Using Comic Books and Graphic Novels to Improve and Facilitate Community College Students' Literacy

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Abstract
This study evaluated how comic books and graphic novels enhanced the reading comprehension of the students enrolled in the intermediate reading course at Western Pennsylvania Community College. The three research questions are: (1) How can a developmental reading course make use of comics as a learning tool? (2) What impact does reading comics have on developmental students' Nelson Denny reading scores? (3) What impact does reading comics have on developmental students' attitudes toward reading?

The researcher conducted a qualitative research that examined the literacy backgrounds and attitudes towards reading comics of a sampling of eight reluctant readers in the Intermediate Reading courses from Fall 2009, Spring 2010, and Fall 2010. Data was collected from the participants' introduction and exit letters, literacy autobiographies, three reading reports, reflective journals of the students and teacher, and interviews. First, based on a thematic analysis of the participants' data, research question one revealed that comics helped them to visualize and understand the concepts of reading comprehension. When reading comics, the reader was able to bridge the gap between the verbal text and the visual text and was still able to utilize critical reading strategies on a consistent basis as one would do reading a verbal-only text. This act is referred to as "Closure" (McCloud 1993).

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Graphic novels are one text type that facilitates such literacy instruction, as the seamless relationship between words, image, and sound (in the form of sound effects) are inherent to the medium. Though there is a wealth of scholarship on the importance of how reading graphic novels facilitate multimodal literacy, there is less scholarship on how writing graphic novels facilitate multimodal literacy. Results indicated the use of graphic novels for improving students' reading comprehension as effective mainly for visual learners. It is recommended that textual novels be integrated in the school curriculum, and graphic novels used for specific occasions. View. Recently, support has grown for using comic books and graphic novels to enhance and support literacy instruction. Comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels can be used in ESL and EFL classrooms to encourage students to read. They can also form the basis of several classroom activities that will engage students and generate discussion. He recommends "A teacher-facilitated discussion of a 'buddy read,' where beginners work with native speakers or more advanced L2 learners to get the jokes, [which] can turn a comic that would have been an impenetrable and frustrating read if processed alone into something understandable, funny, and meaningful" (Cary, 2004, p. 69). Comic books and graphic novels call for "visual literacy," where students need to learn to recognize certain symbols and decode their meaning, much in the same way they do while reading texts.