

WinkWorld August 2003

"Hell has officially frozen over," I muttered to myself as I stood in line about to purchase my first pack of Pokémon cards for my son, Wyatt. Just when you think you've unlearned everything you think you need to unlearn, along comes Pokémon.

I am reminded of Mom's opening story of in *Critical Pedagogy: Notes From the Real World*. Mom describes Jonathan, a boy who has had every literacy enrichment experience imaginable, yet is still not reading in sixth grade. At this point, his parents enrolled him in a very structured literacy program based on breaking language down to the minutest separations possible and placing emphasis on the specific placement of the tongue as words are read. Mom held little hope for Jonathan's literacy success through a program that went against everything she knew and believed about literacy development.

Jonathan learned to read.

Wyatt, like Jonathan, has had every literacy experience imaginable. Yet now entering second-grade, Wyatt barely reads.

Which brings us back to Pokémon.

Pokémon intuitively appalls me. Wyatt's peers have been collecting the cards for years, but I refused to buy any for Wyatt.

"Mom, you and all the girls' moms are the only ones who don't allow Pokémon," Wyatt told me earnestly one day.

I remained unmoved.

Then one day one of Wyatt's friends came over to play. He brought his binder full of Pokémon cards to show Wyatt. I remember thinking, "Oh, no. How quickly can I get them away from those cards and onto the trampoline?"

Except that Wyatt spent the next two hours reading those cards. He and his friend sat on the living room floor going over every letter and word in detail. As I dried dishes in the next room, I became aware of Wyatt's efforts to read every one of those cards. Wyatt usually shies away from any attempt at individual reading. Now he sat pouring over letters and words trying to make meaning.

"He's reading!," I thought to myself.

The next day I purchased Pokémon cards and a collecting card binder. Wyatt has been reading those cards daily ever since. His literacy has grown considerably.

Mom had to unlearn many of her assumptions when Jonathan learned to read. I'm currently in the midst of unlearning much of what I've assumed about what constitutes appropriate routes to literacy. Paulo Friere counseled to follow what holds meaning for the students. I'm in the midst of taking a leap of faith and following Freire's wisdom, even when the path involves Pokémon.

