

## ***Marino C. Alvarez: A Sherlockian Scholar, a Teacher Mentor, and a Global Influencer***

*A.B. Herr Award Winner -2019*

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### **Introduction**

Who is Dr. Marino Alvarez? If you were to run into Dr. Alvarez at an ALER conference, you could be easily fooled by his soft-spoken humor and humble demeanor. In reality, his bibliography reads like a *Who's Who Among Educators and Scholars*. To date, Dr. Alvarez has published his work in more than 100 literacy and education journals and conference proceedings, as well as presented papers in the U.S. and 12 foreign countries. Dr. Alvarez is also an expert on Sherlock Holmes and enjoys presenting his Sherlockian scholarship at conferences, society meetings, and in classrooms.

If you have been a member of ALER for more than a decade, you will recall Dr. Alvarez's significant contributions in the building of the organization's rich and vibrant history as he served as president from 1987-1989 and has served on the board. Some would say that Dr. Alvarez is the personification of ALER's vision and purpose. As the 2019 A. B. Herr Award recipient, Dr. Alvarez is acknowledged for his contributions to the field of reading education through literary scholarship and teacher mentorship.

### **Scholarship: Past and Present**

Dr. Alvarez was born in Keyser, West Virginia, and graduated from Bruce High School in Westernport, Maryland. In 1966, Dr. Alvarez began his scholarship at the Junior College in Albany, New York where he earned his Associates of Arts degree. In 1968, he earned his

Bachelor of Arts degree from Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado. His joy of learning and self-determination paved the way for Dr. Alvarez to return to school to earn his masters (M. A.) in 1976 and his doctoral degree (Ed.D.) in 1989. He completed both degrees at West Virginia University.

As a doctoral student, Dr. Alvarez excelled in his studies and his leadership skills became evident to those around him. As a result, these skills led to his induction into *Phi Delta Kappa* and *Phi Kappa Phi*, honor societies. His strong leadership skills led to his service as the vice president in charge of programs for *Phi Delta Kappa* from 1979-1980. By all accounts, he was a natural born leader. Furthermore, Dr. Alvarez's outstanding teaching abilities led to his appointments as an instructor and lecturer for both undergraduate and graduate courses in the College of Education, until receiving his doctorate degree. During this period, Dr. Alvarez published several scholarly papers with his co-author, Clyde Colwell. The scope of Dr. Alvarez's influence was most evident in a paper titled: *Reading in the content areas: A program for improving reading achievement, Teacher and Principal Editions*, which was written for the West Virginia State Department of Education.

After completing his doctoral program, Dr. Alvarez's hard work and determination paid off as he held dual positions as Professor of Literacy in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the College of Education, and as a Senior Research Scientist at the Research Center for Information Systems and Engineering Management at Tennessee State University, Nashville, TN. Today, Dr. Alvarez remains Professor Emeritus in the Department of Teaching and Learning of the College of Education, as well as a senior researcher, and Director of the Exploring Minds Project, in the Center of Excellence in Information Systems at TSU.

## **An Abundance of Accolades**

Over the years, Dr. Alvarez has collected a plethora of prestigious awards and acknowledgements. In 2001, Dr. Alvarez received what some would consider one of the most distinguishing honors—the President’s Award for Distinguished Service to the University. That same year he became the first faculty to achieve Professor Emeritus status in the College of Education. His excellence as a professor and researcher were not only acknowledged by his mentors and colleagues, but his students commended him, as well. It was not a surprise to those around him when Dr. Alvarez became the only professor in the history of TSU to be presented with both the TSU Teacher of the Year Award and the TSU Distinguished Researcher Award! Furthermore, in a student-held election, Dr. Alvarez was voted as the “Most Inspiring Teacher” in the College of Education. He received this honor...not once...but twice!

Dr. Alvarez has also received national acclaim and recognition for his writings. Two publications he co-authored with Bob Gowin, were nominated for the Grawemeyer Award in Education: *The Little Book: Conceptual Elements of Research* published by Rowman & Littlefield and *The Art of Educating with V Diagrams* published by Cambridge University Press, New York and Cambridge, UK. The award draws nominations from around the world and it is a rare honor to be recognized and nominated. Dr. Alvarez’s numerous articles and books have also been cited by scholars around the world.

As an ALER respected member and scholar, Dr. Alvarez has received recognition from his peers and colleagues. In 2000, he was honored with the Albert J. Mazurkiewicz ALER Special Services Award for outstanding service to the College Reading Association. In 2008, Dr. Alvarez received the ALER Laureate Award given for life-time achievement in research, publications,

and teaching. It was no surprise to his peers and nominator, when word spread that Dr. Alvarez was awarded the 2019 A. B. Herr Award. Some would say that Dr. Alvarez embodies the vision and mission of ALER.

In spite of all of these awards (and this is only a partial list), one of the most endearing awards will be presented in the fall of 2020 when he will be inducted into the Bruce High School Hall of Fame, the very high school where he attended years ago.

### **A Sherlockian Scholar and Teacher Mentor**

One fascinating fact about Dr. Alvarez is that he is highly knowledgeable about Sherlock, Holmes; a fictional detective created by Scottish writer Arthur Conan Doyle. As a world renowned Sherlockian Scholar, Dr. Alvarez shares his knowledge and expertise through his dedication as a member of several Sherlockian societies. He is an active member of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London, the Sherlock Holmes Society of Italy, the Baker Street Irregulars, and a committee member, Awards Chair and Board of Directors of the Beacon Society.

Dr. Alvarez has published multiple journal articles on the subject in the *Baker Street Journal*, and is the author of *A Professor Reflects on Sherlock Holmes*, MX Publishing, London. He presented one of his most notable works, a book, *A Professor Reflects on Sherlock Holmes* (2012), at the 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Southern Festival of Books in Nashville, Tennessee. More recently, Dr. Alvarez co-edited the book, *Education Never Ends: Educators, Education, and the Sherlockian Canon* (2019). This book is the third publication in the BSI Press professions series. In spite of his busy schedule, Dr. Alvarez finds time to visit classrooms and mentor teachers on such topics as how to build student-centered learning experiences that inspire creativity and

critical thinking. One such teacher is Shannon Carlisle, an elementary Accelerated Learning Specialist. She wrote extensively of how Dr. Alvarez mentored her on ways to use a pre-reading activity and visuals related to Sherlock Holmes, and taught her the power of thematic concept mapping.

As a constructivist project, Ms. Carlisle's elementary classroom was transformed to 221B Baker Street, which is the address of Sherlock Holmes' home. The students even created a Sherlock Holmes museum and named it: *The Sherlock Holmes Museum for the Young, Curious, and Observant Mind*. The museum was filled with student-made artifacts and pieces associated with Sherlock Holmes' mysteries. Ms. Carlisle described the day Dr. Alvarez was the guest of honor to help unveil the museum. On opening day, Ms. Carlisle invited other third and fourth grade students, classroom teachers, administrators, and community members to the classroom to celebrate. To the cheers of delight from her students, Dr. Alvarez cut the ribbon.

In support of Dr. Alvarez, Ms. Carlisle wrote:

"I appreciate his support and guidance in our classroom the most. He supports my attempts to implement my classroom theme effectively. For example, as a pre reading activity, he taught me how to create and implement visual literacy guides so the students can 'observe' visuals related to the settings in the Sherlock Holmes stories. The learning activity encourages students to note what objects they *see*, what the visual makes them *think*, and what the visual makes them *wonder*."

Through his active role as leader in advancing Sherlockian theology in schools, Dr. Alvarez has contributed to technology integration and global connections between classrooms.

His extensive travels and global connections have enabled him to facilitate a relationship between a school in the United Kingdom and Ms. Carlisle's classroom. Using the Web 2.0 literacy tool, Padlet, the students posted messages to one another based on what they were learning from their Sherlock Holmes' readings. The relationship forged between the two schools, led to a video conference in which students were able to share their experiences.

Stories like Ms. Carlisle's experiences have been played out again and again. At the end of the day, Dr. Alvarez always makes time for teachers and students. To date, Dr. Alvarez has conducted over 100 professional learning sessions for K-12 national and international educators.

### **Significant Contributions to Literacy Education**

Over the years, Dr. Alvarez has made significant contributions to the field of reading through his research and instruction. His interest in supporting teachers dates back to his years as a secondary social studies teacher. As a classroom teacher, Dr. Alvarez noticed gaps in students' abilities to problem-solve and to connect to their background knowledge. As a problem-solver himself, Dr. Alvarez went about finding a solution. In 1983, he created the thematic organizer as a visual aide and text adjunct to help students comprehend what they were reading. Dr. Alvarez's educational conviction: It is wrong for educators to assume children have the background knowledge they need to comprehend text. This research-based belief has led his seminal work to be cited in hundreds of articles and papers by young academics.

Dr. Alvarez is also well-known for supporting teachers across disciplines by focusing on designing meaningful learning environments to build on students' prior knowledge and their cultural and linguistic histories. These learning environments are situated within physical and

digital learning communities and intended to build on students' curiosity to deepen their understanding of complex texts. Furthermore, students are guided in understanding and solving real-world problems.

Dr. Alvarez's use of concept mapping to problem-solve has had far-reaching benefits and discoveries. Dr. Greg Henry, an astronomer and researcher at TSU, recalled how Dr. Alvarez's design of the *Exploring Minds* digital network led to his discovery of the first transiting extrasolar planet in 1999 and the subsequent study of "newly found transiting extrasolar planets". Such outcomes have been documented in scholarly articles and presentations around the world.

### **A Global Influencer**

Dr. Alvarez's scholarship has positively impacted the field of reading education on a national and international scale. He has served as Chair of the Action Research Group of the American Educational Research Association, and has held key leadership positions in ALER. These positions include serving as President and Board Member of ALER and the American Reading Forum. Additionally, Dr. Alvarez has presented scholarly papers at state, national, and international conferences in the Philippines, Canada, Hungary, Germany, Great Britain, Czech Republic, Ghana, Australia, Belgium, Portugal, and New Zealand.

If that were not enough to keep him busy, Dr. Alvarez has served on the editorial advisory boards of nine national and international research and professional journals. These included: *Reading Research Quarterly*, *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, *The Reading Teacher*, *Journal of Literacy Research*, and *National Reading Conference Yearbook* and *Handbook of Research in Teaching Literacy through the Visual and Communicative Arts*. He was

also a member of the Adolescent Literacy Commission of the International Reading Association (now the International Literacy Association).

Since 2000, Dr. Alvarez presented at 26 conferences and events throughout the United States, as well as England, Finland, and Canada. He presented “The World of Sherlock Holmes: An Invitation to Electronic Literacy,” at the 2012 United Kingdom Literacy Association International Conference. He participated on the 2014 and 2015 221b Con “Teaching Sherlock Holmes” panels, in Atlanta, Georgia. In 2014, he presented “Cross-Curricular Literacy, Complex Text, Cultural Responsiveness, Common Core: Connecting for Comprehension,” at the International Reading Association Annual Conference, in New Orleans, Louisiana. While in Turku, Finland, in 2016, he presented “Writing Your Thoughts” to 7th-9th graders at Puropellon Koulu School.

Today, Dr. Alvarez shows no signs of slowing down! He enjoys traveling and participating in Sherlockian scholarship at conferences, at society meetings, and in classrooms. If you happen to be visiting London, English, don’t be surprised to see Dr. Alvarez and his wife taking in the sights at 221b Baker Street.

*You can learn more about Dr. Alvarez in *The College Reading Association Legacy: A Celebration of Fifty Years of Literacy Leadership (ALER, 2010)*, written by Christine Walsh and edited by Wayne Linek, Dixie Massey, Louise Cochran Elizabeth Sturtevant Barbara McClanahan and Mary Beth Sampson. His biography appears on pages 215-222.*

