THE KING OF TIK-TOK. FACEBOOK IS SO LAST GEN...

I'M IN GRADE 9.

I LOVE BASEBALL AND PRACTICE FOUR NIGHTS A WEEK.



MY DAD'S A CONTRACTOR AND I WANT TO BE JUST LIKE HIM!

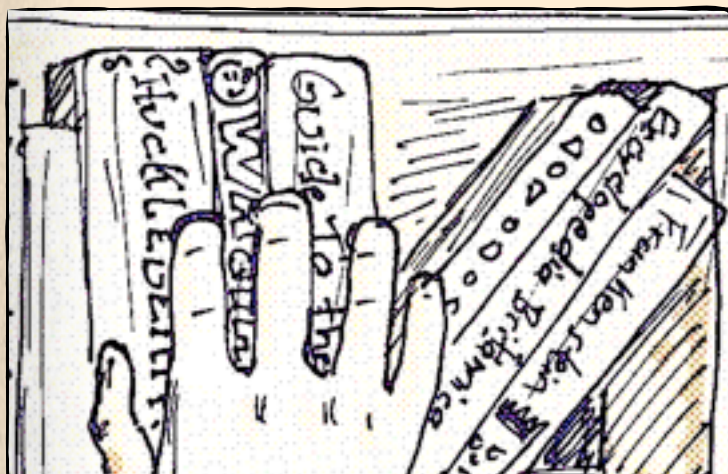


IN THIS NEXT SECTION, I'LL REFLECT ON THREE IMPORTANT ENCOUNTERS I'VE HAD WITH BRAD THAT HAVE COME TO RESHAPE MY UNDERSTANDING OF THE MODERN STUDENT AND POPULAR YOUTH CULTURE.

ENCOUNTER 1:

READING TROUBLE

I FIRST MET BRAD IN ENGLISH CLASS WHERE HE ALREADY HAD A REPUTATION FOR MISCHIEF. BRAD WAS FUNNY AND CHARISMATIC BUT NOT VERY INTERESTED IN READING.



WHEN THE TEACHER HAD THE STUDENTS PICK A BOOK FOR SILENT READING, BRAD SEEMED HESITANT. HE EVENTUALLY REACHED FOR A GRAPHIC NOVEL.

WHY'D YOU PICK THIS ONE? DO YOU LIKE THIS AUTHOR OR THE ILLUSTRATIONS?



BECAUSE OF HIS DYSLEXIA, BRAD HAD COME TO ASSOCIATE **BOOKS** WITH A FEELING OF INADEQUACY AND STRESS. HE FELT ISOLATED FROM HIS FRIENDS WHO HAD NO PROBLEMS WITH READING.



SUMMARY

GRAPHIC NOVELS PROVIDED BRAD WITH A FORM OF NARRATIVE THAT DIDN'T CARRY A NEGATIVE STIGMA, LARGELY BECAUSE IT INVITED METHODS OF READING THAT PLAYED TO HIS STRENGTHS. I MUST RECOGNIZE THAT NOT ALL MY FUTURE STUDENTS WILL SHARE MY LINGUISTIC ABILITY OR APPRECIATION FOR WRITTEN TEXTS. FOR STUDENTS LIKE BRAD, I'LL LIKELY HAVE TO EMPLOY MORE CREATIVE MULTIMEDIA STRATEGIES TO BREAK DOWN THOSE BARRIERS AGAINST LITERATURE AND CLASSICAL TEXTS. ONCE THEY'RE DOWN, I CAN GUIDE STUDENTS TOWARDS THE KINDS OF LITERACIES THEY'LL NEED TO FLOURISH IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION.

ENCOUNTER 2:

SOCIAL (MEDIA) SIGNALS

ANOTHER MEANINGFUL ENCOUNTER WITH BRAD OPENED ME UP TO THE POTENTIAL CULTURE GAP BETWEEN ME AND MY STUDENTS. DURING ONE LUNCH BREAK, BRAD AND HIS FRIENDS INVITED ME ON A WALK TO TIM HORTONS...



OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL, THE BOYS WERE RELAXED AND TALKED ABOUT THEIR PERSONAL INTERESTS.

SO, WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES?

GRAPHIC NOVELS!

VIDEO GAMES MOSTLY. WE PLAY A LOT OF MADDEN.

MADDEN'S A FOOTBALL GAME YOU CAN PLAY ONLINE WITH FRIENDS.

BASEBALL TOO!

IS THAT HOW YOU USUALLY HANGOUT?

YEA, IT'S EASIER THAN GETTING OUR PARENTS TO DRIVE.

I'M ALREADY GETTING BORED OF MADDEN, TO BE HONEST.

THE LARGEST DIFFERENCES IN MEDIA CONSUMPTION BETWEEN BRAD'S FRIENDS AND I CONCERNED CONTENT. AS BURN ET AL. PUT IT, BRAD'S FRIENDS AND MY MEDIA PREFERENCES WERE INFLUENCED BY OUR "SOCIAL ROLES": YOUNG STUDENTS VS. FUTURE TEACHER. BRAD'S FRIENDS CONSIDERED THEMSELVES TO BE, FIRST AND FOREMOST, **ATHLETES** AND WERE INTERESTED IN VIDEO GAMES AND MEDIA THAT COMPLIMENTED THIS IDENTITY.

SUMMARY

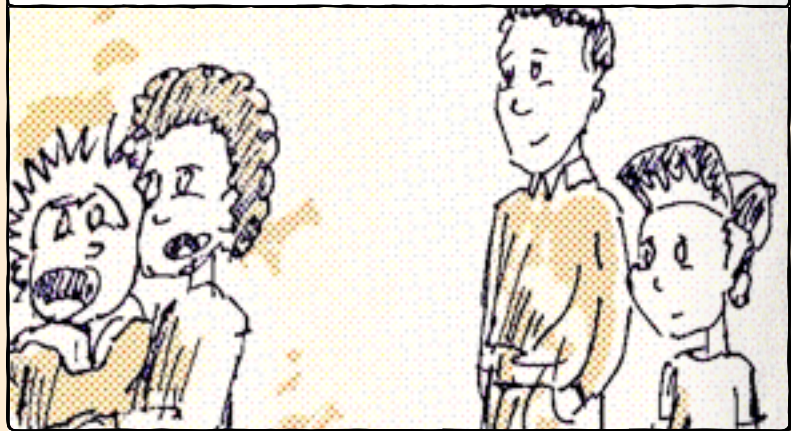
MOREOVER, THEIR FRIEND GROUP WAS MORE CONDENSED THAN MINE (CONSISTING ALMOST ENTIRELY OF SCHOOL FRIENDS) RESULTING IN A GREATER UNIFORMITY IN TASTE AND HOBBIES. FINALLY, AS STUDENTS, BRAD AND HIS FRIENDS HAVE AMPLE LEISURE TIME, MEANING THEY CAN MASTER HOBBIES FASTER AND, TYPICALLY, GET BORED OF THEM QUICKER THAN AN ADULT. IN ESSENCE, BRAD'S INTERESTS ARE USUALLY SOCIALLY INFLUENCED, INTENSE AND SHIFT RAPIDLY. THIS DOESN'T MEAN BRAD'S HOBBIES ARE SUPERFICIAL, JUST THAT HE'S PART OF A DIFFERENT SOCIOCULTURAL NORM THAN ME.

MADDEN  **18**

ENCOUNTER 3:

BIAS AND BELIEF

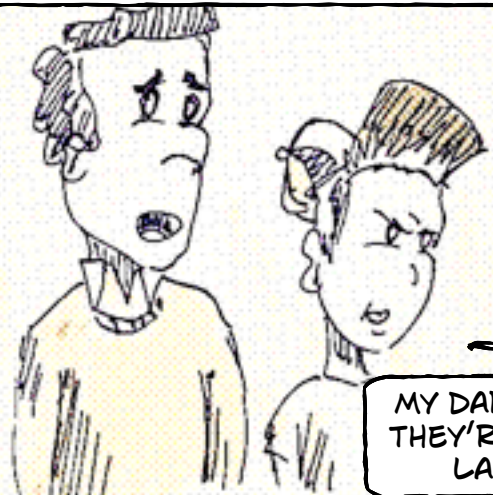
A THIRD ENCOUNTER WITH BRAD REMINDED ME THAT NOT ALL OF MY FUTURE STUDENTS WILL SHARE IN MY PARTICULAR WORLDVIEW. ON OUR WAY BACK FROM TIM HORTONS, BRAD CONFIDED HOW HE FELT ABOUT THE NEW INDIGENOUS ORIENTED CURRICULUM...



I DON'T SEE WHY WE HAVE TO STUDY ABOUT THEIR CULTURE. WE DON'T STUDY MY HERITAGE. IT'S JUST PICKING FAVOURITES.



MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE THERE'S TENSION BETWEEN OUR CULTURES AND THEIRS, AND THE SCHOOL DISTRICT WANTS US TO UNDERSTAND WHERE THEY'RE COMING FROM?



MY DAD SAYS THEY'RE JUST LAZY.

I WAS SURPRISED BY BRAD'S COMMENTS, MOSTLY BECAUSE I HADN'T HEARD ANYTHING LIKE IT SINCE MY HIGH SCHOOL DAYS. I NAIVELY THOUGHT MOST OF THE COMING GENERATION SUPPORTED THE RECONCILIATION CANADA IS PURSUING WITH ITS INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS; HOWEVER, THIS IS EVIDENTLY NOT THE CASE.

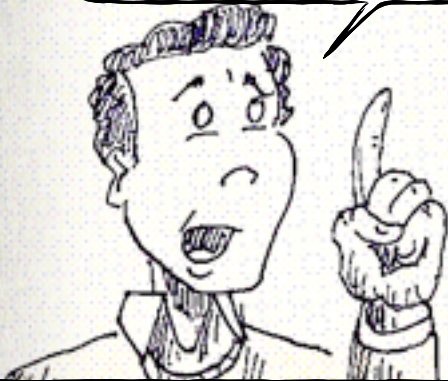


SUMMARY

I RECOGNIZE THAT MANY OF MY FUTURE STUDENTS WILL NOT SHARE MY PERSPECTIVE ON MANY SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES AND WILL GENERALLY DEFAULT TO THEIR PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES. AS A TEACHER, IT WILL BE MY RESPONSIBILITY TO, FIRST AND FOREMOST, RESPECT EACH STUDENT'S VALUES BUT ALSO TO TACTFULLY CHALLENGE AREAS OF THEIR THINKING THAT MIGHT STILL BE IMMATURE. I BELIEVE THIS PARTICULAR GAP—OF BIAS AND BELIEF—WILL BE THE MOST DIFFICULT TO BRIDGE; HOWEVER, IT REMAINS THE MOST IMPORTANT AREA TO SEARCH OUT A COMMON GROUND BETWEEN MYSELF AND MY STUDENTS.

BUT WHY DOES IT MATTER?

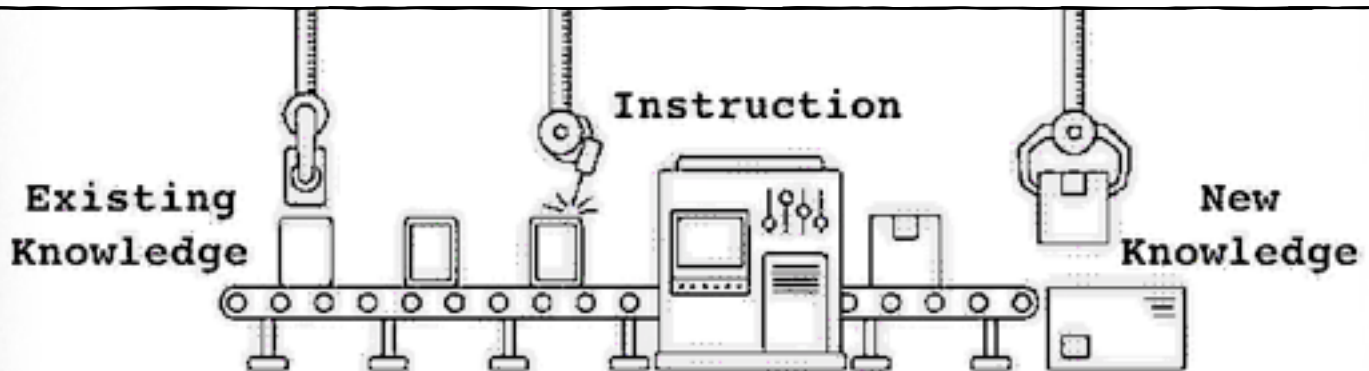
WHY SHOULD TEACHERS SEEK OUT THE INTERESTS, BELIEFS AND ABILITIES OF THEIR STUDENTS?



BECAUSE ALL LEARNING RELIES ON **PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE**!



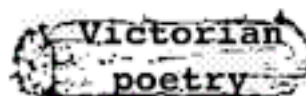
AS THE COGNITIVE THEORISTS JEAN PIAGET AND LEV VYGOTSKY OBSERVE, STUDENTS DON'T SIMPLY COMPARTMENTALIZE NEW INFORMATION AND STORE IT AWAY. RATHER LEARNING IS A DYNAMIC PROCESS OF TAKING **EXISTING KNOWLEDGE** AND TURNING IT INTO **NEW KNOWLEDGE** OR EXTENDING OLD KNOWLEDGE TO FIT NEW CIRCUMSTANCES.



THEY CALL THIS PROCESS "CONSTRUCTIVISM."

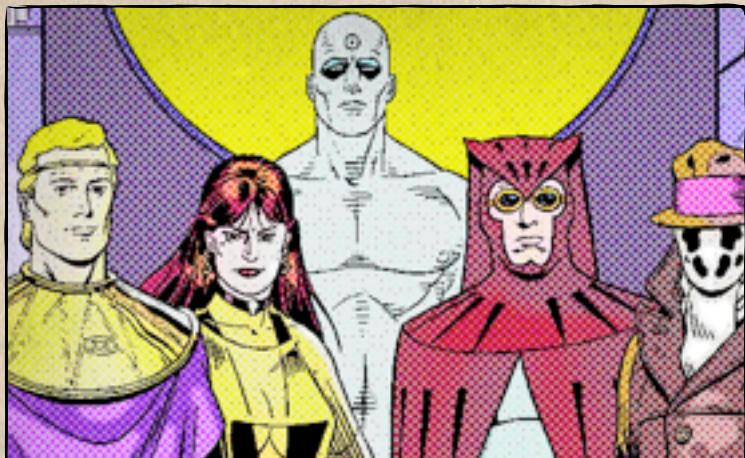


Vs.



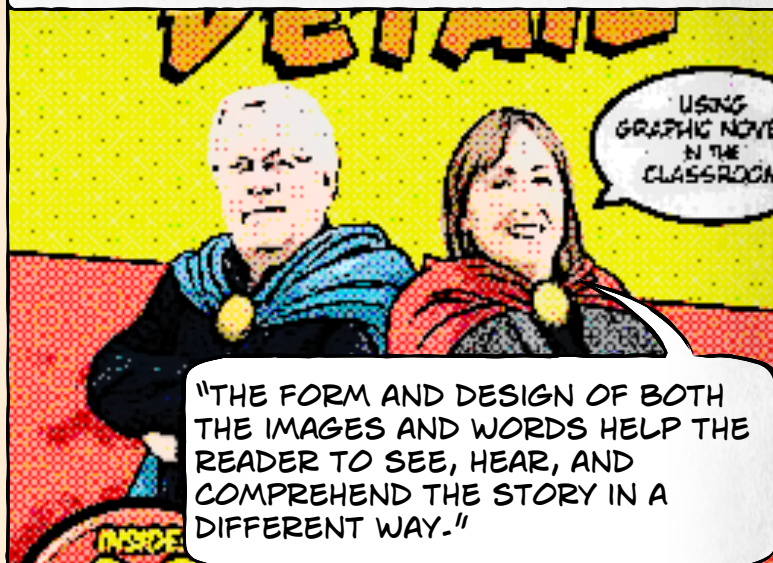
FOR THIS REASON, IT'S CRUCIAL THAT I ATTEMPT TO DRAW FROM MY STUDENTS' EXISTING STORES OF KNOWLEDGE, TO ENSURE THAT THEY HAVE SUFFICIENT BUILDING MATERIALS TO CONSTRUCT NEW WAYS OF THINKING.

WHAT ABOUT THE THIRD SPHERE?



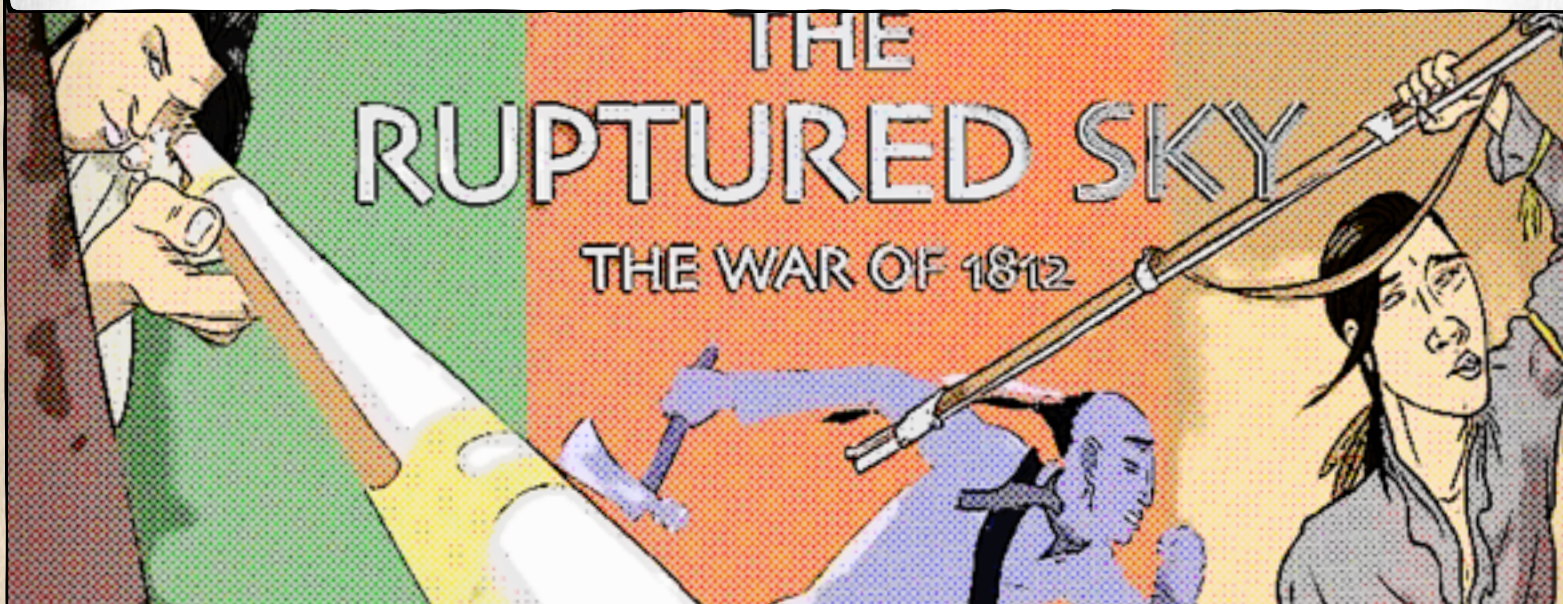
BUT WHAT ARE SOME STRATEGIES FOR INCORPORATING MY STUDENTS' INTERESTS INTO THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM? GRAPHIC NOVELS OFFER A PROMISING BRIDGE FOR MODERN LEARNERS LIKE BRAD.

AS DAVID BOOTH AND KATHLEEN LUNDY ARGUE IN THEIR BOOK, IN GRAPHIC DETAIL...



"THE FORM AND DESIGN OF BOTH THE IMAGES AND WORDS HELP THE READER TO SEE, HEAR, AND COMPREHEND THE STORY IN A DIFFERENT WAY."

WHILE CONVENTIONAL NOVELS COMMUNICATE ENTIRELY THROUGH WRITTEN TEXT, GRAPHIC NOVELS EMPLOY MULTIPLE TYPES OF LITERACY—INCLUDING IMAGES, GESTURES, AND LETTERING—AND THEREFORE INVITE INTERPRETATION FROM MULTIPLE ANGLES. FOR STUDENTS STRUGGLING WITH WRITTEN LITERACY (LIKE BRAD) GRAPHIC IMAGES MIGHT BE THE BRIDGE THEY NEED TO IMPROVE THEIR GRAMMATICAL UNDERSTANDING. MOREOVER, THE MARRIAGE OF TEXT AND IMAGE BETTER REFLECTS THE MULTIMODALITY OF MANY ONLINE PLATFORMS AND, AS SUCH, BETTER PREPARES STUDENTS FOR INTERPRETING THE ONLINE TEXTUAL LANDSCAPES OF TOMORROW. **THE RUPTURED SKY** ONLINE GRAPHIC NOVEL, FOR EXAMPLE, PROVIDES AN ENGAGING INTERACTIVE NARRATIVE FOR STUDENTS...



NOT ONLY CAN LEARNERS DISCOVER MORE ABOUT THE INFLUENCE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ON THE CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL BORDER, THEY CAN ALSO LEARN MORE ABOUT NARRATIVE THROUGH A GRAPHIC MEDIUM THAT ENCOURAGES A MULTIMODAL EXPLORATION OF TEXT.

FURTHERMORE, WITH THE NEW AVAILABILITY OF USER FRIENDLY GRAPHIC MEDIA SOFTWARE AND COMIC BOOK CREATION PROGRAMS, STUDENTS CAN RESPOND TO THIS TYPE OF GRAPHIC WORK WITH THEIR OWN COMICS! THIS ENTIRE BOOKLET WAS MADE USING THE "COMIC LIFE 3" PROGRAM, WHICH IS FREE TO DOWNLOAD FOR ITS FIRST MONTH. COMIC DESIGN ENCOURAGES THE CREATOR TO THINK IN TERMS OF GRAPHIC OR VISUAL LITERACIES, AND ALSO PROMPTS THEM TO REFINE AND CONDENSE THEIR WRITTEN POINTS. THESE KINDS OF LITERACIES ARE BECOMING MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER IN THE DIGITAL AGE, AS STUDENTS LEARN TO NAVIGATE NEW ONLINE LITERATURES.

INTERESTED IN DOING SOME OF YOUR OWN RESEARCH? HERE ARE SOME RESOURCES...

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