

Chapter for the *International Handbook of Student Experience in Elementary and Secondary School*

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***Dissolving Learning Boundaries:***

***The Doing, Re-doing, and Undoing of School***

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Considerable interest exists in some corners of the academy in deconstructing what is commonly referred to as the in-school/out-of-school binary. Characterizing this place-and space-sensitive categorization as unnatural and problematic, literacy scholars in particular (e. g., Ben-Yosef, 2003; Hull & Schultz, 2001; Leander, 2003; Leander & Sheehy, 2004) question its validity, especially given the changing nature of students' literacy practices in a world increasingly blurred by information communication technologies that tend to heed neither place nor space boundaries. Our particular interest in this larger project is to explore how data that we have gathered from studying young people's literacy practices in a public library (Alvermann, Hagood, Heron, Hughes, Williams, & Yoon, 2001) and museums (Eakle, 2005) point to possibilities rethinking the notion of boundaries in the context of youth literacy practices. Specifically, we want

to argue that it is in “doing, re-doing, and undoing school” in school and out-of-school settings that youth are able to show through their actions, words, and products how textual engagement is achieved with little regard to boundaries across space, place, and time.

### **Background and Theoretical Frame**

To bind literacies by category—as school-based or library/museum-based—is to divide up engagement with texts, places, and spaces as though there were no relations among them. Although it is arguably the case that schools focus predominantly on oral and written language, it is also the case that a number of other sign systems (e.g., those of music, art, mathematics, and movement in dance, gesture, drama, and athletics) are readily available to youth. In other words, “doing” school is not solely a practice found within a transmission model of instruction wherein teachers fill students’ heads with book knowledge; rather, there are other non-linguistic resources available to students from which to choose and explore the meaningfulness of texts of all kinds. Additionally, youth assemble from these various communication resources the tools that they use to “do” (accommodate), “re-do” (reproduce), and “undo” (resist and/or disrupt) institutionalized notions in a multiplicity of spaces, such as schools, libraries, and museums.

Indeed, the young people whom we know and with whom we work outside of school rarely, if ever, rely on language as their sole means of communication. Rather, like Short and Kauffman (2000), we have observed that youth quite readily integrate art, movement, and music with language as they talk with their friends, do research on school assigned topics in the library, peer over each other’s shoulders to read a downloaded rap lyric, chat quietly (and sometimes not so quietly) in front of a museum exhibit, and as

they occupy what we call in-between spaces; for instance, the highways, restaurants, sidewalks, and coffee shops in between the institutions where we, and most education researchers, typically observe and transact with youth.

That youth are engaged in literacy practices outside of school that blur the very categories we wish to deconstruct is not surprising. As Resnick's (2000) essay on literacy apprenticeships so aptly reminds us, "schools are not the only—or perhaps even the primary—source of literacy competence" (p. 38). At least as typically conceived, schools are arguably out of touch with the everyday literacies that many youth find relevant and into which they, in part, are socialized. This problem, according to Resnick, does not detract from what schools do reasonably well: teaching the basic skills of literacy.

Although we agree with Resnick's overall assessment, we doubt seriously that her proposed solution in the form of literacy apprenticeships—arrangements in which youth and/or teachers work to find a match between literacy practices espoused within and outside schools—are the answer to the problem. Nor is it likely that such apprenticeships would be deemed practical given what we know about the attention economy phenomenon (Goldhaber, 1997; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003) and how it operates outside and within schools as a force among groups and individuals that produces, re-produces, and disrupts concepts of schooling.

The term *attention economy*, as defined by Goldhaber (1997), is a zero-sum game. To illustrate why he calls it a zero-sum game, Goldhaber challenges us with the following task:

Attention is scarce, and the total amount per capita is strictly limited. To see why, consider yours, right now. It's going to these words. No matter

how brilliant or savvy at multitasking you are, you can't be focusing on very much else. (Goldhaber, 1997, n.p.)

Applied to our interest in how youth "do, undo, and re-do school" in out-of-school settings, the concept of an attention economy offers some useful insights into problematizing the notion of boundaries in the context of youth literacies. Consider, for example, the multiplicity of choices adolescents have in how and where to seek and give attention outside school; now, contrast that with the often limited or restricted choices afforded in school, such as the textbooks students are required to read. Similarly, consider the deregulated attention economy in which today's youth are growing up. According to Rowan et al. (cited in Lankshear & Knobel, 2003):

They learn how to allocate their attention between and among a wide range of communication technologies, both mass and personal. They are adept at juggling the inputs of various attention seeking technologies....

They know that much of what they do in school is of a different order, only useful in terms of attracting attention within a closed attention economy. In this respect, the attention economy of schooling is only relevant to those students for whom it provides a basis for attracting attention in the world outside. (p. 201)

Distributing and managing attention among multiple communication inputs is characteristic of today's youth who confidently and somewhat effortlessly manipulate multiple forms of texts, including electronic chats, instant messages, print text messages, web pages, and blogs while they listen to music mpegs, talk on cellulars, and complete their homework assignments. To view these multiple activities as discreet, separable, and

unrelated is to reinforce attitudes that would divide young people's lived spaces as being either in or out of school. Such a view is antithetical to Lefebvre's (1981/1991) and Soja's (1999) theorizing of *Thirdspace*, or what they commonly refer to as *lived space*, a term that we use here to examine how doing, undoing, and re-doing school mutually inform each other

Deleuze and Guattari (1991/1994) describe attempted divisions such as the in-school/out-of-school binary as territorializations, the distinctive marking off of places, spaces, peoples, and things—divisions that we think need to be reconsidered. Of course, marking off territory is sometimes useful in that it provides a bit of order in chaos. As Deleuze and Guattari (1991/1994) remind us: “Nothing is more distressing than a thought that escapes itself, than ideas that fly off, that disappear hardly formed...” (p. 201). To prevent this from happening, to create a bit of order, and to concentrate our “attention resources,” we all, according to Deleuze and Guattari, construct artificial sets and strategies that slow down phenomena, which serve to mark off and harness the chaos of the world. Examples of the staking out of territories are the bounded set logics found in mathematics and the so called “leveled” books—compilations of print texts designed for use with particular categories of school readers (who are, in turn, assigned to particular territories or spaces, such as gifted or remedial classrooms). Territorialization is, in part, the substance of “doing school.”

Further, there is a number of territorializations and other strategies that schools often use to create what Foucault (1975/1977) describes as “docile bodies” (p.135). These are disciplinary tactics intended to provide what is often called productive learning spaces (spaces where attention is concentrated) and include a multiplicity of minor processes

that serve to control students or make them compliant with school expectations. These strategies include marking territories through “the art of distributions” (p.141) and can be as mundane as the rowed arrangements of separated desks in a classroom, the lunchroom lineup exercise where students are required to be silent and keep their hands to themselves, or can take form in the practice of creating spaces within school spaces, such as the special areas marked off to train students in behavior management.

According to Foucault (1975/1977), strategies to make bodies docile are undertaken through surveillance, which demarcates particular disciplinary spaces between observed and observer. In many of today’s schools this is accomplished in part by the watchful eyes of school personnel through examination and by the comparison of students against linear and normalized trajectories of progress. As we know, watchful examination and comparison have increasingly become principal concerns of teachers and school administrators, and by extension students, in “doing school” under current U. S. education policy.

Marking territory is also part and parcel of social practices and can sometimes result in what Foucault (1975/1977) describes as “binary branding” (p. 199). This practice is evident in the following words of Monisha (one of the young participants we studied who identifies herself as African American) as she describes a category of young people she marks as “thugs.”

I see thugs, a huge bunch that be wanna wear their pants saggin’, and bendin’ over, in the car and drivin’ with one arm, and blastin’ the music; I don’t get that. What’s so cool about bein’ a thug? What’s not a thug is a person that’s intelligent, wears their pants up with belts. Sits like they supposed to in the car

while drivin' and don't blast the music so everybody can hear it and don't be puttin' rims and all of that kind of stuff on their cars.

As we see in Monisha's assessment of "thugs," marked boundaries can be drawn using some of the multiple textual practices that we mentioned earlier in this chapter, such as movement, music, and gesture. From these practices we can also glean everyday bids for gaining notice in an attention economy, such as the blasting of music "so everybody can hear it," a salient phenomenon of everyday life that is familiar to urban drivers, bids for attention that are often curtailed in the regulatory spaces of institutions such as schools, libraries, and museums. Additionally, in this case, the lines traced out by Monisha show how textual practices of popular culture are sometimes mixed with a binary branding that involves a person's intelligence—a trait typically associated with "doing school" well. In turn, "branded" youth often construct spaces through multiple textual forms that attempt to disrupt, or "undo," perceptions and rules that are put in force to regulate young people.

Whether they be social lines dividing people on issues of intelligence and textual practices of popular culture or abstract lines outlining mathematical sets or reading levels, all are bounded practices or territorializations, and as Foucault (1970/1971) points out, are symptomatic of particular (and historically mobile and possibly alterable) ways of thinking and transacting with the world. In this vein, rather than considering marked territories as impenetrable fortresses, we prefer, thinking through Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari, to regard marked barriers, as merely, albeit often powerful, products of social forces and conditions. Yet, because of the artificiality of these boundaries, the practices of everyday life, or lived space (de Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1981/1991; Soja, 1999), are often much more open than we realize. It is these fragile, leaky, historically symptomatic,

territories, such as those marked out by the practices of schools and what is more often than not, accommodated by students, that we believe some youth resist by using multiple textual strategies. And, it is these everyday tactics of resistance and/or disruption, what we call “undoing school,” that particularly interest us in the present project.

Looking at accommodations, resistances, and possible escape routes from the boundaries set up by schooling institutions requires us to look at power and forces that operate in and out of school. However, rather than taking the conventional perspective that power is usually oppressive and is held by certain individuals, such as teachers and museum docents, we look at power as being productive and circulating through social bodies (Foucault, 1975/1977; 1982/1994; Deleuze & Guattari, 1991/1994). In this chapter we use power as a tool to analyze youth’s lived spaces. This analysis is based on data obtained in earlier studies that we conducted both in and out of school but not within an attention-economy perspective marked by young people’s strategies for territorializing space, which is the framework of choice in our present analysis.

### **“Doing, Undoing, and Re-Doing School” in a Public Library**

After-school spaces support a deregulated attention economy, which although different from the attention economy of schooling, nonetheless overlaps it and gives license to marking territories that can accommodate, resist, or even provide escape routes from boundaries set up by schooled literacy. This was borne out in research that Donna and her colleagues conducted with youth in an after-school program that focused on developing young people’s critical awareness of textual practices of popular culture as represented visually, aurally, and digitally by mass media (Alvermann, Hagood, Heron, Hughes, Williams, & Yoon, 2001). The 30 adolescents in that study, all between the ages

of 12 and 15 and all reading two or more levels below the grade level expected for average-achieving youth in grades 6 through 9 on state-administered reading tests, attended 14 weekly sessions of a Media Club that took place in a public library three afternoons a week. Meeting in groups of approximately 10 each, participants in the study divided their time between activities arranged by the three adult facilitators (Donna Alvermann, Margaret Hagood, and Alison Heron) and activities they chose to pursue on their own. Club members also participated in researching their own after-school literacy practices by keeping a daily log (including weekends) for which they earned a weekly compensation of \$10 for 14 weeks.

Of interest here are the ways in which Media Club members engaged in “doing, re-doing, and undoing school” as they negotiated a deregulated attention economy that produced spaces, which although not free of surveillance, were nonetheless marked by youth-oriented choices. We view such spaces as strategic intersections where adolescents’ interests in and uses for popular culture texts created opportunities that made “doing, re-doing, and undoing” school both visible and analyzable. Moreover, we propose that it was in this lived space that youth who were identified by their teachers as struggling to read academic texts were able to use their knowledge of schooled literacy to accommodate, resist, and occasionally escape from its force in the deregulated attention economy that the library-based Media Club afforded through its various activities involving broadly defined textual practices.

### **Freedom Activities in the Media Club**

Ned, a pseudonym for a 14-year-old African American eighth-grade member of the Monday Media Club, coined the term *freedom activities* for the projects that he and

his peers elected to do as part of their participation in the study. The term, which quickly caught on in the Wednesday and Thursday groups as well, referred to student-selected projects that involved texts of various types: rap lyrics, celebrities' web pages, magazine articles on hair styles, the latest *Harry Potter* book, Football Fantasy rules and score sheets, *Pokémon* manuals, video games, Japanese animé, and news articles on saving the environment in the youth-oriented magazine, *Time for Kids*. Because they were self-selected, these projects provided opportunities for Media Club members to explore textual practices of popular culture in ways that were meaningful to them on a personal level. As Ned explained when he first learned that he could choose his own project, *freedom activities* were something special because they would be different from the homework assigned at school.

**Ned's freedom activity.** Although Ned was only one of 30 Media Club members, his case, documented at length elsewhere (Alvermann, in press; Alvermann, Hagood, & Williams, 2001), is representative in several respects of other club members' experiences with their freedom activities. Ned's case is featured here because it allows us to examine in some depth our earlier claim that in "doing, re-doing, and undoing school" in out-of-school settings youth are able to show through their actions and words how textual engagement is achieved across space, place, and time. It also allows us to examine how power circulates in a deregulated attention economy, such as that which was operating in the public library where Ned attended Monday Media Club.

According to school records, Ned scored consistently in the lowest quartile on district-wide standardized reading tests. Described by his middle school teachers as being "not academically inclined," Ned's daily effort in his core classes nonetheless had been

sufficient to earn him eligibility status on the school's football team where he was a valued running back. However, when Ned's grades began to decline toward the end of fall semester, he was dropped from the team.

Along with his interest in football, Ned had an affinity for rap music. A self-styled rapper, he had formed his own rap group and later created a home page for it on the Web, which he named the M-L-P Boyz (Major League Player Boys). The group, which consisted of Man (aka Ned), L'il Thug, Tron, and G-money, composed raps that they subsequently committed to memory and performed locally. But Ned's major interest in rap centered on a group from Atlanta, Georgia, known as the *Goodie MOB*, an acronym for "The Good Die Mostly Over Bull." The *Goodie MOB*'s first album, "Soul Food" had been one of the earliest Southern rap albums to appear on a major label. In addition to this pioneering achievement, *Goodie MOB* had distinguished itself by addressing serious social issues in the 'hood.

When Kevin Williams, a member of the research team and a former classmate of three members of the *Goodie MOB*, learned of Ned's interest in focusing his freedom activity on the Atlanta-based group, Kevin volunteered to help. Shortly thereafter, Kevin and Ned struck up an e-mail correspondence as a condition of the freedom activity in which both contributed information on the *Goodie MOB*'s whereabouts and latest music releases. In fact, it was this reciprocity of knowledge sharing between two individuals with a common interest but greatly differing reading abilities that makes Ned's and Kevin's case particularly appropriate for including here. Theirs was a storyline—a cultural model (Gee, 2004)—in which issues of power were inseparable from the

deregulated attention economy that framed this analysis and made accommodation possible.

**Accommodation.** With at least nine years of public schooling behind him (having failed a grade), Ned was no doubt quite adept at reading the social order and levels of hierarchy operating in a closed attention economy such as the classroom—a space where historically he had had little if any chance of attracting (positive) attention from teachers, or perhaps even his classmates. The storyline was clear: in the attention economy of schooling, youth are typically accorded the “right” to assemble meaning from only certain kinds of texts. Moreover, the “right” to impart knowledge is reserved for their elders who are deemed in that particular economy to be more competent and more knowledgeable than the youth they teach.

However, in the space of the library-sponsored Media Club, with its contrasting deregulated attention economy, Ned and Kevin were free to read and email about the *Goodie MOB*'s rise to fame and its sustained popularity among socially conscious rappers on a more or less even footing. Evidence of this phenomenon can be seen in a micro-level discourse analysis of their e-mail correspondence below, where it is evident that Ned and Kevin asked questions of each other that they deemed relevant to their purposes for reading, that they challenged each other to find answers to those questions, and that they appreciated each other's efforts in what they viewed as a co-learning process—in this instance, a process more akin to “re-doing” than “undoing” school.

In Stanzas 1 through 4, using Gee's (1999) system of analyzing discourse, it is possible to show the co-learning process through Ned's and Kevin's own words. (Note: participants' spellings are preserved throughout the chapter.). Briefly, the central premise

in Gee's discourse analytic is that whenever we speak or write, we always and simultaneously construct or build particular forms of "reality," such as: what social languages are relevant and irrelevant; what discourses are being re/produced; what status, power, and identities are relevant or irrelevant; and what sorts of connections—looking to the past and/or future—are made to other people, things, ideas, institutions, and discourses. (For a fuller description of how Gee's analysis was used with the Ned and Kevin exchange below, see Alvermann, in press).

### Stanza 1

1a My favorite rap group is *Goodie MOB*

1b because they talk about life

1c and the sciety in there neighbor[hood]

2a Like for instance

2b the song I think should describe them

2c is Sky High

2d because that's like a fact in life

3a If you would listing to their songs

3b you would know that they rap

3c from the hart

4 Because I'm doing a project on them

5a Could you give me

5b some kind of facts about them?

6 Sincerely, Ned

### Stanza 2

- 1a I hear you like my home boys
- 1b *Goodie MOB!*
- 2 I will help you with your project.
- 3a One condition is
- 3b that you have to e-mail me
- 3b and keep me informed.
- 4a Today I will start with a little basic information
- 4b about the members of the group
- 5 All of the members are from Atlanta, GA
- 6a They all attended Benjamin E. Mays High School
- 6b named after a great Civil Rights educator in Georgia
- 7 B.E. Mays was once the President of Morehouse College
- 8a Today I will start off
- 8b with information about Khujo
- 8c my closest friend out of the group...
- 9a The next time I write
- 9b I will tell you a little more about Khujo
- 9c in terms of when he started rapping
- 10 Sincerely, Kevin PEE-WEE Williams

**Stanza 3**

- 1 Hi Kevin
- 2a I found two good websites
- 2b about goodie mob

2c you might want to know about

3a [www.cdspider.com/music/artist/goodie\\_mob/htm](http://www.cdspider.com/music/artist/goodie_mob/htm)

3b and [www.nr/uc/edu/s98/5-13/goodie.html](http://www.nr/uc/edu/s98/5-13/goodie.html)

4 by Ned

#### **Stanza 4**

1a I appreciate you

1b giving me the web sites.

2 I have enjoyed looking them up

3a My home boys are coming real good

3b with their new album

3c called World Party!

4a I hear that one of your favorite members

4b is T-Mo

5 I am good friends with him as well

6a I will write you something about him

6b if you would like

7a E-mail me some questions about him

7b and I will try to answer them

8 Kevin Pee-Wee Williams, M.P.H.

Success aside, Ned's and Kevin's relationship was not an easy one and it did not just "happen." Instead, we would maintain that it was Ned's experience in watching and "doing school" over the years that made it possible for him to re-do school by assuming the role of "teacher" to Kevin's "student" and vice versa as the situation demanded.

Ironically, perhaps, it was in “re-doing school” that both Ned and Kevin were able to make room for a different kind of attention economy—a deregulated one in which doing led to an undoing, or at the very least, to an accommodation of the other more restrictive model. Speculating even further about the possibilities for re-doing school and literacy boundaries within a deregulated attention economy, we turn next to an instance in which Ned resisted a textual practice presented by Donna and thereby escaped moving backwards into a highly regulated and controlled school economy where the rules for giving and receiving attention are well established.

### **Free-Choice Activities in the Media Club**

Although the terms *freedom activities* and *free-choice activities* might seem one and the same to someone outside the Media Club, in fact they represented two very different ways of spending one’s time as a club participant. Freedom activities were well within what most educators, including the club’s facilitators, would deem a school attention economy. That is, freedom activities referred to the projects that the participants had agreed to complete as a condition of being in the Media Club study. As such, the projects demanded students’ attention, and failure to give the appropriate amount of consideration to them would certainly attract the facilitators’ (all former classroom teachers’) attention.

Free-choice activities, on the other hand, referred to all other ways of spending time in the library during Media Club. For example, club members were free to surf the Web, e-mail, read magazines, and listen to music or play video games in a special meeting room that the youth librarian reserved for the club’s use. In this respect, free-choice activities fit well within the deregulated attention economy of the library. In a

public domain outside of school, such as the library, rules for giving and gaining attention (as well as controls for enforcing the rules) are far less formal and visible than in a school attention economy. Participants in the Media Club study were well aware of this peculiar, albeit largely unwritten, distinction.

So, too, the club facilitators. For example, when Donna, Margaret, and Alison became anxious midway through the study that the participants were not spending an adequate amount of time during each meeting to complete their freedom activities, they wrote in their planning notes:

Let's explain that free-choice time should be inclusive of two things: freedom activities and free-choice activities. In other words, if their [participants'] freedom activity is on [designing] hairstyle magazines but they want to also listen to music that is fine. But they need to work on their freedom activity in some way during their free time.

Close to the time that the facilitators communicated this new rule to club members, Donna purchased a copy of the *Goodie MOB's* first album, "Soul Food," for Ned to use as part of his freedom activity. Although she did not know it at the time, this purchase would set off a series of events that would cause Ned to resist her (perhaps) unconscious attempt to impose certain schooled literacy practices in a space that he had marked off as Media Club territory and hence presumably "safe" from such incursions.

**The series of events.** Following is a transcript of Donna's field notes describing the events leading up to and following her introduction of the "Soul Food" album.

Shortly after 4:00 p.m., I arrived at the meeting room reserved for the media club's use in the left wing of the public library, a large modern building located adjacent to the middle school that Ned attended. As was typical, the majority of the club members had arrived early and had settled

into their favorite activities. Bob, Seymour, and James were seated on the floor around a Nintendo game already in progress, which Ned, who had arrived after me, then joined.... Within 5 minutes of joining his friends, Ned looked up and hollered down to my end of the room: "Miss Donna, did you get *Goodie MOB*?" I had, but it had slipped my mind. When I produced a copy of "Soul Food" from my black canvas bag, Ned left his 3 buddies to finish the video game by themselves. He immediately opened the CD case, read off the list of raps on the back of the case, and put the CD to play in one of the two boom boxes nearby. With headphones on, he was soon engrossed in the group's music. I also noted that he was reading the printed insert that came with the CD as he listened to the group rap.

After some time had passed, Ned came over to where I was working [with another club member] and asked me if I wanted to listen to *Goodie MOB* with him. I said I did and followed him back to the CD player, where he proceeded to turn up the volume on "Soul Food," the song for which the album is named. Although I listened intently, I had trouble distinguishing one word from the next in some of the raps—a fact that didn't escape Ned's attention. Strategically, he reached over to the CD case, withdrew the insert containing the printed lyrics, and began running his finger under the lines of the rap that boomed out into the room. No one else looked up from what they were doing as Ned and I sat on the floor for a good 15 minutes listening to the various tracks on the *Goodie MOB*'s first album.

After listening to the track titled "Cell Therapy," I reached for my book bag to get out the most recent issue of *Blaze*, a magazine that I had purchased for its feature story on the *Goodie MOB*. When Ned showed no visible interest in reading the article, I asked him if he'd like me to read aloud the part on "Cell Therapy." He said he would, but after a couple of paragraphs I could tell he wasn't interested. His attention wandered, and he began to play with the CD case, opening and closing it for no apparent reason. I asked him if he'd rather I read about Cee-lo, his favorite of the rappers. He said he would. This time he remained engaged, following along as I read aloud, for about a page.

When it was time to switch activities so that those who had not had access to the computers in the young adult section of the library could take their turn, Ned quickly headed to a computer with the CD in hand and e-mailed Kevin the names of the individuals who were listed on the insert's dedication page.

As illustrated in this excerpt from Donna's field notes, Ned used his free-choice time to engage in different activities; first, he played a video game with friends in the club and then he listened to a CD of his favorite rap group. Whether he would have multitasked

and done both of these activities while he worked on his freedom activity (the semester-long email correspondence with Kevin concerning the *Goodie MOB*) is unknown. The computers for e-mailing were in another part of the library separate from the special-use room that the librarian had set aside for listening to music, playing video games, designing hair style magazines, and so on. What is known, however, is that Ned and Donna were on a collision course when it came to making sense of the deregulated attention economy that was operating in the library.

**Resistance and escape.** In attempting to avoid as much as possible the types of activities that mark school literacy and set them apart from the everyday out-of-school literacies assumed to be available in the library, Donna, Margaret, and Alison had purposefully worked to open up spaces in which members of the Media Club would feel free to reject activities that they found irrelevant. Thus, one could infer that Ned had read the facilitators' intention correctly when he resisted Donna's attempt to interest him in a magazine article about his favorite rap group. For example, when he initially showed no interest in reading the article himself, she began to act in a teacherly fashion by offering to read it to him. In turn, Ned withheld his attention by playing with the CD case. Guessing that he might be more attentive if she were to read about Cee-lo, his favorite rapper in the group, Donna offered to concentrate on that section of the article. Although Ned appeared to follow along for about a page, once the opportunity to email Kevin presented itself, Ned made his escape.

We would argue that Ned's success in resisting Donna's attempt to insert, or re-do, a schooled literacy practice in a space he had already mapped as his own—for example, recall that it was Ned who first invited Donna to listen to the CD and that she

changed the dynamics of the situation by introducing a printed text—is a good example of how power circulates. It also illustrates how a deregulated attention economy made visible the “doing and undoing” of schooled literacy practices.

The same might be said about literacy practices in the library. As suggested in Donna’s field notes about Ned’s and her transactions around “Soul Food,” traditional print texts such as magazines were joined by videogames and rap music CDs—all to dissolve in the deregulated learning space of a library. In fact, we would speculate that it is, in part, this multiplicity of textual forms that has transformed library spaces (once considered to be print archives of quiet, regulated study) into what are now referred to as multimedia centers. Next, we turn our attention to how a school and its adolescent students used another institutional archive, museums, which are spaces where variations of multiple media are also present and deregulated and traditional literacies can be made possible.

### **“Doing, Redoing, and Undoing School” in a Museum and an Academy**

Museums often have extensive education programs that rely on a range of expertly constructed multimedia materials, exemplary spatial designs, and remarkable objects. These are spaces where multiple literacies practices are prominent, which is of particular relevance for educators as communication practices both in and out of school increasingly rely on diverse and mixed modes of expression. The uses of multiple modes of literacy are especially apparent in the art museum, where Jonathan studied adolescent literacy practices. Granted, a central focus of art museums involves visual concepts, yet these concepts are frequently supported by language texts (e.g., scripted docent tours, audio taped guides, informational wall print, and labels). In this regard, although

sometimes described as “informal learning environments” (Paris & Hapgood, 2002, p. 37), museums are more like formal spaces of school practices, three-dimensional textbooks that dispense expert knowledge and encourage regulated attention economy models of learning, spaces to “do and re-do school.”

As with the after-school spaces described earlier, museums can also support a deregulated attention economy and the means and strategies to “undo school.” Frequently, museums offer the conditions through which free choice activities can take place. In this vein, alongside more regulated and formal education characteristics such as asking students to listen quietly and carefully to docent lessons or search for and record information about an exhibit for a classroom assignment (e.g., scavenger hunts, which can be likened to library or Internet research), museums commonly provide their visitors the freedom to experience exhibitions without necessarily engaging with the “expert knowledge” of docents and language texts.

To explore the conditions of possibilities of doing, re-doing, and undoing school that are commonly afforded by museums, Jonathan studied adolescents between the ages of 12 and 15 experiencing seven museum events in two art museums, two groups during school field trips and two groups who freely toured the same museum exhibitions with minimal regulated supervision (Eakle, 2005). The museum and school study was situated in Marthasville, a city at the center of a Southeastern U. S. metropolitan area. The school group was part of the Marthasville Christian Academy (MCA), a kindergarten-8<sup>th</sup> grade private school that serves what school officials identified as African Americans of low economic status. As in the regional public schools, MCA curricula focus on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, and although a goal of the academy was to prepare

students for college bound high school courses the students were assessed as below grade level in academic achievement. In the next sections of this chapter, data from four adolescent MCA eighth grade students are presented: Monisha, Bishop, DiDi, and Flo aka Mic (pseudonyms the adolescents chose). Their African American veteran teacher, Lakesha, also appears in the following sequences of doing and undoing school. In these sequences, we begin with an instructional activity in the school academy space and then present data of the adolescents' out-of-school museum experience.

### **Doing School at MCA**

A typical technique that Lakesha used in teaching the academy's basic curriculum illustrates what we have identified as limited or restricted choices afforded in schools. The teacher's approach was to introduce a topic, have her students read about the topic in textbooks, and then review the material during what Lakesha described as "classroom discussion." The classroom reviews were usually comprised of short question/answer techniques, as shown in the following exchange about the U. S. Congress.

Lakesha: What's the job of the legislative branch?

DiDi: They make laws and change laws.

Lakesha: They really go and what you?

DiDi: What you?

Lakesha: Yeah, they what you?

Monisha: Help you?

Lakesha: Not help you. They go to *represent* you. Now what's it called?

Bishop: Congress?

Lakesha: No [gestures a roof angle with two index fingers]. A house. So you can think of them in a big house. It's the House of?

Monisha: The House of Rice?

Lakesha [wrinkling her nose]: No, that's a restaurant in your neighborhood.

[Class laughter]

Lakesha: Congress is made up of what?

DiDi: Men?

Lakesha [sighs]: No, representatives. So, it's the House of Representatives...Let's get out our handy dandy study books. Y'all need to study. We're gonna have a quiz on Thursday.

After the “classroom discussion” the students spent the rest of this class period reviewing workbook information about Congress in preparation for a test on Thursday.

This everyday classroom exchange points to how school was done at MCA and to possibilities to “re-do school.” Lakesha staked out a territory around the “right” answers to her questions, answers the “expert” teacher had in mind. We think this is a characteristic classroom scenario that shows how power often circulates in school space. In some instances the adolescents offered “correct” answers, such as DiDi’s assessment of the duties of congress. Responses such as this could have been accommodated and could have encouraged a flow of exchange between students and teachers. However, in this schooled space the flow was blocked by the preset responses Lakesha had in mind—what she wanted the students to concentrate their attention upon; the teacher was unwilling to cross what she had staked out as proper “doing school” territory.

More importantly, we think, is that the exchange offers a glimpse of other possibilities made available by adolescents during classroom transactions, potentials that affirm life. Monisha’s reference to a neighborhood restaurant brought the classroom conversation into local, everyday space—the personal. Although her response might be considered off topic, perhaps even a means to “undo” the teacher’s lesson, it nonetheless points to the possibilities of making a relevant connection rather than remaining in marked, schooled, territories of abstraction. Perhaps, instead of Monisha’s answer being treated as wrong or as a source for classroom laughter, her personal connection to local space could have been transformed into a discussion about similarities of Congress and local businesses that are part of the adolescents’ everyday lived spaces.

Additionally, DiDi's assessment of Congress being composed of men provided possibilities for ways to "re-do" and "undo" school. For instance, from her response there was an opportunity to discuss the predominant male voices in government and other "old school" notions that linger on in societies, particularly relevant in terms of the concept of democratic representation that Lakesha was attempting to teach. The teacher could have addressed whether groups, such as females, African Americans, and lower economic classes, are reasonably represented in government—a significant topic to the MCA students, which could also serve to "undo old school" models while "doing school."

### **Doing and Re-doing School in Museums**

Doing school for MCA students was not limited to the boundaries of the school building. During Jonathan's investigation, among other places, the students went on fieldtrips to two Marthasville art museums. The museum tours were marked with controlled, disciplined movements, where, as Lakesha reported, the students were "steered to do the right things...[to exhibit] appropriate behavior for public places," such as keeping their hands to themselves, paying close attention, and not talking loudly.

One of the museums the school visited, The Carver House, displays African and Diaspora art. The similarities to the students' formal schooling experiences and their excursion through the museum is prominent, as shown in the following exchange between the MCA adolescents and Montsho, an African American Carver House docent, around a portrait of a 'faceless' African American. First, as in the MCA classroom, the students were asked by the docent to look at the image, or, using a broad definition of literacy, what we call read the visual text. Then, as had the classroom teacher Lakesha, Montsho led the students in a "schooled discussion":

Montsho: What is the first thing you notice about this painting?

Bishop: The man has no face.

Montsho: Right. Now let's talk about politics. This painting was done in 1961. How was the average Black man treated in America in 1961? Well or not well?

Flo aka Mic: Not well.

Montsho: And you know about civil rights; what were they fighting for?

Students [in unison]: Freedom!

Montsho: Right, freedom. So this man had no face, no recognition, no vote. So the face was left out. Sometimes, you can tell something by leaving something out rather than putting it in. Many people in the South were working as sharecroppers at this time. Did sharecroppers own the land? What do we know about sharecropping?

Bishop: When a person doesn't own the land, but they take care of it.

Montsho: And you're *paying* the landowner. The reason I bring up sharecropping is that it's really just a form of slavery. In essence, you were still a slave, it just wasn't acknowledged as such...When we think about civil rights we think about the big names. But really, the main people who rose up and fought for civil rights and their freedom were the sharecroppers of the South. They said they weren't going to take this kind of abuse anymore.

As this exchange suggests, Montsho used exhibited paintings (visual texts) in the museum to do another type of school: to teach lessons of local resistance and African American identity. The museum became a space, a marked-off territory, where particular issues of everyday, Southern culture and histories could be expressed. Not only were the art texts used to talk about the abuse of sharecroppers and civil rights, but also about the ongoing effects of slavery in local spaces such as Marthasville. Discussing the paintings in the museum exhibit, for example, Montsho suggested these effects, and in some instances drew a connection between slavery, the African American students, and himself:

Montsho: [This painting] represents the fact that when we were brought over into slavery that basically we were broken down; we were torn apart and we have to pull ourselves what?

MCA Students [in unison]: Back together!

Like Lakesha's schoolhouse lesson, the students' short responses to Montsho's comments were incorporated into the docent's teaching strategy. Also akin to Lakesha's instruction, Montsho had a message in mind, which he delivered to the MCA students, and the space was not made available for the students to elaborate their personal views. At best, the adolescents' responses were fleeting props used by the docent to hold their "limited" attention while he laid out his lessons of history, identity, and resistance. This illustrates the way that school was typically re-done in the museum, where the instructional focus was centered on images, the "expert" docent's oral interpretations, and concepts that he, the authority, thought were important to learn from the picture texts.

In both institutional spaces of "doing school" the students were subjected by and participated in particular academic discourses. Both spaces reflect the strategies and territories that form schooled subjects. The Carver House museum exchanges point to the forces through which the "schooled" African American subject position is formed, whereas in the example shown at MCA, the students were being schooled in the facts of U. S. citizenry, democracy, and representation, perhaps paradoxically, through teaching them to be docile recipients of the teacher and docent's authoritative knowledge.

### **Undoing School and Adolescent Voices**

In the academy and museum the MCA students' roles were defined, more or less, by the "schooled" idea of children as the passive recipients of knowledge within a limited attention economy. However, when the students were provided the space to express their views outside their classrooms and the museum, elaborated connections between the museum and everyday life events became visible. Some of these connections were about how work situations and "doing school" influence their lives, especially prominent issues

to the population that MCA serves. For example, DiDi accommodated the notions of sharecropping and work from the Carver House paintings and used the ideas as an opportunity to mention the types of books she likes to read and to elaborate on what she called the “drama” in her life, as shown in the following observation she made:

In some of the paintings you could see the fields and everything, so you could tell that there was work going on. The paintings were like drama. Drama is my favorite kind of book. Me and my mom we're going through drama; we're just trying hard to make it. 'Cause she gotta go to work and school a lot of time...We hardly get to see each other... So there's a lot of drama there, cause we never see each other anymore.

For Flo aka Mic and Bishop, work was also very much a part of their everyday lives and present in their thoughts. Throughout the investigation, their in-and out-of-school preoccupations were with their present and future work with rap music—a line of creative escape from the economically depressed spaces in which they lived. Although from closed attention economic perspectives their interests could be seen as recreation or child’s play, outside the surveillances of schooled spaces the pair took many opportunities to mark off territories—in between classes, in the lunchroom, during museum fieldtrips, in corners during study periods—where they could diligently and seriously discuss and write rap lyrics and poetry or perform impromptu music compositions for their classmates. Further, similar to what was formed by Ned of the Media Club group, Flo aka Mic and Bishop made a pact to start a music production company and to earn summer money performing odd jobs such as lawn work and to work in convenience stores to finance their future rap music business ventures.

Creative rap music work and its potential for rewards were lines of escape from the everyday, sharecropper-like spaces the adolescents were willing to accommodate as they dreamed about local success that had been achieved by groups similar to *Goodie*

*MOB*, which had intrigued Ned in Donna's Media Club study. Thus, it is not surprising that some of the connections the two youths made to the museum event were to the poetry they wrote and their music, as suggested in the following observations and compositions made by Bishop and Flo aka Mic during one-on-one open-ended interviews with Jonathan in two different "unschooled" spaces:

Bishop: To me basically, art is like drawing and poetry, and stuff like that. It's basically a type of music. To me art, the drawing like I saw at the museum is like a silent type of music. The artists basically really wanted to express themselves... it's like *everything* is like a music note, like if I can write a song about what I do, it will be *directly* with what I do.

Flo aka Mic: The paintings [at the museum] are like how you express your mind. Put it on paper and draw it...It was kinda unique how you think of something and put it into pictures, like drawing it from the mind. Drawing it, now that's unique. Like the same thing with my lyrics, how I can put it down from my mind. But, I didn't draw it, I write it. The same thing with poems. Just like poems. People who like art and music, who like art period, should go to the Carver House Museum.

The connections Flo aka Mic and Bishop made between the museum art, poetry, and music and were not abstract musings. As Bishop said, art and music is directly related to what he does, to everyday life—lived space. For example, he reported and demonstrated through a personal notebook he kept that the museum event encouraged him to return to an earlier interest he had in drawing, an interest he had abandoned in previous years. In this vein, following the museum event and outside "schooled" space, Flo aka Mic and Bishop created and informally performed for classmates what they called a "freestyle rap"—another freedom activity that further shows their interest in making creative connections to lived space, drawing attention in deregulated territories, and also their knowledge of the dynamics of disciplined schooled space:

The eighth graders went on a field trip yesterday  
We had so much fun, we did not have anything to say, so Hay.  
But we did not waste any time,

But our teacher make sure we stayed in line.  
 So all the kids had questions on there mind  
 and just remind yourself that we made up this rime...  
 (The students' spellings are preserved as recorded in Bishop's notebook)

Flo aka Mic and Bishop's reference to being kept in line reflects one of the schooled practices we mentioned earlier, where Lakesha "steered [students] to do the right things" while out in public. And we look at this reference as part and parcel of the practices that attempt to make docile bodies and mark territories, the lines drawn in the doing of school. What is particularly interesting to us in this brief snippet of freestyle rap is that during the museum event Flo aka Mic and Bishop realized the MCA adolescents had, as they wrote, "questions on there minds" but that the students remained silent because, we argue, of how they have been trained to "do school." Yet, the adolescents had much to say about the museum event outside schooled space when they made connections between the museum event and relevant dimensions of their everyday lives using creative modes or lines of escape, such as in when they engaged in "freestyle rap."

### **Some Parting Thoughts**

The literacy practices exhibited by youth in the deregulated spaces of the Media Club were similar in many ways to those exhibited by the MCA students. For example, both groups of adolescents expressed an abiding interest in reading and writing rap lyrics, and both demonstrated in their own special ways an awareness of how "doing and re-doing school" in out-of-school settings can produce forms of textual engagement that schooled spaces, such as the academy, often do not. This is not to say that out-of-school settings are superior to schooled spaces, or that the former should replace the latter in matters related to literacy practices. Rather, what we have tried to show through our separate studies is the futility of partitioning youth's literacy practices into in-school and

out-of-school spaces. Although it is not a new idea (e.g., see Garner, 2002; Hull & Schultz, 2001), it is one that heretofore has escaped analysis from an attention economy perspective.

Argued from this perspective, we see possibilities for dissolving what has typically been conceived as school and literacy boundaries. For example, consider how the limited or restricted choices in forms of student interaction at Marthasville Christian Academy were endemic, even in the “lesson” taught by Montsho, a docent at the Carver House. There, despite what would appear to be deregulated museum space, MCA students demonstrated that they knew how to “do school”—to be attentive pupils and offer short responses to Montsho’s docent-led presentation about the lack of civil rights among the South’s sharecroppers. Consider, too, that although the surveillances of schooled spaces were internalized in the talk of MCA students, such as Flo aka Mic and Bishop, they knew how to re-draw this everyday practice using it as a lyrical component to express resistance in a rap about the eighth-grade class trip to Carver House. The adolescents’ transformation of such practices into what might bring them notice (e.g., from their classmates, a wider rap music listening audience, a future record company, etc.) gives us a glimpse of how the attention economy works at the local, student level.

These examples of MCA students dissolving school and literacy boundaries have parallels in the Media Club study. For instance, the ways in which Ned and others fashioned their freedom activities afforded evidence of how participants in the Media Club used a public library’s spaces—not as passive recipients of information produced by others, but rather as active producers of their own meanings and uses of texts broadly defined. What we found particularly interesting is the degree to which the adolescents in

our two studies engaged in textual production when the material and concepts that they were working with had some kind of everyday relevance, whether it be in writing a rap lyric, securing employment, composing a note to a classmate, or describing rap artists in an email correspondence.

We think that it is important to point out that as active producers of texts the adolescents used what was readily available around them in their efforts to accommodate, transform, and resist school practices, or to “undo school.” For instance, Flo aka Mic and Bishop’s rap assemblage demonstrates how elements of mundane experience are grafted one upon another to create personally meaningful, attention-laden products. Their museum trip, a regulated line up exercise, and the language structure of “freestyle” composition became ingredients of a rap recorded on notebook paper that was subsequently performed for classmates using sound, gesture, and movement. Similarly, material from the *Goodie MOB* CD text insert was displayed by Ned to Donna in a “doing school” teacherly fashion using another gesturing movement, finger pointing, which was also grafted by him into an email message to Kevin.

From these examples, we think it is important to consider that the medium (e.g., a sheet of notebook paper, a workbook, an electronic message, a music CD insert, a gesturing movement) in a deregulated attention economy could be of secondary importance to the everyday relevance of a particular activity. In the restricted attention economy of schooling, Ned (and for that matter, Kevin) had long been exposed to an autonomous view of school-based literacy (Street, 1995) in which reading is regarded as something that is done independently of social contexts and assessed as an individual trait. This model prizes print-text learning and the acquisition of “proper” information,

such as the MCA workbook exercise and Lakesha's definitions of the constitution and functions of Congress. It is a perspective that we believe needs to be closely examined as we increasingly move into an attention economy.

Indeed, with the flood of easily accessed information in our changing, digital world it can be seen how autonomous models of literacy wane in the mounting wake of an attention economy. What is made visible in our analysis is that adolescents in deregulated space territorialized certain aspects of the enormous information available to them, transformed personally relevant material, and entered into social flows that were catalyzed by their notions of generating attention. Unlike concepts drawn from autonomous literacy perspectives, these flows are multi-directional, strategic, socially driven, and function on a grid of power (Foucault, 1975/1977). When considered in regard to the productivity of power, the materials in the hands of the adolescents we studied (e.g., a rap CD, a museum trip) were used not only as lines of escape from regulated activities, but also were transformed by the participants into active textual productions. This we believe demonstrates how power often functions: oscillating at the boundaries of regulation and creative production, with each field feeding off the other.

In learning and productive spaces a key aspect of power is to what extent attention is given and received. The spaces of deregulated attention economy introduced through our studies show how power can produce social, circulating literacies of active adolescent text production, whereas spaces of limited attention economy promote a marking off of territories that often forms reactive individuals rather than affirmative transactions. These spaces are not a function of particular institutions or boundaries, but of perspectives, and in this respect we believe that a task of teaching institutions is to pay

closer attention to attention. In this vein, it is through listening to and closely watching students such as Ned, Bishop, DiDi, Monisha and Flo aka Mic that new possibilities for education can be conceived. Schools, museums, libraries, any learning place, can possibly accommodate everyday experiences, capture and give attention, and thus promote productive flows of multiple literacies.

To reify distinctions between in-school and out-of-school literacies serves mainly to divorce these literacies from the very spaces which give them meaning and make them worth pursuing. It also limits what teachers and researchers can learn from students' experiences, at least to the extent that students are willing to share their perceptions of those experiences. Listening to and observing youth as they communicate their familiarity with multiple texts across space, place, and time can provide valuable insights into how to approach both instruction and research—insights that might otherwise be lost or taken for granted in our rush to categorize literacy practices as either in-school or out-of-school and thus either worthy of our attention or not.

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