Using Graphic Novels in the Classroom

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Abstract

This article aims to examine the use of graphic novels as a teaching tool. In order to provide the necessary background information, the historical evolution of graphic novels as well as the definition of the genre is presented. Graphic Novels with their raising popularity and many recognized benefits have been a fast growing genre in recent years. Research done by professionals in the field has proved that they may serve as powerful instructional tools in addition to their merits as works of literature. Particularly, in language classrooms graphic novels can be used to boost many different skills. Although there are still reservations and doubts as to their efficiency, the worth of graphic novels as a pedagogical tool has been proved by substantial evidence. In this article, different arguments concerning the use of graphic novels as teaching tools are discussed. Although the main focus is the use of these novels in language classrooms, the article also explores the possible and current use of graphic novels in other fields of study.

Keywords*: graphic novels, comics, language learning, language skills, reading, literature*

Introduction

The term graphic novel was first introduced in Eisner's *Contact with God* in 1978 (Bucher & Manning, 2004). Since then, it has been used to refer to longer, book-like comics. Eisner himself describes graphic novels as a sequential art and a method of expression (Eisner, 1985).They are also defined as juxtaposed pictorial and other images intended to convey information and create aesthetic effect on its reader (McCloud, 1993). According to Hayman &Pratt, comics is "a sequence of discrete, juxtaposed pictures that comprise a narrative, either in their own right or when combined with text" (Hayman & Pratt, 2005, p. 423). Today there is much controversy over not only the correct definition of graphic novel but about the term itself. The reason of the disagreement mainly arises from the fact that many works of non-fiction or collection of comic strip series are labeled as graphic novels, which actually contradicts with the term 'novel' (Gravett, 2005). In this respect, some prefer to describe it as a "more refined, big sibling," to comic books (Carter, 2007b, p. 49) while some others like comic illustrator Gene Yang (2008) view them as a "thick comic book" (p. 186).

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Even though in most cases the term comics and graphic novel are used interchangeably, comics can be regarded as an umbrella term covering the comic strip and the comic book as well as the graphic novel. A comic strip is the simplest form of comics with a short and straightforward narrative embedded in horizontal blocks of three to five panels. On the other hand, a comic book is lengthy compared to the comic strip. Ranging from twenty to forty pages in magazine form, a comic book tells either a whole story or appears in serial form with a continuity plot. What mainly distinguishes graphic novels from comic strip and comic book is their extended size, which enables them to compete with pure prose. Graphic novels deal with a wide range of genres including fiction, non-fiction, adventure, horror, fantasy, science fiction, history and mystery.

Regardless of their definition, graphic novels or comics with their potential and diversity as Aaron states "earned the right to be considered art on their own merits" (Aaron, 2007, p. 376). In recent years, the visual image has begun to play a very dominant role in communication, education and entertainment through the increasing popularity of television, films and the internet (Gillenwater, 2009). Graphic novels adapted into films and television series add to the appeal of graphic novels. Some noted movies based on graphic novels include *Spider-Man*, *Iron Man* and *Batman* (Behler, 2006). Such television series as *Smallville*, *The Walking Dead* and *The Human Target* are also adaptations of famous graphic novels.

The use of graphic novels in language classrooms has a short history, and therefore its literature is rather limited. Although there are not many comprehensive studies assessing their impact as teaching tools, the feedback from educators and scholars as to the use of graphic novels in language classrooms is a clear indication of their worth as a pedagogical tool. Many experts in the field suggest that they can be used in classrooms with many different purposes. As they have the potential to facilitate comprehension by combining images with text, they are proved to be helpful particularly for visual learners (Hassett & Schieble, 2007). Graphic novels can be a source of motivation and stimulation for learners with reading difficulties and with those who are reluctant to be involved in reading activities (Schwarz, 2002a). Thanks to their diverse nature ranging from cultural and social issues to historical and political ones, either fictional or non-fictional, graphic novels provide a rich pool of alternatives for the teacher and promise to absorb the interest of more learners (Ruggieri, 2002). As it is a fairly new field of study in educational settings and needs to be better understood both by educators and scholars interested in their use as teaching tools, this article will mainly focus on the benefits and risks of using graphic novels in the classroom in general with implications of its use as a language teaching tool in particular. To provide a more precise perspective for the prospective readers the definition of graphic novels as a genre will also be presented along with its historical evolution.

Historical Overview

Graphic Novels in America

Graphics have been an important medium of narration since antiquity. Means of graphic storytelling such as cave paintings and hieroglyphics have been used for centuries to communicate thoughts and ideas. Before the outset of Industrial Revolution, reading was an

exclusive practice of the privileged and wealthy. As for the humble working class, instead of written material, drawings, cartoons and visual representation of events and announcements were generally used as a simple way of conveying meaning or giving a message. However, with the technological breakthroughs of industrial age, one of the most important of which is the appearance of industrial printing press, many humor publications began to emerge often in the form of daily or weekly periodicals. These periodicals usually dealt with the social and political problems of the period. One of the first and finest examples of this new wave was *Poor Richard's Almanac* printed by Benjamin Franklin in 1732 in the form of satirical cartoons dealing with the causes of American Revolution. *The Adventures of Obadiah Oldbuck*, published in 1842 by Rodolphe Toffler, is regarded as the first noteworthy graphic novel in the United States. It was followed by *The Yellow Kid* by Richard Outcault, published in 1897 and became the first graphic novel to achieve commercial success.

In the early twentieth century, roughly from 1915s to mid-1930s, the collection of daily comic strips into softcover album form appeared as a successful way of promoting sales. After the First World War Pulp Magazine Novels featuring adventure stories based on war, westerns and science fiction started to become popular. In 1933, the first comic book, *New Funnies* was printed. In the same year, the first original comic book, *Detective Dan*, was published by a company entitled Humor Publications. In 1938, the publication of *Action Comics* and its star Superman marked the beginning of the comic's books golden age in America (Carter, 2007a). 1940s withnessed the rise of comics, which sold millions of copies and became popular among not only children and teenagers but also adults. These books featured characters with supernatural powers and mainly followed an adventure or action storyline. During this period, *Archie Comics* was created, featuring the fictional teenagers Archie Andrews, Betty Cooper, Veronica Lodge, Reggie Mantle and Jughead Jones. The Archie series generally dealt with adolescent issues (Gorman, 2003).

In the mid-1950s, the growing attraction that television created along with the concerns as to the content of comics aimed at children brought about a decline in comic book industry (Monnin, 2010, p. xvii). This was triggered by the publication of Seduction of the Innocent (1954) by Fredric Wertham. According the Wertham (1954) comics gave rise to sex, crime, homosexuality and juvenile delinquency (Haugen, 2005). In the same wave of criticism, some also claimed that comics led to reading disabilities among children (Carter, 2007a).

During 1960s publishers tried to prevent a further decline by featuring characters from television and westerns. However, the foundation of Comics Code Authority along with the ongoing governmental pressure on the comics industry seriously hampered the growth of comics. As it is the case for most of the attempts to put a ban on something, not only did many publishers refuse to use the seal of Comics Code but also more comics with inappropriate content began to appear on the market. Towards mid-1960s underground comix[1] emerged as a

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[1] Underground comix appeared as a reaction to the restrictions imposed by the Comics Code Authority in 1970s. Unlike mainstream comics they included forbidden content such as violence, sexuality and drug addiction.

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reaction to censorship and restrictions. They generally dealt with sex, race and drugs along with the social and political issues of the time such as civil rights movement and Vietnam War.

Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s the formation of the direct market for comics with the advent of shopping malls and mass merchandisers brought about regeneration in the comics industry. Underground comix along with the new face of distribution paved the way for today's graphic novel. The first creator owned and published graphic novel was *A Conract with God* (1978) by Will Eisner's, who made the term graphic novel widely popular (O'English, Matthews, and Lindsay, 2006). It was also during this period that graphic novels started to be used in the classrooms as an education tool. The success of Eisner's short story collection was important in that it proved that graphic novels have the potential for serious literature.

The second half of 1980s witnessed the rise and recognition of graphic novels by a wider audience. In 1986, the publication of Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize – winning novel, *Maus*, Alan Moore's *Watchmen* and Frank Miller's *The Dark Night Returns* brought about both critical acclaim and commercial success for not only its creators but the genre itself.

At the beginning of the 21st century, graphic novels experienced another major breakthrough particularly by the literary achievements of Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan* (2000) and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2003). On the other hand, American movie industry contributed to the growth of the genre by producing movies based on comics such as *Spiderman* and *X-Men*. As a result, comics or graphic novels have come to be appreciated and read by people in all age groups.

Graphic Novels in the World

Parallel to the growth of the industry in America, comics have been popular in different countries of the world since the early 20th century. For example album style graphic novels were popular in Europe throughout 1930s. In 1930, the first graphic album *Tintin in the Land of Soviets* created by a Belgian cartoonist called Georges Remi, writing under the pen name of Hergé, achieved a remarkable success. By 2007 it had been published in over 70 languages and sold more than 200 million copies. There are other successful and well-known graphic novel series created by Belgian artists such as *Asterix the Gaul*, the first volume of the Asterix comic strip series, by René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo, and *The Smurfs* by Pierre Culliford, known as Peyo. In Britain, the genre of graphic novels was led by Raymond Briggs, who became popular with his graphical novels *When the Wind Blows* (1982) which is about a nuclear attack on England, and *Ethel and Ernest* (1998) that depicts working class life in London during the period between 1930 and 1970.

Comics are popular all over the world. The Korean name their comics as Manhwa (mahn-hwah) and the comics in China are called manhua. They all have a tradition but among the many examples Manga stands out. In Japan during the late 1900s, it has emerged as a major type of graphic novel dealing with multiple genres. Manga, which has gradually come to mean Japanese comics as a whole, is read more than any other piece of literature in Japan (Allen & Ingulsrud, 2003). Some genres of Manga include shojo for girls, shonen for boys and kodomo for

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children. When they first appeared they were in the form of individual issues, which in time changed form and began to be published as album type comic books following the trends particularly in America. The emergence of Manga as a major graphic novel genre in America only dates back to late 1990s. One of the most interesting features of Manga that strictly distinguishes it from regular graphic novels is the fact that works of Manga are read from right to the left and back to the front. They are usually short and the Japanese reading Manga usually do not keep them but throw them away like magazines and newspapers (Schodt, 1996). On the other hand, like many graphic novels they are composed of images telling a story with a clear beginning and ending with minimal text in panel format (Schodt, 1996). Today, Manga has one of the biggest shares of graphic novel trade in America. There are even Manga classics, like Sonia Leong's *Romeo and Juliet*, part of a Manga Shakespeare series that illustrates the original text in Manga format (2007).

Graphic Novels Today

The increasing popularity of graphic novels has transformed it into a powerful medium of expression. Once regarded as only a means of amusement lacking literary insight and merit, graphic novels have evolved into a respected and well-regarded genre of literature which deserves a permanent place in the literary world. Today readers from all ages are attracted by the lure of graphic novels. Not only young but also adult readers have a significant role in the growth of comics industry. There are entire sections devoted to graphic novels in the chain bookstores and libraries worldwide. Many distinguished newspapers and popular internet sites such as New York Times, Amazon.com and School Library Journal popularize graphic novels by issuing reviews, comments, reader feedbacks and discussions about them. New York Times has been publishing reviews of graphic novels regularly for a long time now (Yang, 2008). Today graphic novel publishers are expanding at a much bigger rate compared to traditional publishers (Gorman, 2003).Graphic novels have become one of the major actors in the world of literature. The most common topics include superheroes, science fiction and fantasy, but there are also a good deal of graphic novels written on subjects like politics, history as well as more specific issues such as family matters, love affairs, disabilities and abuse (Gorman, 2002).

Today, graphic versions of many major literary works are available in both libraries and bookstores. One can find the graphic versions Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*, Eisner's (2001) *Moby Dick*, Kuper's graphic versions of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (2003) and Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (2005) as well as historical texts dealing with the American Revolution and the invention of electricity (Bickers, 2007). Graphic novels are also considered and appreciated as a form of visual art in view of their visual media content (Haugen, 2005). Today, of all the genres popular in America, graphic novels are experiencing the most remarkable growth (Gravett, 2005). Weiner (2002) notes that despite the fact that historically comics made their breakthrough in the mid-1980s with the publication of *Maus* (1986), Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer- winner Holocaust narrative, the real explosion of interest towards the genre of graphic novels in United States has come about with the new millennium. On the other hand, Grossman (2003), in *Time Magazine*, praises graphic novels saying that "some of the most

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interesting, daring, and most heartbreaking art being created right now, of both the visual and verbal varieties, is being published in graphic novels."

As their potential to cater for different learning styles is discovered, graphic novels is taking their place in classrooms as teaching tools. Research on their effective use in education is also gaining momentum. In most parts of the world they take their place in early reading experience of particularly the young learners. The results of an informal survey indicate that 75% percent of sixth grade students in America have read and enjoyed a graphic novel (Carter, 2007a). Similar to the popularity of comics in America in 1940s, graphic novels are enjoying a Golden Age in education today (Carter, 2007b, p. 1).

Today, educational settings are more challenging than ever before and need to be supported by every appropriate material available. Graphic novels in this sense have the potential to play a role on different levels. Carter (2007a) draws attention to the fact that non-text visual media is a far more convenient way of learning for today's generation. On account of their common features with graphic novels visual media devices like computers, video games and the internet have created a generation of students that are capable of learning through visual material much easier than the traditional texts (Beers et al., 2007).

The typical classroom reading material is no longer sufficient to meet the needs of current generation. Research shows that we need more innovative and creative practices that will facilitate learning and enable us to make teaching more efficient. Particularly in language classrooms where reading comprehension might become a major obstacle in the progress of our students, graphic novels are used not only as a teaching tool but also as a means of motivation. Through traditional texts the difficulty of learning a new language often becomes an even more painstaking burden for the students who have to associate concepts with the printed words. This is the main reason of rising popularity of graphical novels particularly for young learners in language classrooms.

The Case against Using Graphic Novels in the Classroom

The reception that graphic novels receive in educational circles is not always so bright. Graphic media has long been met with severe criticism and denial as a legitimate form of literature. That's why only in 1990s did universities and colleges begin offering courses and programs in "sequential art" (Sturm, 2002). Comics still meet with harsh criticism, the roots of which date back to the anti-comics campaign of the 1950s in the United States. During this period, comic books were burned and such popular characters of the genre as Batman and Robin were accused of the spread of homosexuality, Wonder Woman of being a bad example for girls and Superman with his supernatural power of promoting an unnatural sense of reality. All of these with many others were condemned as being a source of corruption for American youth. These attitudes formed a legacy that still harms the medium of graphic novels and comics today.

There are still many teachers and scholars who argue that graphic novels can only be regarded as a free time activity that must be kept out of the classroom. One of the most criticized aspects of graphic novels is that they involve substandard literature. Some educators believe

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that using these non-traditional texts accompanied by images as a teaching tool is no more than a waste of time and energy. The view that refuses to classify graphic novels as real books is a source of concern for both their writers and supporters who firmly believe that with their literary merits, depth and cultural importance graphic novels are no more or less real than any other reading material (Gravett, 2005). Another common point of criticism targets the content of graphic novels. They are accused of depicting and illustrating explicit scenes of violence and sex. In fact, many people associate the word graphic with pornography and view it as a source of danger for young learners. It is a fact that there are sexually explicit graphic novels, but their sexual content does not exceed those in many traditional texts (Rudiger & Schliesman, 2007). As it is the case for traditional word-only reading materials, teachers and educators should check the graphic novels which may potentially have adult content and if necessary ask for parental permission before taking the decision to use them in the classroom (Schwarz, 2002b). According to Gorman (2002) censorship of graphic novels is no more critical than other books in a public library that contain such adult topics as murder, violence and sex.

The use of graphic novels as a teaching tool are also claimed to bring about practical difficulties in the classroom. Some believe that they perform poorly as read-aloud books, which seems to restrict group reading activities. Individual reading pace is also seen as a factor affecting the use of graphic novels unfavorably (Hughes et al., 2011). Gender differences in dealing with graphic novels appear as another source of concern for teachers. According to a research conducted by Moeller (2011) graphic novels are more attractive for boys than girls. While girls tend to focus on character relationships, boys are more interested in action and adventure. These differing tendencies could make it for the teacher more difficult to attract the student's attention to a common point that needs to be taught to all students in the classroom. Furthermore, in his research, Moeller found out that students who were enthusiastic about the idea of reading a graphic novel at the initial stage usually did not believe that their performance with graphic novels will not get the praise as it is for traditional novels.

Probably the biggest challenge that graphic novels provide for teachers and educators is their integration into the curriculum. First, teachers themselves must be informed about the pros and cons of using a graphic novel in a specific educational setting. They need to have the necessary background knowledge that will enable them to assess the risks and help them to successfully integrate graphic novels into multiple aspects of their programming (Schwarz, 2006). As for the language classroom, the risks are even more threatening since in case of failure the students' progress in the target language will be seriously hampered. The reluctance of teachers to use graphic novels as teaching tools general arises from teachers' ignorance about the potential benefits of these materials, lack of teacher testimonials or lack of policy regarding the use of graphic novels as a pedagogical tool (Carter, 2008). All these factors should be taken into account and be eliminated by the teacher in order to make efficient use of graphic novels. Today most of the beliefs that cause many educators and teachers to dismiss graphic novels seem to be groundless misconceptions as the new generation has already been caught by the appeal of visual media through television, films, computers and the internet. Today, the learning styles are increasingly shaped by technology that deeply penetrated in our lives. The question is how this inevitable tendency can be transformed into a powerful teaching tool that will help learners

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from all age groups progress both in their mastery of a foreign language and for other educational purposes alike.

The Case for Using Graphic Novels in the Classroom

Despite some skeptical views and reservations towards the use of graphic novels in the classroom, they are proved to be effective as teaching tools through studies conducted by both educators and scholars. For example, today, it has often been suggested that students need to be taught through more real and meaningful language materials that will help them to break the chains of mechanical learning and act more efficiently in real-life settings. It is also supported by research that the effective use of graphic novels can boost the students' creativity and imagination. Using sequential art in the classroom with its motivating and appealing features can provide a path to the development of critical skills in language learning. By analyzing how graphic novels work as both a source for reading and analytical skills Brodsky (2009) states that "The beauty of graphic novels in the high-school classroom is that they truly offer a multilevel reading experience for all readers. Students not only have to read the words for the plot but the images for the plot, too. By having students read on the two levels of text and image, they are not only improving their basic reading ability, but also their analytical skills—by evaluating how the images work with the text". Students are surrounded with texts accompanied by images in every inch of their lives. Today, they are keen users of smart phones, ipads, computers and the internet, all of which have a role in reshaping the learning habits of our age. In this respect Burmark's projection at the beginning of this century seems to have already been a part of our lives. "The primary literacy of the 21st century will be visual: pictures, graphics, images of every kind... it's no longer enough to be able to read and write. Our students must learn to process both words and pictures. They must be able to move gracefully and fluently between text and images, between literal and figurative worlds" (Burmark , 2002 quoted in Biebrich, p. 27). As Monnin (2010) refers to the tendencies of new generation by saying that our visual world is the product of what many literacy educators consider a revolution in communication, second only to that ignited by the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century (p.118).

One of the most challenging aspects of teaching young learners is to find reading materials that appeal both to their level of proficiency and their interests. Complex text-alone reading materials often cause frustration and reluctance among the students who are already biased against reading activities. In this respect, graphic novels can function as a mediating tool without disrupting their language acquisition progress. Krashen (1993) notes that "perhaps the most powerful way of encouraging children to read is by exposing them to light reading, a kind of reading that schools pretend does not exist and a kind of reading that many children, for economic or ideological reasons, are deprived of. I suspect that light reading is the way that nearly all of us learned to read" (pp. 47- 48).

With their potential to offer a rich variety of genres graphic novels, like traditional ones, also play a major role in student's life-long reading (Crawford, 2004). The diversity of reading materials will create the chance for poor readers to develop the required skills to become rich and capable readers (McQuillan, 1998). Graphic novels by facilitating reading comprehension

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can act like a catalyzer that will help students deal with more complex reading materials more confidently. As Gorman (2002) notes even the novice reader can understand "60% to 70% of the story in a comic book just by looking at the pictures" (p. 11). Biebrich (2006) reports that adolescents who "choose materials that truly interest them and read for pleasure [benefit from] gains in vocabulary, reading fluency, a greater effort, motivation, and a more positive attitude towards reading. Allowing students to choose "light reading" materials like comics or magazines not only lead to increased reading skills but confidence as well. They also conclude that the increased confidence leads to tackling more complex texts. When students experience success, they are more likely to take risks" (p. 18). Through graphic novels, the hesitant or reluctant readers lacking the self-confidence and experience to cope with a text full of unknown vocabulary items are exposed to visual media that guide the students in their challenge to establish the correct links between images and abstract concepts. Graphic novels give the opportunity to our students to get engaged in complex works of literature that would otherwise be impossible for them to read with their current proficiency level. There are graphic versions of the works of Shakespeare, Franz Kafka and Jane Austen, whose text-only versions are almost impossible to cope with for particularly language learners at the beginner or elementary levels. By combining visual and verbal elements, graphic novels may serve as effective tools to stimulate interest in reluctant readers who are generally discouraged by their failure to cope with the difficulty of the traditional texts (Frey & Fisher, 2004; Thompson, 2007). Gorman (2003) asserts that "Unlike any preceding generation, [this generation of] readers is comfortable with non-text visual media and is therefore more at ease reading the combination of words and pictures utilized in the graphic-style format to tell a story " (p.9). However, the impression that graphic novels are only effective when used for reluctant readers is misleading. McTaggert (2008) summarizes the chain effect that graphic novels cause saying, "they enable the struggling reader, motivate the reluctant one, and challenge the high-level learner" (p. 32). It is obvious that the benefits of graphic novels for reluctant readers also play an important role in the progress of more proficient readers.

Graphic novels are regarded as great resources for authentic writing activities as well. Not only do they pave the way for creative writing assignments (Bucher & Manning, 2004) but also help develop writing skills that the students need to become better writers and consume the information wisely (Frey & Fisher, 2004). Graphic novels provide a means to improve non-verbal skills, learn new vocabulary items in a meaningful context and engage in more life-like dialogues. As a writing activity practiced through graphic novels, creating their own graphic novel gives students the chance to build their meaningful communications and relationships, which is far more interesting than writing a traditional composition (Morrison, et al., 2002).

Graphic novels rich in visual media enable students to develop more sophisticated cognitive strategies significant not only for the improvement of reading or writing skills but their overall language competence and intellectual development (Schwartz, 2002). Although it is supported by research that graphic novels help students to acquire metacognitive strategies for particularly reading and writing, the power of graphic novels as pedagogical tools is not confined to these two skills. They can also be used as valuable resources to improve such critical language skills as listening and speaking. Graphic novels help students develop critical thinking

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skills through encouraging discussion and offering diverse and thought-provoking subject matter. For instance, the graphic novel *Superman: Peace on Earth* (1999) by Alex Ross and Paul Dini focuses on global issues like world hunger and military rule. These topics can inspire class discussion or research (Schwarz, 2002a). Compared with the traditional texts, graphic novels are easier to understand, shorter and quicker to read. These are facilitating factors which promote critical thinking during classroom activities based on graphic novels. In a case example, a class of college students read a three page graphic novel by John Callahan that provoked discussions for two entire class periods (Versaci, 2001).

Research indicates that ability to visualize a concept is an important step that leads students to go further in the mastery of comprehension skills. On the other hand, failure to form mental pictures discourages the learners and causes frustration. According to Biebrich (2006) "Visualization impacts the motivation to read tremendously. Without making mental pictures a great deal of understanding is lost. Many reluctant or non-readers are unable to form metal pictures and need concrete images to aid their understanding. It is not astonishing that students who do not visualize are not drawn into the text in a meaningful way. They are not able to engage fully with the text and therefore are denied the very personal emotional responses that motivate many of us to read. We should not be surprised that they find it boring and don't want to read. But visualization is a skill that can be learned "(p. 17).

One of the other most striking features of graphic novels is their potential to appeal to various learning styles. It has long been discovered that multiple intelligences exist in educational settings and they should be identified to be able to design effective teaching programs. Being aware of the different learning styles of our students has a crucial role in choosing the right classroom materials. Graphic novels with their potential to cater for different learning styles offer many options for language courses as well as many other subjects. The most effective group likely to make use of graphic novels as a language teaching tool is the visual learners. Spatial intelligence which can be described as the ability to visualize with the mind's eye is particularly common among young learners. Graphic novels with their rich visual content appeal perfectly to the tendencies of this group of learners, who feel comfortable with images, shapes, colors and learn more readily through their combination with textual material. On the other hand, linguistic intelligence that refers to analytical and verbal skills can be a great asset and source of inspiration while dealing with graphic novels. Students with linguistic intelligence can find stimulating elements in a graphic novel that will encourage them to make inferences learn new vocabulary in a greater pace and improve their critical thinking skills. The third type of intelligence that graphic novels cater for is interpersonal intelligence which involves interaction with others. Students with interpersonal intelligence are sensitive to other people's thoughts, feeling and emotions. They are also effective team workers. The key word in interpersonal intelligence is communication, and graphic novels have the potential to prepare the necessary environment for effective communication through pair-work and group work activities. The dynamic dialogues accompanied by images are also a source of motivation and raw material for this group of students who are usually adept at reproduction activities.

Graphic novels also promote the realization of the connections between linguistic and social and cultural components of language learning. Language learning involves the mastery of not only linguistic skills but also learning social and cultural aspects of the target language. Cultural elements are integrally related to the language a community speaks. On the other hand, language is a major component of social events. Effective communication and interaction in a language entails contextual awareness as well as linguistic competence. By including graphic novels in the curriculum, it is possible to provide a more vivid insight to the use of foreign and second language. Through visual clues students can gain access to cultural and social settings in which the target language functions.

Finally, in order to make efficient use of all the benefits of graphic novels mentioned above and before taking the decision to use a graphic novel as a teaching tool in our language classroom, we must bear in mind that text literacy and visual literacy are different ways of dealing with the printed material. Thus, our students should first be informed about the codes and conventions of graphic novels. Codes can be defined as the signs used to convey meaning, while conventions are the usual and repeated ways of doing things. The first thing to do is to introduce our students to the reading convention of comics. The panel format read from left to right and top to bottom will not cause much trouble for our students who are supposed to follow a similar path with traditional texts. However, if we choose Manga as the reading material, our students faced with the unusual reading path from right to left and back to front might be puzzled. They must be instructed about the unfamiliar format beforehand so that they can cope with the unusual sequence. As for the codes of graphic novels, Students working in groups or pairs may be asked to identify the outstanding features of graphic novels. In this way, they can easily be familiar with the use of the major codes of graphic novels such as panels, gutters, narration boxes, speech and thought balloons, motion lines, and onomatopoeia.

Conclusion

With the new perspectives and opportunities they offer, graphic novels are transforming the ways we instruct students. They have the power to meet the needs of the new generation born and raised on visual media. By challenging the traditional teaching and learning methods graphic novels have already started to gain recognition in many fields of education. For the time being it is difficult to claim that educators can keep up with the change offered by this innovative medium. However, the ongoing trend indicates that soon they will become one of the most efficient teaching tools particularly in the field of language arts, social and historical studies and science.

Although most of the argument for the use of graphic novels seems to be based on its positive effect on reading comprehension skills, graphic novels have much more to offer teachers and students in the classroom. They provide an invaluable teaching tool for the improvement of writing, speaking and listening skills along with their potential to develop critical thinking skills. Graphic narratives have the potential to support students, whose lack of confidence and anxiety inhibit their progress in the target language. Graphic novels can arouse interest and thereby enhance the acquisition of the new language and encourages kids to

become "autonomous acquirers" (Krashen, 2004b). Teachers should conform to the principle that no text should be dismissed "without fully understanding or searching for its possibilities or merits" (Versaci, 2001). With their unique qualities that cater for the dominant learning habits and styles of our age there is no doubt that graphic novels deserves a chance in our classrooms for the good of our students. It is expected that this paper has shed some light on the merits and capabilities of graphic novels as a pedagogical tool for language teachers and the teachers of other subjects likely to benefit from graphic narratives. If you decide to give graphic novels a try in your classroom, lend an ear to the wisdom of Marjane Satrapi who proposes that graphic novels, "like anything new, you have to cultivate an interest. It's like opera. You have to go a couple of times to appreciate it" (quoted in Grevatt, 2005, p. 10).

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