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LIBR 285-02

Spring 2013

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**Distributed Research Group and Article Annotations**

***Introduction***

Since the 1930s our culture has attached negative stigma to the comic book medium (Hajdu, 2008). Anti-comic campaigns in the 1940s and 1950s by youth groups and articles published in popular magazines warned about the dangers of reading of comic books and their link to juvenile delinquency (Hajdu, 2008). These campaigns were brought to national attention when psychologist Frederic Wertham published his anti-comic treatise, *Seduction of Innocence*, which purported scientific proof that comic books caused juvenile delinquency (Nyberg, 1998). Spurred by these claims, the United States Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquencybegan hearings on comic books (Nyberg, 1998). Though no significant legislation resulted from these hearings, public perception that comic books were harmful to the literacy and the psychology state of children grew in force (Nyberg, 1998). As a result of this pressure, the comic book industry was forced to impose a comic book code used to self-regulate the themes and stories allowed to be published in comic books (Nyberg, 1998). This severely limited the type of stories that could be printed by comic publishers, and had a lasting negative impact which reduced what was a flourishing industry, to a few publishers (Nyberg, 1998). Though the medium has grown immensely since that time, and only a few comic book publishers still continue to use the code to regulate their publications, the negative stigma surrounding comic books persists today.

I originally became interested in this topic when I first ventured into the world of graphic novels while an undergraduate in college. I have been reading graphic novels for many years now, and the experiences that I have had with its uniquely presented narratives and with its colorful community have truly changed my life. Being a member of the comics community has exposed me first hand to the stigma that comics books continue to have. Additionally, working in the children’s department of a bustling urban public library has also given me another perspective. On a daily basis I see children rush to our graphic novel section, looking for their next great read. I witness the light that they get in their eyes when they are truly excited and engaged with reading. With goals of being a children’s librarian, this love of books, especially comic books, gives me great joy and hope. It saddens me to no end when I see a parent tell their child that they cannot read comics because “they are not real books”, “not serious”, and even “bad.”

Despite these ongoing beliefs about comic books and graphic novels, the format is more popular than ever. More works are being produced in a variety of subject areas, included non-fiction informational books. I believe the future for comic books is bright, but I also believe that research must be done in this area to both combat the stigma that was created all those years ago and to understand some of the ways that comic books and graphic novels can be used in classrooms and as a learning tool. To that end, I propose as my research topic to seek to understand the experiences of students who use graphic novels and comics in the classroom. The annotations that I present here are the result of a preliminary search of research done by others who had similar questions and interests as mine. Many of these studies present some similar themes and topics, but ultimately they are each unique in what they add to the growing body of research in this area.

***Abstracts***

Dallacqua, A. K. (2012). Exploring literary devices in graphic novels. *Language Arts. 89*(6), 365-378. Retrieved from http://www.ncte.org/journals/la/issues/v89-6

This paper reports on a qualitative study that explores the use of graphic novels to teach literary devices. The author, a fifth grade teacher, uses her classroom experience with introducing literary devices to her students using graphic novels to inform the study. The article begins with a review of the literature that examines the validity of the graphic novel format; an exploration of its academic use to teach literary devices, various types of content, social and cultural issues, and visual literacy; and its application in reader response theory. The study was conducted with four students from Dallacqua’s fifth grade classroom. The students read two graphic novels, and data was collected from two group book discussions, one-on-one interviews, and a teacher journal. Triangulation of these sources was used in analysis to identify the main theme of the study-- a focus on literary devices. Participants in the study, unprompted, identified literary devices (i.e. point of view, allusion, and symbolism) in the graphic novels to make meaning of the narratives. Participants also connected these literary devices to elements found in print-based texts read as part of their other classwork. The author used these findings to justify the implementation of more graphic novels in her classroom to introduce literary devices to students. The author concludes that there is great potential to use graphic novels to scaffold readers’ transitions into different modes of literature, and that graphic novels are on par with print-based literature in complexity and use of literary elements.

Hammond, K., & Danaher, K. (2012). The value of targeted comic book readers. *ELT Journal: English Language Teachers Journal*, *66*(2), 193-204. doi: 10.1093/elt/ccr051

This paper reports on a qualitative study that explored the perceptions of the value of targeted comic book readers by English as a Second Language learners. Studies have shown that reading outside of the classroom provides more exposure to language, but reading programs require an extensive amount of time and motivation for students to make progress in vocabulary and reading. This time requirement has been a hindrance to adult refugees and migrants learning English at the Unitec Institute of Technology in New Zealand. The authors created targeted comic book readers for students at the school learning elementary and upper-intermediate level English. Comic books were created for each unit of the courses, and provided stories and illustrations that included the targeted vocabulary words. Data was collected in the form of focus groups, small-group interviews, and one-on-one interviews, over the course of two semesters. Data analysis was done through data-driven code, a process in which themes are not predetermined but rather emerge from the data. The learners found value in the targeted comic readers in five broad themes: helpful story characters, perceived performance enhancement, use of learning strategies, enjoyment, and areas for improvement. Overall, the learners perceived the comic books as both enjoyable and useful to the learning of the course material and relevant to their needs. The study highlights the importance of responding to the needs and contexts of learners and discusses how providing creative learning resources can make learning more enjoyable and beneficial.

Hosler, J., & Boomer, K.B. (2011) Are comic books an effective way to engage nonmajors in learning and appreciating science? *CBE- Life Sciences Education*, *10*(3), 309-317. doi: 10.1187/cbe.10-07-0090

This paper reports on a study that examines the potential value of comics in education. The researchers note there are numerous articles published that suggest the value of the use of comics in the classroom, but that these are usually anecdotal and do not assess what role comics play in student success. The researchers state that the public’s science literacy rates are at an all-time low. They hypothesize that using a scientific comic textbook will enhance learning and student attitudes towards biology. The study was conducted using four biology courses taught by Hosler, at a small liberal arts college in Pennsylvania. Two of these courses are primarily for nonmajors, and the other two for natural science majors. Three courses used the comic textbook *Optical Allusions* by Hosler, and the control course (primarily for majors) used a standard textbook that covered the same content as the comic textbook. Students completed identical pre- and post-instruction assessment instruments. These instruments consisted of the Biology Attitude Scale, the Comics Attitude Scale, and a content-based assessment tool. Statistical analysis of these assessment instruments indicated that nonmajors who began the course with lower content knowledge and attitudes towards biology had significant improvements in both areas, supporting the hypothesis. The authors mention that in our culture of negative stigma towards comics it is important to note that student understanding did not decline due to comics. They suggest future research to determine if the use of comics can be an effective pedagogical tool in other subjects.

Hughes, J. M., King, A., Perkins, P., & Fuke, V. (2011). Adolescents and "autographics": Reading and writing coming-of-age graphic novels. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *54*(8), 601-612. doi: 10.1598/JAAL.54.8.5

This paper reports on two case studies that examine how literacy skills develop and how the convergence of text and image makes meaning for adolescents who read and create multimodal graphic novels. The authors argue that a development of multimodal (text, image, and sound) literacies is essential for the success of young people both in school and out. Graphic novels were chosen for the study because the format combines visual, textual, and spatial elements to create deeper meaning in narratives. The case studies involved 12 Canadian at-risk students, one class of six male students in a grade 11 work preparation English class, and another class of six mixed-gendered, multi-grade students in an academic program for expelled students. The courses were six weeks long, and focused on a two-fold approach where students first learned about visual literacy and read coming-of-age graphic novels, and then created their own autographics (personal narratives told in graphic format) using the software ComicLife. Researchers observed the students behaviors and actions during the study, and analyzed in-depth the student’s autographics to observe what literacy skills they each developed through the course. The authors found that students were eager and engaged in the courses, and demonstrated with their autographics a variety of techniques that revealed multimodal literacies. They argue that the reading and writing of graphic novels can be used to engage reluctant students and to develop the multimodal literacy skills needed in today’s world, but also note that more research must be done in this area.

Lapp, D., Wolsey, T., Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2012). Graphic novels: What elementary teachers think about their instructional value. *Journal of Education*, *192*(1), 23-35. Retrieved from http://www.bu.edu/journalofeducation/files/2012/09/BUJOE\_192\_1\_Lapp.pdf

This paper reports on a quantitative study that explores the attitudes of teachers towards graphic novels and the use of graphic novels in their classrooms. The authors begin with an overview of the evolution of the concept of literacy that has emerged since the 1970s, defining it as beyond proficiency with written text to other text types and visuals. Graphic novels and comics (graphica) have gained increased attention in the context of this emerging multifaceted view of literacy, and the authors suggest that the images, layout, and text of graphica interact to scaffold complex concepts and encourage meaning-making. Sixty teachers attending a summer institute for graduate degree candidates in education were surveyed. The findings suggest that a majority of teachers have limited knowledge and experience with graphic novels, but they also recognized they should be familiar with the genre due to its popularity with students outside of the classroom. Teachers also had positive attitudes towards using graphic novels in the classroom, but analysis found that many are not using them to an extensive degree. The authors speculate that this discrepancy may be related to a lack of availability of graphic novels for use in the classroom, and a lack of control by teachers over what materials may be used or introduced into their classrooms due to legislated curricula. The authors give suggestions and questions that could be the basis of qualitative research to further investigate the findings of this study.

Norton, B. (2003). The motivating power of comic books: Insights from Archie comic readers. *The Reading Teacher*, *57*(2), 140-147. Retrieved from http://www.reading.org /general/Publications/Journals/RT.aspx

This paper reports on a study that explores the insights of students who read *Archie* comic books and the impact of these insights on literacy education. Norton notes that the concept of literacy is being challenged by the 21st century, in which children make meaning with a wide variety of multimodal texts. Norton conducted two pilot studies, one with student teachers and one with a small group of *Archie* readers. The findings showed that while teachers believed comics to be unsuitable for the classroom, students were immensely engaged by them. Norton conducted a larger study, based on these pilot studies, at an elementary school in Vancouver with a group of 34 students from grades five to seven, aged 9-12 (19 girls and 15 boys). Norton conducted interviews with students and found that the comics were appealing to students because the stories, characters, and visuals were interesting, humorous, and engaging. Norton also found that the comics were the basis of a reading community that crossed social boundaries. Norton concludes that children derive pleasure from comics because they are associated with a sense of ownership; this is in contrast to school-authorized texts that are centered on what a teacher considers to be appropriate. She believes that if children are to engage meaningfully with texts they need to feel that texts have significance in their own lives. Norton pleads for further research to be conducted, and for educators to consider the power of comics in reclaiming literacy as meaning-making practice rather than ritual.

Ranker, J. (2007). Using comic books as read-alouds: Insights on reading instruction from an English as a second language classroom. *The Reading Teacher*, *61*(4), 296-305. doi:10.1598/RT.61.4.2

This article presents a qualitative study that explores the use of comic books in an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. The author begins the article with some background information about recent literacy research that suggests that students’ use of popular media can serve as a frame of reference and a resource for learning to read and write in school. This in-depth case study fits into the growing body of research that has explored the use of comics in learning to read and write in the classroom. The article details the innovative techniques that an ESL teacher, Ms. Stephens, uses in her first grade classroom to teach her students about new ways of reading and writing. The author gathered qualitative data during the academic year during weekly visits to Ms. Stephens’s classroom. The students in Ms. Stephens’s class were bilingual, with Spanish as their first language. As part of her lessons, Ms. Stephens read aloud from various popular comic books, in addition to using comics of her own creation. The article discusses in-depth the various ways Ms. Stephens incorporated the use of comics in her lessons to teach her students about story structure, narrative structure, dialogue, and critical media literacy. The author found that comics gave Ms. Stephens’s students interesting and motivating reading material that was able to effectively engage them in learning about different reading processes and assorted ways to write, think, and talk about texts.

Vassilikopoulou, M., Retalis, S., Nezi, M., & Boloudakis, M. (2011). Pilot use of digital educational comics in language teaching. *Educational Media International*, *48*(2), 115-126. doi:10.1080/09523987.2011.576522

This paper reports on a mixed-method case study that examines the use of Web comics in language teaching. The study was part of a research initiative, EduComics, which promotes the use of comics in education by providing software that allows students to become the authors of their own Web comics. Similar case studies were undertaken in countries across Europe through the initiative. The study participants were 24 students from a high school in Athens, Greece, ages 12-13, enrolled in a Modern Greek language class. The students, working collaboratively in pairs, created a Web comic related to the topic of diet and nutrition habits, using the software, ComicLab. A learning scenario with specific learning objectives was created, which dictated the goals of the course. Data was collected through anonymous surveys given to students before and after the course, as well as through the Web comics themselves. Data analysis of the surveys was done statistically. The Web comics produced by the students were assessed according to a qualitative scoring rubric to determine the level of a student’s performance at the different tasks outlined in the learning scenario. The researchers found that Web comics can be used in language teaching because students prefer them to other media. They also helped students learn linguistic skills, collaboration, and how to create multimodal texts. The researchers note that it is too early to draw conclusions about the educational value of comics, and that more research must be done to gather comparative data.

***Conclusion***

The body of work reported on in these annotations is vast and span time, locale, and population. Without any preplanning on my part, I seem to have stumbled across a body of research that seems to overwhelmingly suggest that comics and graphic novels can be used by students in the classroom. An overarching theme throughout these studies also suggests that the medium appears to be extremely approachable and engaging to students of all ages and backgrounds. Also introduced and discussed in many of these studies is a transformation of the very concept of literacy, from predominately based in reading and writing comprehension and proficiency, to a multifaceted understanding which includes comprehension of images and sound. Graphic novels and comics, with their melding of text and images, seem to be one of the best formats for students to become proficient in these multimodal literacies, required for our 21st century world. Though all of these researchers have made leaps and bounds in legitimizing the format, they all suggest and recommend that more research be done in this field. All of the research presented in these annotations will be utilized and synthesized in the formulation of my own research proposal in hopes of building upon and continuing this important field of work.

References

Hajdu, D. (2008). The ten-cent plague: The great comic-book scare and how it changed American. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Nyberg, A. K. (1998). *Seal of approval: The history of the comics* code. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.