

# Dr. Thom Gencarelli Takes a Sabbatical to Pursue His Book

by Victoria Correia

*“I’m going to write in a way that makes it worth your while.”*

Dr. Thom Gencarelli, the founding chair of the communication department at Manhattan College, is credited with bringing many ideas and innovations to the department. This spring, Thom is on a sabbatical leave to devote his time to work on a book titled, “Raising Digital Kids: An Owner’s Manual.”

As a mentee of Neil Postman, a public intellectual who authored books for other educators, Thom has learnt from the master when it comes to scholarship and writing. Thom strives for the same thing Postman did -- enlightening others and providing meaning. It is for this reason that rather than writing an academic book, he wants to express his thoughts by writing a trade book, as that can be read more widely by a non-academic audience as well.

Thom compares the essence of writing to a childhood example: being a young child who creates artwork. He uses the analogy of a child bringing a finger-painting home hoping that it will impress his parents and end up on the fridge. He finishes with, “So why do we write? If we don’t write for people to read, then I really don’t understand the point.” Rather than writing the book because he ‘has to’ or because it is accessible, he wants to write something valuable that is worthy for others to read.

The book is targeted toward parents who are raising children, especially in the digital age. Children’s interaction with media has always been of interest to Thom. He decided to include “An Owner’s Manual” in the title a bit tongue-in-cheek, since children do not come with instructions, and parents do not always know who their kids will grow up to be.

Thom highlights the adaptation of life through screens, especially in younger individuals, in the book. For example, he explores why parents decide to give their child a phone at a young age: typically for the purpose of safety, and perhaps to give them advantages that they did not have as kids. He also analyzes how social media encourages users to believe that it revolves around them, when, in reality, it does not. Thom believes that people need to control their own lives instead of being controlled, especially by major companies. Thus, in his book, parents are given advice on how to raise members of a generation that is programmed to fit in and be “cool and trendy.” He raises the question: “when will we stop being controlled?”



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Thom's last sabbatical was also focused on writing a book– about language acquisition in cognitive development. He wanted to explore human consciousness and information perception. That book, however, became too challenging to complete, so Thom did not finish it. He hopes that his new work will expand upon his previous writing and interest in this topic.

## *Life Before the Book:*

As founder and former chair of the department, Thom hired professors, wrote the curriculum, and worked to make sure the program was the best it could be. His goal was to create a worthy program, helping students toward their goals. He took on these responsibilities in 2007, and stepped down in 2019 as chair of the department. In his own words, it was simply time for him to “get out of everyone’s way and give someone else a chance.” ★