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Children's Everyday Literacies: Intersections of Popular Culture and Language Arts Instruction

Donna E. Alvermann
University of Georgia
dalverma@uga.edu

Shelley Hong Xu
California State University-Long Beach
hxu@csulb.edu

Superman
Spiderman
Little Robin
Batman
Peter Pan
Hercules ("the Walt Disney one")
Mortal Kombat Jack
Sub-Zero
Superfriends
X-Men, Wolverine, Storm, Professor X
Silver Surfer
Fantastic Four

If you were a child in the late 1970s, it's likely you will recall one or more of the superheroes listed above. Or, if you are currently working with elementary school-aged children, it's likely they will be able to identify essentially the same set of characters, and maybe even their successors. On what basis do we make this claim? Three years ago, Donna, Jennifer, and Margaret were part of a research team (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999) interested in exploring the uses that teachers and children made of popular culture in classroom settings.

One of the classes the team visited was in a school known for its effectiveness in helping immigrant children feel at home in their new environment. A favorite story told by teachers in this school involved the music room. It seems that children who often spoken little or no English on their first day at the school were invited into the music room to play the piano. Regardless of whether they had had piano lessons, they found ways to communicate through making music.

Donna and her co-researchers were intrigued by this story and wondered if a group of second graders whom they had come to know in the school would communicate with similar ease if engaged in a discussion of popular superheroes. Jennifer, a former primary-grade teacher at Bank Street School in New York City, volunteered to be the kids' teacher for an afternoon (with the regular teacher's approval, of course). The activity she used as a discussion opener was one that involved the children in naming their favorite superheroes. Later, in telling Donna and Margaret about her experience, Jennifer said she was surprised that the kids' list of superheroes had not changed much from the time when she was a child, some 25 years earlier.

What Jennifer learned in her discussion with this particular group of second graders was that their knowledge of superheroes was largely defined by the TV shows they watched and the comic books they read. For example, when she asked them to imagine themselves as "perfect" superheroes and to draw images of what they had imagined, the children said such things as "He has to be strong and able to carry heavy things," and "He has to fly or do something that we can't do." Interestingly, even though Jennifer had instructed the children to

draw *themselves* as superheroes, both Pilar and Maria (two girls in the class) drew male superheroes. Pilar chose Zorax for her head, whereas Maria drew an image of Lenoardo DiCaprio. The names the students had brainstormed earlier also reflected a preponderance of male superheroes. Although perhaps not surprising, it is interesting to note that Dyson (1997) found this same prevalence of male superheroes in her study of primary-grade children who wrote about superheroes in writing workshop.

Gender considerations aside (though we do return to issues of gender bias and stereotyping later in this article), it appears that not much has changed in the past 25 years related to young children's popular culture interests. The second graders with whom Jennifer worked chose characteristics for their superheroes that were straight out of the TV shows and comic books that they were currently watching and reading. Moreover, Jennifer noted, the superheroes the children described had essentially the same characteristics as those she remembered identifying with as a child. So, you might ask, what *is* popular culture? Does it cross generations? Is it not fleeting—here one day, gone the next?

In the first of this two-part article, we define what we mean by the term *popular culture*, being careful to distinguish it from definitions ascribed to mass media. We then provide a description of four approaches to using popular culture in the classroom. In this description, we attend to the tensions created when teachers try to develop students' critical awareness of the very things the children find most pleasurable about popular culture. In the second part of the article, we

share some practical (and classroom- tried) ideas for integrating elementary students' everyday literacies and popular culture interests into language arts instruction across the curriculum.

Popular Culture and Children's Everyday Literacies

Defining a Slippery Term

Trying to define *popular culture* is like nailing Jell-o to a wall, as our colleague David Moore at Arizona State University-West is wont to say. This inability to define the term is not necessarily a problem. In fact, some scholars (Jenks, 1993; Marsh & Millard, 2001) would argue that the concept of culture itself is so complex that "it is neither feasible, nor desirable, to arrive at a single definition" (Jenks, 1993, p.1). We agree, but we also think it is worthwhile to consider some of the more common uses of the term *popular culture* as a way of understanding what we mean (and do not mean) by our usage here.

For many years the idea of high culture, as opposed to low culture, has served to separate what people think of as belonging to the elite or finer side of life. Thus, certain kinds of paintings, books, music, and the like have been dubbed high culture to set them apart from the kinds of things thought to appeal to the masses, or common people. Low culture, therefore, is thought to have a coarseness that makes it undesirable, at least among high-brow elites. As Hagood (2001) has noted, those who critique mass media believe that "the culture industry socializes people in common ways by exposing them to mindless drivel" (p. 254). This perception of popular culture—one in which popular culture is equated to mass media—assumes that audiences lack the ability to interpret

for themselves the messages that the media produces. We do not subscribe to this view.

A view of popular culture as folk culture, on the other hand, celebrates the very fact that common people are indeed capable of making their own meanings of popular culture, irrespective of what mass media producers may intend as the message. From this perspective, people are not seen as dupes of the media. Typically, adults find it difficult to believe that children might also have the ability to create their own meanings of the popular culture they consume. In fact, parents and teachers alike often blame the media for children's problems. As Kenway and Bullen (2001) put it,

> It is often the case that when parents and teachers try to explain the behaviour of "young people today," they look to "the media"—in particular, commercial TV, computer games, popular youth culture and advertising directed at the young. Moreover, "the media" is blamed for kids' short attention spans, is seen to render them passive, to undermine their capacity to play independently, to entertain themselves and also to threaten their creativity. In addition is is seen to corrupt their morals by favourably disposing them towards violence, individualism, hedonism and materialism... In this view, the media discloses too much and exposes young people too early to the unpalatable and the forbidden. (p. 2).

Like Kenway and Bullen, we believe this view of young children's use of media-produced popular culture is too simple and thus unhelpful.

A view of popular culture that is more appealing in our eyes is one that conceptualizes it as *everyday culture*. Those who favor this definition of popular culture reject notions of mass media producing mindless audiences. Instead, they see audiences as understanding that media-produced popular culture contains images, sounds, symbols, and the like that appeal to different audiences in different ways. In short, it is up to audiences to negotiate the production and consumption of popular culture, for producers will only make what audiences will buy. Or, as Lumby (1997) metaphorically puts it, “The media is like a virus. It infects everything it touches, but it is also, in turn, changed by what it comes into contact with—it mutates” (p. xxiii). This recognition of popular culture as everyday culture—and like the media, constantly changing—suggests that audiences are indeed capable of simultaneously incorporating both pleasures and critiques in their use of it. Further, it suggests as Marsh and Millard (2001) maintain that “children are agents in the construction of their own culture at the same time as being subject to hegemonic discourses of profit and consumerism. They both accept and reject the products offered to them” (p. 21).

Thus, in defining popular culture in terms of children’s everyday literacies, we seek to show that it is not something to be shunned, set aside, or kept at a distance. As Hull and Schultz (2002) and others (e.g., Dyson, 1997; Tobin, 2000) have documented, new research on children’s everyday literacies is helping educators “to think again and anew about teaching and learning in the schoolroom” (Hull & Schultz, 2001, p. 3). With this in mind, we describe four

approaches to using popular culture in the classroom, with some being more to our liking than others, as will become clear.

Four Approaches to Using Popular Culture in the Classroom

One approach, which we do not necessarily endorse but which nonetheless is prevalent in some classrooms we have visited over the past five years, views popular culture as being detrimental to young children's development. In presenting popular culture as a degrading (low-culture) form of entertainment, teachers are sending the message that by engaging in it, students are losing valuable time that could more profitably be spent in developing their minds and tastes for "better" (higher?) forms of culture. Carmen Luke (1997), an Australian educator with many years of experience in researching and teaching critical media literacy, contends that when teachers think of popular culture in this way, their teaching becomes one of proselytizing about mass media's harmful effects. For example, we know teachers who ask students to keep a journal of their out-of-school activities during the school's annual week-long "Turn off the TV" initiative. Almost without exception, students will write why they think this initiative is a good idea, and then, when the week-long initiative has ended, go right back to watching the same amount of TV. Situations such as this suggest to us that any meaningful use students might make of popular culture is not being factored into the teaching-learning scenario.

A second approach to using popular culture in the classroom consists of teaching students how to critically analyze various forms popular culture texts. For example, they may focus on teaching students how to become "the ideal"

reader, viewer, listener—"the one who is never persuaded or fooled, who sees through the illusions the media provided—in effect, the [one] who is impervious to influence" (Buckingham, 1993, p. 146). In this approach, popular culture becomes an object that is useful primarily for the lessons it can teach. Children learn to critique it such that the learning process becomes what Buckingham (1998) describes as one of "demystifying" –of revealing some assumed "underlying truths that are normally hidden from view" (p. 8). When this approach is implemented, popular culture becomes a pedagogical guise for limiting the pleasures students can take from it. Not surprisingly, children are quick to protect their own thinking by pretending to see the teacher's perspective. The politics of pleasure are such, however, that rarely are students' minds actually changed. We have learned this from our own practices as classroom teachers at the university. For example, a few years ago, Donna conducted a research project (Alvermann, Commeyras, Young, Randall, & Hinson, 1997) that attempted to get practicing teachers to change their gendered practices during classroom discussions. It was largely an unsuccessful project because while teachers tried to "walk-the-walk," they ended up primarily "talking-the-talk."

A third approach to using popular culture in the classroom emphasizes the pleasures students take in various forms of media-produced texts (e.g., magazines, lyrics, videos, raps, TV, movies). Teachers who favor this approach typically shy away from asking students to critique what they find pleasurable in these texts. The underlying assumption is that everything is relative, and thus everyone is entitled to her or his own pleasures. This view, however, has its

drawbacks. When children are not taught to become critically aware of media-produced popular culture texts, their thinking about such texts goes unchallenged. They do not develop tools for exploring their likes and dislikes of certain forms of popular culture. In short, their learning is truncated. This happened to a 3rd grade teacher we know who declined to engage her students in alternative readings of male-dominated fairy tales—ones in which the princess saves the prince (e.g., Munsch's *The Paperbag Princess*)—because she did not want to destroy the pleasures her students took in traditionally written fairy tales. Focusing solely on students' pleasures while ignoring opportunities to teach them to be critical readers is tantamount to undermining their capacity for learning to respect differences. For as Luke (1998) points out, "views and voices from everywhere are potentially views and voices from nowhere" (p. 25).

Finally, a fourth approach (and one that we favor) involves developing students' ability to be self-reflexive in their uses of popular culture. Teachers working from this perspective provide opportunities for students to explore issues such as "how media and the mass-produced icons of popular culture situate us into relations of power by shaping our emotional, political, social, and material lives" (Luke & Roe, 1993, p. 118). This self-reflexive approach to using popular culture in the classroom strikes a balance between teaching students to be critical and allowing them to experience pleasures without challenges that can extend their learning (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999).

A 5th-grade teacher in one of Donna's content area classes tried out this approach in his classroom. Briefly, he asked his students to read a newspaper

article about Brittney Spears from two different points of view. In one view, the students were to read as if they were fans of Brittney's music. In a second view, they were to read from the perspective of disappointed fans in Mexico, where Brittney had recently canceled a long-awaited performance. By reading from these opposing positions, the children were able to put themselves into the "storyline" (i.e., they were self-reflexive) and to imagine how a different set of circumstances caused them to question some of their earlier assumptions about fandom. More examples of the self-reflexive approach to using popular culture in the classroom will follow as we move now into the second part of the article.

Intersections of Popular Culture and Language Arts Instruction Across the Curriculum

As noted earlier, in this second part of the article, we share some ideas for integrating students' everyday literacies and popular culture interests into language arts instruction across the curriculum. These ideas include:

- exploring teachers' knowledge of their own and students' popular culture interests;
- using children's popular culture interests to make home-school connections for linguistically and culturally diverse learners;
- using students' popular culture interests to teach reading and language arts concepts and skills;
- using students' popular culture interests to teach literacy across the curriculum; and
- using students' popular culture interests to teach critical literacy.

Exploring Teachers' Knowledge of Their Own and Students' Popular Culture Interests

The most important and first step for teachers to integrate students' popular culture interests into literacy teaching and learning is to learn about their own experiences with popular culture and about students' popular culture interests. Knowledge of their own and students' popular culture interests can help teachers better appreciate the entertaining and pleasure-providing functions that various forms of popular culture serve. Such an understanding may also assist teachers in planning instruction that takes into account the importance of popular culture texts to children's everyday literacies.

How to begin? Teachers can use a survey to learn more about their own experiences with popular culture and their assumptions about their students' popular culture interests. They can give the same survey to students to find out if there is a match between their assumptions about students' popular culture interests and what students actually say. Students in the upper grades can complete the survey on their own. Teachers in the primary grades (particularly, K-1) may conduct a class survey where teachers tally the results for each item based on the students' oral responses. After conducting the surveys, teachers can share with students their own experiences with popular culture and also talk with students to learn more about their popular culture interests. Students often appreciate that teachers show some interests in what students care about. Table 1 and Table 2 are two examples of teachers' and students' surveys. As noted in

the sample surveys, large differences exist between the teachers and their students in terms of their popular culture interests.

Insert Table 1 and Table 2 about here

Making Home-School Connections

Culturally responsive teaching (Au, 1998) calls for home-school connections in literacy instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse students. One way for teachers to make such connections is to make students' popular culture texts part of the children's school literacy experiences. With the entertainment industry's increasing awareness of growing diversity in today's American society, more and more popular culture texts are available that take into consideration cultural and language differences among school-age children. Teachers who choose wisely from among these texts can use them to validate their students' diverse cultural and linguistic experiences both in and out of school.

For example, TV shows are one of several meaningful educational resources for teachers to use in making home-school connections. The TV show *Dora the Explorer* on the Nick Channel features a young girl who speaks both English and Spanish. In each episode she and her friend, Boots the monkey, engage viewers in solving a problem. During the process, Dora repeats some phrases in Spanish. The teacher may use this show, if it is part of students' popular culture interests, to help Latino students learn Spanish words (or review them if already known). The teacher and students may also make an alphabet book of Spanish and English words, and compare and contrast sounds of the

same letter in English and in Spanish (e.g., */j/* in English and */h/* in Spanish for the same letter *j*).

Music is another form of popular culture that can be used in classrooms to enhance student learning. Sherry is a teacher of 5- to 8- year olds who are experiencing difficulties in reading and writing in a Title 1 school. She and her 5 students (3 Latinos, 1 African American, and 1 European American) developed a unit on two of the students' favorite bands, *Los Kumbia Kings*, led by the brother of the late Latina pop artist, Selena, and the *Baha Men* from the Bahamas. The unit included learning about the artists' lives, reading and discussing song lyrics, comparing and contrasting songs by the bands, and learning to dance La Cumbia (taught by parent volunteers). Throughout the unit, Sherry witnessed her students practicing many reading and language arts skills. Most importantly, she noted that there was "a closer relationship between the students and me, because it [the unit] showed that I cared and valued their interests and cultures" (for details see Xu, 2001).

Teaching Reading and Language Arts Concepts and Skills

Because popular culture texts are part of students' everyday literacies, they hold powerful and personal meanings for students. This is illustrated in the experience of one 1st grade teacher in a school with children from middle-class backgrounds. The teacher conducted reading and writing workshop daily, and her students were immersed in children's books on various topics of interest and genres. During a unit on the Olympic Games, children wrote about one of their favorite characters who would win a medal at the Games. To the teacher's

astonishment, none of the children chose a character from a book they had read. Instead, all the characters were from TV shows, movies, and comic books (e.g., *Scooby-Doo* and *X-Men*).

Popular culture texts can assist in the teaching of various reading and language arts concepts and skills. For example, a 1st grade teacher known to Shelley took advantage of her students' interest in the hit movie *Spiderman* to engage them in word play and writing poems. One student made words out of the letters in *Spiderman*: *pie*, *die*, *man*, *spider*, *red*, *name*, *in*, *rain*, *spin*, *pin*, and *pen.* The student also wrote an acrostic poem about the main character of the movie, *Spiderman*: *<u>S</u>pider*, *<u>P</u>eaceful*, *<u>I</u>ntelligent*, *<u>D</u>ynamic*, *<u>E</u>xciting*, *<u>R</u>esponsible*, *<u>M</u>an*, *<u>A</u>chiever*, *<u>N</u>ice*.

Similarly, a kindergarten teacher built a unit about animals based on her students' rich background knowledge of *Pokemon*—a cartoon and video game about animals whose super powers are enhanced by their trainers (the game players). All the animal characters are similar to those living in the natural world, and the name of each character gives a clue as to what kind of animal the character is. For example, *squirtle* is a turtle that posses techniques for attacking with a water gun, and *psyduck* is a duck with hypnotizing power. Building on her students' knowledge of *Pokemon*, the teacher used an interactive writing strategy to help students grasp the concept of comparing and contrasting and to gain some knowledge of turtles. Here are the 4 sentences a group of kindergartners produced about the similarities and differences between a squirtle and a turtle:

Squirtle and Turtle. Squirtle and turtle have a shell. Squirtle blows water. Turtle can swim.

In teaching reading and language arts, teachers also can connect a popular culture text with a favorite book in children's literature. Mary's 4th grade student, Kelly, wrote a compare and contrast piece using the book *The Cay* (Taylor, 1969) and the movie *Cast Away*. Both the book and the movie are about the main characters' survival on a remote island.

Teaching Literacy across the Curriculum

Popular culture texts can be interesting and meaningful resources for teaching literacy across the curriculum. Because many popular culture texts make use of multimedia, they can be helpful in extending school literacy teaching and learning beyond traditional print-based materials. For example, Maria and her 6th grade students, most of whom were Latino students in a Title1 elementary school, worked together to develop a unit on *Pokemon*. Although Maria did not consider herself proficient in the discourse on Pokemon, she was both willing and eager to learn from her students. In her words:

> I had to research the material. Read much information about what Pokemon was and how the students used the cards. I had to listen very carefully to what my students were telling me about the cards. I also took several notes to help me gain insights.

The unit on Pokemon resulted from a collaborative effort between Maria and her students. Before developing the unit, Maria informed the students of the curricular objectives in content areas that they needed to accomplish, and

encouraged them to come up with ideas for the unit. Throughout the unit with Maria's guidance, the students learned or reviewed many concepts and skills in reading, language arts, science, and math. They also explored non-print texts (e.g., images and sounds from videos and websites). Maria stated that her experience with the unit was "a teacher AHA!" In reflecting on some of the things she learned about herself as a teacher, Maria noted,

> The teaching becomes a little easier because students are willing to share what they know. . . I keep thinking of the students who are already using so many literacy skills, it's just a matter of letting them know just how much they already know and how to apply it to other things.

Maria used several activities to connect her students' interest in Pokemon with the district's curriculum objectives For a science objective on classifications, the students, working in groups, sorted their Pokemon cards into categories based on criteria such as the identifying characteristics of various Pokemon characters (e.g., fire, electric, and grass), their hit power (HP) points (e.g., 40, 60, and 120), their attacking techniques (e.g., thundershock, petal dance, and screech), and their weights and heights. Each group then explained to the whole class the criterion or criteria they had used in classifying the cards.

For a math objective that required learners to generate equivalent forms of rational numbers, including whole numbers, fractions, and decimals, the students first completed a survey on their favorite Pokemon characters. Then one student filled in a chart by tallying the responses under the drawing of each Pokemon

character. Using the information in the chart, each student generated fractions, percentages, and decimals related to their favorite Pokemon characters. They used this information to formulate questions for their peers to answer (see Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here

A reading/language arts objective on writing to inform others (e.g., explaining, describing, reporting, or narrating an event) was the impetus for Maria's decision to invite her students to bring to class a Gameboy that they used in playing a Pokemon video game. Each student wrote a "how-to paper" and later exchanged it with a peer who then used the directions on the paper to play the game. Maria successfully played a Pokemon game by following a set of fairly elaborated directions written by a student who typically wrote very little in class (see Figure 2).

Insert Figure 2 about here

Teaching Critical Literacy

Popular culture texts can be useful tools to teachers who are interested in developing their students' critical awareness. Teachers can guide students in distinguishing between the unfamiliar and the familiar in these texts. The unfamiliar might include other people's perspectives, voices, and experiences, or it might be a comment on the social and political contexts in which they live. Developing students' critical awareness as they read, view, and listen to popular culture texts can help them see beyond the more familiar or personal connections they have with these texts. It can also lead to a better understanding

of how they and others are positioned by texts within a variety of contexts (Boozer, Maras, & Brummett, 1999; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Marsh, 2000; Vasquez, 2000). The following two examples illustrate a few of the critical literacy practices that children in the primary and upper elementary grades may experience when teachers are knowledgeable about and make use of their students' interests in popular culture.

For primary grades students. A common theme running throughout many popular culture texts is one of superheroes performing extraordinary feats of courage. There are numerous comic books, TV shows, movies, and books on superheroes, such as *X-Men*, *Spiderman*, and *the Adventure of Captain Underpants* series. Superhero characters are traditionally males. Teachers can challenge students to look at gender biases and stereotypes in the depiction of superheroes in popular culture. Male superheroes can be compared and contrasted to female superheroes in the TV show, *PowerPuff Girls*, which is one of only a few popular culture texts (for children) that involves female superheroes. To push students' thinking beyond the simple pleasures they take in reading about or watching their favorite superheroes, teachers might engage them in a discussion about a particular group of firefighters, police officers, airplane passengers, and others who saved real people's lives on that darkest of day, 9/11. By connecting students' interests in popular culture with actual events that happened in a broader context, teachers are developing children's critical awareness of how the media portrays heroic deeds, both mythically and in reality. They are also encouraging students to use what they know about popular

culture to make sense of schoolwork. For example, following a unit on Spiderman, a youngster who had previously demonstrated a good understanding of what a superhero does, designed the T-shirt illustrated in Figure 3.

Insert Figure 3 about here

For upper grade students. The CBS show, *Survivors*, is currently quite popular with students in the upper elementary grades. Teachers can use this show as a springboard to helping students develop an understanding in the concept of *survival*. They can start with the basic and familiar type of physical survival in a harsh environment by asking students to watch the movie, *Cast Away*. They can also use children's books, such as Paulsen's *Hatchet* and Taylor's *Cay*, as discussion-starters about what it takes to survive in an unfriendly environment. After these introductory kinds of activities, teachers can push students to move beyond a consideration of physical survival to one of spiritual survival. They can engage students in reading and discussing books such as Hamilton's *Many Thousands Gone: African Americans from Slavery to Freedom*, Rappaport's *Escape from Slavery: Journeys to Freedom*, Taylor's *The Well* and *Mississippi Bridge*, Epstein's *Ann Frank*, Bunting's *How Many Days to America?* and *Fly Away Home*, and Hess's *Just Juice*. These books provide students with opportunities to explore other people's experiences in dealing with spiritual survival (e.g., overcoming the dehumanizing effects of slavery, cruelty, racial injustices, dictatorships, prejudices, biases, and poverty). Through reading and discussing how the characters in these books survived (both physically and

spiritually), students will be developing a greater critical awareness of how certain social and political circumstances position people in all walks of life.

Some Concluding Thoughts

We have only begun to scratch the surface in terms of what is involved in using children's everyday literacies to make connections between their interests in popular culture and the language arts curriculum. Certainly a first step involves getting in touch with our own interests in, as well as uses of, popular culture. Only then are we in a position to understand the appeal popular culture has for our students. After determining the nature and scope of students' interests, it's simply a matter of taking the leap. That is, trying out some of the ideas suggested here or attending to various aspects of the four approaches to using popular culture in the classroom to see where we feel most comfortable. None of the approaches is an island unto itself. Sampling and choosing from among them is fair game. In the end what matters, we believe, is that students begin to develop a critical awareness of how popular culture texts position them and how they, in turn, have a say in how those texts are "read."

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Authors' Note

We wish to thank the teachers for their efforts to explore new ways of teaching by integrating students' popular culture interests into their literacy curriculum, and the students for helping us to better understand the role of popular culture in their lives and its motivational value in teaching and learning.

Table 1 A Survey of 1st Grader Teacher and Her Student

	Dana (Teacher)	Dana's Prior Knowledge of Her 1st Graders' Popular Culture Interests	Jason (Student)
TV Shows	The Division, The Golden Girls, M.A.S.H, Law and Order, NYPD Blue, Designing Women, In the Heat of the Night	Moesha, The Parkers, Scooby-Doo, PowerPuff Girls	Pokemon, Digimon, Carita De Angel, The Sabrina the Teenage Witch, Abrazame Muy Fuerte, Power Rangers
Movies/Videos	Anna and the King, Ever After, Where the Boat Is, Car 54 Where Are You? The Water Boy, The Wedding Singer, Thelma and Louise, Forrest Gump, Beaches, Sister Act	The Emperor's New Groove, Shrek, Pokemon, The Rugrats	Shrek, Dinosaurs, Lion King, Jurassic Park, Barney
Music	Pam Tillis, Abba, The Corrs, Bon JonVi, Ace of Base, The Kinleys, LeeAnn Wormack, Teri Clark, Pat Benatar, Dixie Chicks	Backstreet Boys, N'SYNC, Britney Spears, Billy Gilman	Los Locos, Cumbia Kings, Los Carnales, Los Tigres Del Norte, Ricky Martin
Bestsellers	The Pelican Brief, The Runaway Jury, And Then You Die, Poverty, The Joy Luck Club	Harry Potter, Captain Underpants, Junie B. Jones	Pokemon, Digimon, Scary Books, Sunburn, X-Men
Magazines	Ladies Home Journal, Good Housekeeping, People	Teen Bop, Sports Illustrated	Ranger Pick, World Hot Stuff
Websites	cinemark.com, amazon.com, askjeeves.com, prodigy.net, TCTA.org	Ask Jeeves for Kids	None
Video Games	None	I don't know	None

Trading Cards	None	Pokemon	None
Other	None	None	None

Table 2 A Survey of 4th Grade Teacher and Her Student

	Mary (Teacher)	Mary's Prior Knowledge of Her 4th Graders' Popular Culture Interests	Kelly (Student)
TV Shows	Who Wants to be a Millionaire, News, Basketball Games, Football Games, Olympic Games	I don't know	Even Stevans, Boy Meets World, Medical Detectives, Cribs, Smart Guy, Friends, Ed, Watching Ellie, Leap of Faith, Crossing Jordan
Movies/Videos	Father of the Bride, Sleepless in Seattle, Andy Action Movies	I don't know	Scream, The Children of the Corn, Hardball, Pearl Harbor, Case Away
Music	Bill Gather Trio, Any Williams, Perry Como, Theresa Brewer, Frank Sinatra	N'SYNC, Back Street Boys, Britney Spears	Naligh, Nelly, Creed, Nickleback
Bestsellers	Bible, Means of Ascent	The Babysitter Club Series	The Cay, Beauty
Magazines	Ladies Home Journal, People, Texas Monthly, Southern Living, Texas Highway	I don't know	None
Websites	southwestairlines.com, cheaptickets.com	I don't know	None
Video Games	none	I don't know	None
Trading Cards	none	I don't know	None
Other	none	none	None

Figure 1 Fractions, Percentage, and Decimals on Favorite Pokemon Characters

	Fractions, Percentage, and Decimals
Pikachu	$\frac{10}{20}$
Charizard	$\frac{4}{20}$
Mew and Mew Two	$\frac{4}{20}$
Primate	$\frac{2}{20}$

	Fractions	*Percentage*	*Decimals*
Pikachu	$\frac{10}{20}$	50%	.5
Charizard	$\frac{4}{20}$	20%	.2
New & New Two	$\frac{4}{20}$	20%	.2
Primate	$\frac{2}{20}$	10%	.2

Extension Question: How many more people like Pikachu than Charizard?

Figure 2. Example of a Student's "How-to-Paper "

How to Play a Pokemon Game

Introduction:

Want to learn how to play a Pokemon game? You need to have a Gameboy.

Steps:

1. You need to turn on the Gameboy.
2. You need to read and put your name in.
3. When you are ready, you can start to play.
4. After you get out of your house, you go up to a grassy area and walk into it.
5. Then there is a person called Professor Oak who calls for you and then he comes to you and tells you what to do.
6. You follow him into his Pokemon Research Lab.
7. After you do that he talks to you and gives you a choice of three Pokemon.
8. When you get your Pokemon, your rivalry gets one, too.
9. Them you battle your rivalry to test your Pokemon and then you are ready to go on to your Big adventure.

I have given you some tips of what you need to do to play Pokemon.

Figure 3 A T-Shirt with a Superhero Design (Note: Please substitute the image that Shelley Xu is sending as an electronic attachment under separate cover. She believes the new image is better than the one below.)