

Migration Narratives: Using Graphic Novels in Teaching Social Studies

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A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTERS OF EDUCATION

In the Area of Language and Literacy

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Ramzi Darwazeh, 2016

Abstract

This project explores the potential role of using graphic novels to teach social studies. Chapter one outlines the inspiration and rationale behind investigating the teaching and learning opportunities that arise from using graphic novels as an educational resource in a secondary school social studies class. Chapter two begins with an overview of the theoretical frameworks that underpin the project including multiliteracies and disciplinary literacy. Furthermore, the chapter also reviews the relevant literature on graphic novels in terms of increased reading motivation and student engagement. The chapter concludes by examining how graphic novels can aid in developing disciplinary literacy including the teaching of contextualization, corroboration, and sourcing and historical agency. Chapter three describes a social studies unit on migration that involved students reading and composing graphic novels in a grade 9 classroom in Amman, Jordan. Students read various graphic novels that dealt with migration, visited a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan and composed their own graphic novels on migration. The chapter also outlines the successes and challenges experienced as a result of incorporating graphic novels into the unit. The project concludes with four research implications.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The purpose of this M.Ed. project is to investigate the potential role of using graphic novels as a resource in teaching social studies with a focus on teaching history. The desire to explore the benefit of utilizing graphic novels stems from my own passion for history and also from my desire to explore how new literacies and multiliteracies can help improve teaching and learning in my own classroom.

My journey begins with my passion for history. I can recall countless visits to museums, trips to archaeological sites in the Near East and Europe, and untold hours watching historical documentaries. My obsession extended beyond the above explorations as I filled my time reading history books, playing historical video games, such as *Age of Empires*, and most importantly reading *Asterix* as a teenager. Both formal and informal resources informed my understanding of the past and it is this inclination to consider and utilize informal resources, such as video games and comics, which inspired my M.Ed. project.

Reading primary sources and peer-reviewed articles dominated my experience as a history major at university, however, two courses in particular, *Indigenous Peoples of North America* and *Representations of the Holocaust*, would shift my thinking regarding what constitutes an appropriate text in history. *Louis Riel: A Comic-Strip Biography* by Chester Brown (2006) and *Maus* by Art Spiegelman (1986) shifted my thinking in two ways. First, I was reading graphic novels in a university setting and as such the professors had legitimized a text that I was used to reading at home. The

legitimization of graphic novels sparked my initial interest in the potential of using alternative texts in teaching history. Second, *Louis Riel* and *Maus* were not only used to inform our understanding of historical events but most importantly how history is constructed. Both texts allowed for a discussion of historical agency, perspective and reliability of sources. It became clear that graphic novels had merit as a teaching resource and were worthy of discussion in academic settings.

The topic at hand, which explores the role and benefits of graphic novels in the teaching of social studies, is significant especially in light of the increased focus on multiliteracies. The traditional definition of literacy, that which focuses exclusively on printed text, is outdated in the age of information technology. The New London Group (1996) put forth the notion of multiliteracies, which embraces the diversity of texts, both print and visual, and the increased cultural and linguistic diversity of our societies. The underlying assumption is that meanings are made through many representational and communicational resources and modes, including graphic novels (Jewitt, 2008). This study explores the potential benefits of using a multimodal text in the teaching of social studies and also attempts to examine how the legitimization of different texts, such as graphic novels, might enhance the teaching and learning in social studies.

Furthermore, the topic addresses the importance of visual literacy. The delivery of social science has long been dominated by traditional print texts, primarily textbooks (Chun, 2009; Cromer & Clark, 2007; Rhoades, Dallacqua, Kersten, Merry & Miller, 2015) thereby limiting the variety of resources and consequently the perspectives and voices that students are exposed to. Graphic novels, such as *Palestine* by Joe Sacco (2000) and

Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi (2003), are visually rich and multi-layered texts that require the reader to decode, interpret and synthesize the visual and the print text in order to comprehend the narrative, the historical context and the multiple perspectives. The inclusion of both print text and visual text invites the reader to assess the value and limitations of the sources used in the construction of the narrative (Cromer & Clark, 2007). Therefore, the use of graphic novels allows students to become aware of how authors construct historical accounts through the purposeful selection and organization of images.

Furthermore, the value of graphic novels extends beyond the importance of teaching visual literacy as graphic novels can assist in teaching disciplinary literacy. Graphic novels, such as, *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan (2006) and *American Born Chinese* by Gene Yang (2006), explore themes and events highly relevant in teaching social issues, including that of discrimination, violence, conflict and migration. In addition to tackling relevant issues and increasing engagement levels, graphic novels aid in developing the required disciplinary literacy skills (Boerman-Cornell, 2015; Clark, 2014), including contextualization, historical understanding and perspective. Therefore, graphic novels not only speak to the importance of incorporating multiliteracies and visual literacy into the classroom but also facilitate the development of foundational skills required to succeed in social studies.

The opportunities that arise by using graphic novels enrich my understanding and application of the Middle Years Programme (MYP)- Individuals and Societies (International Baccalaureate [IB], 2014) curriculum document. The curriculum calls for

enabling students to appreciate and understand human commonalities and diversity, the interactions between individuals and societies and to ensure students develop the required inquiry skills. Furthermore, it is an expectation that students read and view suitable texts, and recognize and evaluate multiple perspectives. The wide range of suitable graphic novels to include in a high school social studies curriculum means that it is possible to bring the aims of the Individuals and Societies curriculum to life by examining the diverse voices of historical actors, evaluating the value of perspectives included and examining the sources used within the novels such as the various primary sources including photos, letters, maps.

I want to answer the following question: What teaching and learning opportunities arise from using graphic novels as an educational resource in a secondary school social studies class?

In exploring the question I aim to investigate the role of graphic novels in motivating and engaging learners and how the use of graphic novels can help in the developing the required disciplinary literacy skills and understanding.

This project is divided into two components, the literature review and a reflection. In chapter two I examine the theoretical frameworks, including multiliteracies and disciplinary literacy, which shape my understanding of the benefits of using graphic novels as a teaching resource. Furthermore, the chapter also reviews the literature on graphic novels with regards to reading motivation and student engagement. Finally, the literature examines the use of graphic novels in teaching social studies including historical agency and developing disciplinary literacy skills.

Chapter Two

This chapter examines first the theoretical frameworks of multiliteracies and disciplinary literacy followed by a review of the literature on the potential of using graphic novels in teaching social studies. The review addresses how graphic novels help increase student motivation and engagement shown towards reading and themes relevant to social studies. Furthermore, the review outlines how graphic novels foster the attitudes needed for historical thinking and facilitate opportunities to explicitly teach discipline skills and strategies, including historical agency, contextualization, corroboration and sourcing. I evaluated the literature on its relevance to the role of graphic novels in teaching social studies at the middle or high school level. Studies focused on examining the benefits of graphic novels in an English Language Arts class or at the elementary level were omitted.

Theoretical Frameworks

Multiliteracies

The nature of communication has changed and is no longer dominated by the printed text. The change in the communicational landscape, partly due to improvements in information technology, has led to the increased cultural and linguistic diversity of texts. As a result, the definition of literacy has evolved from standard forms of written and spoken language to new forms that embrace the visual as a text (Jewitt 2008; Rhoades et al., 2015). Rhoades et al. (2015) define multimodal literacies as the consumption, production and learning across multiple media, modes and contexts, a definition that resonates with the views expressed by the New London Group (1996).

The New London Group posited that the new variety of communication mediums has resulted in increased cultural and linguistic diversity of texts and contexts. According to Jewitt (2015), the aim of multiliteracies is to “attend to the multiple and multimodal texts and wide range of literacy practices that students are engaged with” (p. 245). As such, we are no longer consuming a text written through one perspective that represents a single narrative. It is clear that our understanding of what constitutes a text must stretch to consider alternative formats, such as graphic novels, as visuals are increasingly important in communicating ideas (Rhoades et al., 2015). Graphic novels assume a privileged position in designing learning experiences that favor the use of multimodal texts.

At the heart of multiliteracies is the ability to comprehend visual text and accordingly teaching visual literacy skills is crucial in the 21st century. Jewitt (2015) maintains that meaning is constructed through multiple communicational resources including written and visual texts. Visual literacy refers to the skills, which enable the reader to understand and to use images as well as to think and learn in terms of images (Avgerinou, 2009); therefore, graphic novels allow students to develop their ability to read visuals and also to think and learn social studies in terms of images. Learning social studies through visuals enables students to picture the past, understand historical contexts and to form connections with the text and themes presented. Avgerinou (2009) lists eleven visual literacy competencies that enable the reader to read and interpret visual texts including the knowledge of visual vocabulary and conventions, critical viewing and visualization. Serafini (2011) further suggests the need to go beyond

the traditional strategies for comprehending texts, such as predicting, summarizing, asking questions, and to consider art theory, grammar of visual design and media literacy when interpreting and analyzing multimodal texts. Furthermore, Serafini (2011) highlights that students do not possess the needed visual literacy skills and as such explicit instruction needs to be weaved into the curriculum. The visual literacy competencies suggested by Avgerinou (2009) and Serafini (2011) reflect the importance of teaching students to consider the visual content of the images and the design of the multimodal text as that will allow them to better interpret and critique texts. The introduction of graphic novels does not automatically allow for meaningful teaching and learning opportunities but rather scaffolding is crucial to allow students to develop the required multimodal and visual literacy skills. Finally, Rhoades et al. (2015) propose that visual literacy enhances skills crucial in developing historical thinking, including the ability to form multiple interpretations and to engage in active authentic inquiry.

The New London Group's proposed pedagogy of multiliteracies embraces metalanguages. Metalanguage can be defined as a language for talking about language, images, texts and meaning making interactions (New London Group, 1996). Therefore, when considering multiliteracies it is important to recognize the diversity of metalanguages needed in order to navigate the various literacy students will encounter. For instance, reading and producing graphic novels require the understanding of a certain metalanguages that allows for students' understanding of visual meaning, such as color and perspective, and linguistic meaning, such as vocabulary and metaphor. Both visual and linguistic meaning constitute the required visual and linguistic design

elements needed to read and produce graphic novels. Therefore, reading and producing graphic novels requires the exposure to a certain metalanguage that needs to be explicitly taught to students. As such, the New London Group (1996) articulates the need for explicit instruction and in this case the need to teach the conventions of visual literacy and graphic novels, such as perspective, framing, color and by doing so allowing for meaningful and authentic discussions and analysis of themes that arise in the various graphic novels. Furthermore, the New London Group emphasizes the need for transformative practice which allows the students to apply their understanding of the metalanguage and in this case the ability to produce their own graphic novel depicting the experiences of migrants. It is clear that considering metalanguages allows for rich and meaningful learning opportunities that embrace multimodal texts.

Furthermore, the New London Group emphasizes the importance of multiliteracies in calling for a social and culturally responsive curriculum. A social and culturally responsive curriculum not only questions the nature of texts used in class but also emphasizes critical literacy as a crucial teaching pedagogy (Jewitt, 2015; New London Group, 1996). Therefore, multiliteracies challenge the traditional relationship between teacher and student by positioning the students' experiences, interests and existing discourse at the heart of the learning experience. According to Jewitt (2015), the aim of multiliteracies is to situate both the student and teacher as "active participants in social change, the active designers of social futures" (p. 245) and by doing so multiliteracies allows for a curriculum that engages with student values, identity and

strengths. The next section examines disciplinary literacy and importance of specialized literacy instruction in the content areas.

Disciplinary Literacy

Disciplinary literacy also frames the inquiry into the use of graphic novels in teaching social studies. The literacy skills required in disciplines, such as social studies, differ from the skills required in a language arts class. Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) outline the progression of literacy in a K-12 context whereby learners progress from developing basic literacy skills, to intermediate generic literacy skills and finally specializing in specific skills needed in the respective content areas. A study by Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) examined how disciplinary experts, such as chemists, mathematicians and historians, read and write in their own disciplines. The participants were asked to explain the reading and writing processes in their own disciplines and to reflect on the use of new literacy strategies. The results show that the literacy demands in each content area is unique and requires specialized instruction. For instance, their interview with two historians reveals that reading in history requires a careful consideration of the author's background and the ability to evaluate texts in terms of value and limitation in developing an understanding of the topic under study. Furthermore, according to Wineburg, Martin & Monte-Sano (2013) reading like a historian requires developing historical understanding by being able to contextualize, corroborate and source across multiple texts. Moreover, Clark (2014) emphasizes the importance of historical agency, the capacity to understand the relationship between structural forces and an individual's action, as a skill crucial in learning history. By

applying these disciplinary based processes, students come to understand that history, as a discipline, is an account of past events and as such students need to critique and evaluate texts and wrestle with the bias and multiple perspective inherent in history texts.

The interaction between the image and text is crucial in the construction of meaning while reading a graphic novel. The reader must engage with both the visual and the text. Graphic novels allow for meaningful engagement with visual sources that extend understanding as many historical non-fiction graphic novels incorporate maps, charts, graphs and primary sources within the narrative. Therefore, by introducing a multimodal text, such as, graphic novels, teachers can potentially assist with increasing student motivation, engaging students with topics present in social studies curriculum and assist in teaching disciplinary literacy skills.

Review of the Literature

In this section I review the literature regarding best practices in social studies, and graphic novels specifically in teaching social studies. The review of the literature on best practices in social studies focuses on the need to develop meaningful learning opportunities, the importance of disciplinary and visual literacy and the problems associated with using traditional texts. The review of literature on graphic novels examines how graphic novels can increase reading motivation and student motivation. Furthermore, the review also focuses on the role of graphic novels in teaching historiography, historical agency and developing disciplinary literacy skills.

Best practices in social studies

Our understanding of the potential of graphic novels in teaching social studies must be understood in the context of what constitutes powerful teaching and learning in this discipline.

Meaningful learning opportunities. A position statement by the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS), entitled *A Vision of Powerful Teaching and Learning in the Social Studies* (2016) emphasizes that a strong social studies curriculum is meaningful, integrative, challenging and active. As such, the curriculum should allow students to engage with significant ideas, encourage them to connect content with prior learning and current events, challenge them to think critically and creatively and invite them to apply their understanding to authentic situations.

Visual and disciplinary literacy. A curriculum that is meaningful and authentic must incorporate linguistically and culturally diverse texts and allow for the development of the required visual literacy and disciplinary literacy skills. As such, the NCSS (2016) calls for the development of necessary skills, including discipline-based literacy skills and communication skills. Sperry and Baker (2016) in a NCSS position statement entitled *Media Literacy* articulated the importance of media literacy in the social studies. Sperry and Baker suggested that the critical interpretation of content rich media texts allows students to ask questions, apply historical analysis, identify perspectives, assess credibility of sources and draw logical conclusions. As such, social studies should provide vibrant and rich learning opportunities for students to explore the complexity of the subject.

Problems with traditional texts. Finally, effective teaching and learning in the social studies should avoid relying on a textbook. Misco (2014) argues that the overuse of textbooks in teaching social studies is problematic as there is a reliance on anonymous third-person accounts, which results in estrangement from the discipline. Over-reliance on the textbook provides a selective, biased and deliberately structured curriculum that positions students to think in a particular manner and to adopt a limited worldview void of alternative perspectives and a narrow understanding of historical events (Chun, 2009; Cromer & Clark, 2007; Misco, 2014). Furthermore, textbooks present a specific historical narrative based on the author's intentions and interpretations which is problematic considering that many students believe that knowledge in textbooks is contested and verifiable truth (Misco, 2014). As such, textbooks reinforce dominant ideologies while silencing non-dominant voices. Therefore, it is crucial to consider multiliteracies when teaching social studies as incorporating a wide range of texts exposes students to alternative perspectives and voices.

Graphic Novels

This project explores the potential role of graphic novels in teaching social studies. It is important to clearly define what the term graphic novel means especially when it is often confused with comic books. Graphic novels are often considered to be "insubstantial and disreputable" (Hajdu, 2004, as cited in Cromer & Clark, 2007, p. 577) when compared to other literacy forms. In addition, they are often viewed as a more substantial version of comics. Graphic novels, like comics, are a hybrid text that

combines both visual and print texts. However, the differences between graphic novels and comics can be found in the subject matter and length and complexity of the narrative. Stephen Tabachnick provides the following definition:

The graphic novel is an extended comic book that treats nonfictional as well as fictional plots and themes with the depth and subtlety that we have to expect of traditional novels and non-fictional texts (as cited in Clark & Camicia, 2013, p. 2).

When considering incorporating graphic novels into teaching and learning social studies, it is important to consider graphic novels that contain an in-depth and well-developed plot, and rich and relevant themes.

Connors (2012, 2013) highlights that reading multimodal texts, such as graphic novels, requires considerable knowledge and skill. Reading graphic novels, such as *Persepolis* (Satrapi, 2003) and *Palestine* (Sacco, 2000), exposes the reader to emotionally charged narratives that touch on rich and relevant themes and also requires the reader to utilize a diverse range of strategies in order to comprehend the narrative. Connors (2012) examined how readers drew on a range of semiotic resources as they read various graphic novels. The study involved six students from an affluent high school in the American Midwest and all participants were asked to read a graphic novel and to complete a reading survey and participate in a series of interviews and discussions. The results reveal that students were able to express their understanding and application of visual and linguistic design by examining how the authors used perspective, facial expressions, color, value, layout, word choice to construct meaning. Connors reveals that readers drew on their understanding of the various visual and linguistic design elements to understand the narrative and the themes. It is clear that there is a need to

explicitly teach the elements of visual literacy (Avgerinou, 2009; Connors, 2012, 2013; Serafini, 2011) as increased confidence and mastery of visual literacy competencies allows for increased understanding of the text and the themes explored in the narrative. As such, it is crucial to not only teach disciplinary literacy skills required in the social science but to also ensure that students are able to decipher and interpret the visuals in graphic novels.

The next section examines how graphic novels can help improve reading motivation and student engagement and as such positioning graphic novels as a legitimate text in classrooms.

Reading Motivation. A reading gap exists between at home and at school literacy practices. The research indicates that students who are resistant to reading in school are nonetheless readers outside of school (Lenters 2006). Reluctance extends to the content area as textbooks are often viewed as dull, broad and difficult to read (Chun, 2009; Misco, 2014). Lenters (2006) highlights that many students who appear to be reluctant readers at school value reading outside of school. Alvermann (2001) suggests that schools create reluctant readers by privileging certain texts and promoting normative ways of reading texts. In fact, schools place greater emphasis on the ability of students to decode, comprehend and summarize large chunks of informational texts. The favoring of certain texts, in this case the overreliance on textbooks in teaching social studies (Cromer & Clark, 2007; Misco, 2014), might be detrimental to some students and result in many students withdrawing from in-school reading and appear to struggle in the content areas.

Graphic novels can act as a bridge between at home and at school literacies and help re-engage students with social studies. Alvermann (2001) articulates the need to legitimize all forms of reading and to show that school literacy is not radically different from non-school literacy. The research indicates that graphic novels are popular with adolescents, including both boys and girls (Edwards, 2009; Moeller, 2011). Research by Edwards (2009) reveals the relationship between graphic novels and motivation as the study of 148 seventh graders shows remarkable increase in student motivation to read. Participants completed a pre and post reading Motivation Toward Reading Questionnaire (MTRQ) and were divided into three treatment groups and one comparison group. Group one was given access to graphic novels and free voluntary reading time (FVR), group two was only given FVR, and group three was only given access to graphic novels while group 4 was the comparison group. The findings, a combination of the MTRQ results, anecdotal observations and discussions, suggest that reading graphic novels and having FVR could affect the intrinsic motivation of seventh graders. Students in both group one and two experienced an increase in intrinsic motivation to read, a desire to continue reading after the study and improved comprehension and vocabulary. Despite the promising results, the study does not examine whether students continued to be motivated to read for the remainder of the year nor does it shed light on whether the increased motivation extends to reading graphic novels as a legitimized in-school text.

Engaging Students. The literature supports the role of graphic novels in engaging students. It is worthwhile to consider Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory as a

means to understand how graphic novels increase reading engagement. Rosenblatt (1978) differentiates between aesthetic and efferent reading. An aesthetic stance implies that the reader focuses on the experience of reading a text, specifically the emotional response to the ideas, characters, situations and scenes presented in the narrative. As such, emphasis on aesthetic reading might allow for increased student engagement and motivation towards reading. Visual texts, such as graphic novels, can provide increased opportunities for aesthetic reading, as the combination of both print and visual text is appealing to adolescent readers.

Edwards' (2009) study establishes the link between graphic novels and reading motivation and suggests that graphic novels are positively received amongst students, a finding supported by Chun (2009), Hammond (2012) and Hughes, King, Perkins & Fuke (2011). Chun's (2009) research into the use of *Maus* (Spiegelman, 1986) with English Language Learners (ELL) at the secondary level reveals that the text was enthusiastically accepted by the students as the combination of visuals and text made it easier to comprehend the content and many reported being "turned on" by history (p. 151). Similarly, Hammond (2012) through the use of *American Born Chinese* by Gene Wang (2007) demonstrates the potential of graphic novels in engaging students. The study, involving 23 senior political science students at a Midwestern US high school, reveals that despite initial reluctance with using a graphic novel, a finding support by Chun (2007), Moeller (2011) and Rhoades et al. (2015), the participants altered their perception of the value graphic novels by realizing that as a text it provided them with the freedom to form their own interpretations and also widened the creative

possibilities within own narratives when tasked with designing their own panels. Furthermore, Hughes et al. (2011) validate the beneficial role of graphic novels in engaging students through two case studies conducted with twelve at-risk adolescents in two alternative education programs in Toronto, Canada. The students were exposed to a variety of graphic novels, however the students particularly enjoyed graphic novels that explored “coming of age” issues. The students were all required to read one graphic novel, take part in group and class discussions; complete a few writing prompts and produce their own short graphic novel. The findings revealed that students completed all the assignments, borrowed graphic novels to read at home and produced their own powerful panels. The research confirms the value of graphic novels as a teaching resource.

The research reveals that graphic novels have the potential to engage learners whether by increasing reading motivation, improvement in comprehension or increased engagement with subject matter. However, the findings by Chun (2009) and Hughes et al. (2011) are limited to their participants being English Language Learners or struggling students. Furthermore, the research does not address what happens after increases in motivation in terms of increased achievement or motivation shown towards other subjects that make use of graphic novels as a text.

Additional research is needed to challenge the premise (Chun, 2009; Hughes et al., 2011; Park, 2016) that graphic novels are only suited to teaching struggling or reluctant students or English Language Learners. Both Hammond (2012) and Connors (2012) examine how proficient readers construct meaning when reading graphic novels,

however the research does not shed light on student motivation or the use of graphic novels in the content areas. Nonetheless, the literature establishes that graphic novels are well received amongst students at the middle and high school level and can help increase motivation shown towards reading and the subject.

Using Graphic Novels to Teach Social Studies

Graphic novels can allow for meaningful and powerful teaching in the social studies by challenging the dominant views presented in textbooks. By weaving in multiple voices into the narrative and incorporating primary and secondary sources into the narrative, graphic novels can help students develop a comprehensive understanding of the relevant social studies concepts and content. Edward Said best captures the potential of graphic novels in capturing the complexity and diversity of voices in historical issues in his forward to Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (2002):

A political and aesthetic work of extraordinary originality, quite unlike any other in the long, often turgid and hopelessly twisted debates that have occupied Palestinians, Israelis and their respective supports. With the exception of one or two novelists and poets, no one has ever rendered this terrible state of affairs better than Joe Sacco. (p. iii)

If graphic novels, such as *Palestine*, can capture the complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict then it is vital to explore the role of graphic novels in teaching social studies.

Understanding historiography. Studying history requires students to recognize that history involves evaluating the credibility of the accounts of the past as presented by historians by recognizing and evaluating the perspectives and credibility of the author. Graphic novels, due to the nature of the format, allows for a much richer and a more insightful understanding of the past and how historical narratives are constructed.

Cromer and Clark (2007) highlight the role of graphic novels in fostering an appreciation that history is an interpretation of past events. First, the reader must interact with both the text and the visual in order to comprehend the narrative. Second, the reader is free to read the panels in a range of ways and move beyond the conventional linear reading of texts. Third, the reader must also understand what is happening in and between the sequences of images by understanding what is happening in the gutters, the space between framed panels. Therefore, no single correct interpretation of the narrative emerges leaving the reader questioning the credibility of the presented narrative. By doing so graphic novels steer the reader towards an increased appreciation of uncertainty, open-endedness and a greater tolerance of ambiguity (Cromer & Clark, 2007). It is by developing such attitudes that students come to understand that there is no correct interpretation of history.

Reading graphic novels aids in assisting students' understanding of how knowledge is constructed in history (Clark, 2014; Cromer and Clark, 2007). Graphic novels by nature are visually rich and multilayered texts and are able to reflect the complex reality of historical events. Cromer and Clark (2007) suggest that by utilizing a visual text in teaching history, students, through their use of visual literacy skills, must evaluate the visuals in terms of origin and value and as such are well placed to evaluate the narrative constructed by the author. As a result, students come to realize that historical graphic novels, similar to other history texts, involve the selection, simplification and interpretation of facts; however, graphic novels are more accessible to the reader due to the use of visuals to assist with comprehension and evaluation of

the facts presented. Teaching history has generally privileged a text that delivers a single narrative whereas graphic novels allow students to develop multiple understandings of historical events through the richness of the visuals, which allows the reader to connect with characters and their context.

History as an account of the past. History students need to recognize that history texts are human accounts of the past. Park (2016) investigates how the use of graphic novels can help students approach history as an account rather than as an event. The study, based on an after-school literacy program for immigrant girls in an urban high school in the US Northeast, examined how seven girls responded to six graphic novels, two of which, Nakazawa's *Barefoot Gen* (2004) and Vaughan's *Pride of Baghdad* (2006), were historical graphic novels. The data, a result of a targeted analysis of the transcripts of the class discussion, reveals that the girls developed historical thinking skills, questioning strategies and the ability to evaluate the reliability of sources and the credibility of the author. For instance, in their discussion of *Barefoot Gen* (2004), an account of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima, the participants grappled with determining whether the author's Japanese background played a role in the negative depiction of the American scientists. The study concluded that due to the use of visuals and reading a text written by a identifiable author, unlike textbooks, allowed the students to strengthen the writer-reader-text relationship, which enhanced their understanding and their affective engagement. Although Park's research suggests that graphic novels can assist students to question historical narratives, further research is needed to determine if such understanding and engagement manifests itself in a regular

classroom setting and whether there is an increase in student achievement as a result of improved historical understanding.

Understanding complex themes. Furthermore, the literature reflects the role of graphic novels in allowing students to better understanding complex themes addressed in social studies. Rhoades et al. (2015) investigated the usefulness of graphic novels as an academic text. The study, based on Shaun Tan's novel *The Arrival* (2006), involved 100 participants across four different age groups ranging from elementary school to college level. The study made use of different instructional methods including dramatic inquiry, after-school reading groups, and a long-term unit on migration and lectures and group discussions. The results reveal that students were eager, after an initial hesitation, to engage with the text. As Rhoades et al. suggest the narrowed distance between the reader and the characters' experience enabled the students to develop empathy and a better understanding of the social, economic and political contexts of migration. Furthermore, due to the wordless nature of the text and the subsequent multiple interpretations of the narrative, Rhoades et al. highlight that students were more inclined to understand the diversity and complexity of the migrant experience. Although the results indicate the potential role of graphic novels in allowing students to form multiple interpretations of events and an appreciation of the complexity and diversity of historical accounts, further research is needed to examine if such opportunities can be replicated using other texts. Moreover, research into using graphic novels in combination with other texts, such as a social studies textbook, might speak to the

increased ability of students to form multiple and alternative interpretations of events and themes as they start comparing and contrasting accounts.

Teaching historical agency through graphic novels. Central to understanding history is historical agency, a tool necessary to understand how past social, economic and political structures shape the actions of historical figures. Clark (2014) highlights how graphic novels, unlike traditional texts, visually construct the social, economic and political contexts of historical actors. As a result of using both primary and secondary sources in visually constructing the contexts of historical actors, graphic novels bring to life the actions of the actors in ways that more accessible to the reader's prior knowledge. In comparison, traditional texts tend to rely on the use of a passive voice and gloss over the actions of historical figures and the circumstances that shaped their decisions (Clark & Camicia, 2014; Cromer & Clark, 2007). As a result, social changes seem inevitable and the voices of historical actors, particularly the marginalized, such as women and minority groups, are silenced. The visual richness of graphic novels and the shift from third person to first person point of view allows the reader to visualize and connect with the context of the actors and understand how structural forces influenced the choices of individuals.

In *Teaching Historical Agency: Explicitly connecting Past and Present with Graphic Novels*, Clark (2014) examines how graphic novels can help teach historical agency. This action research study was undertaken in an undergraduate social studies methods course at a large Midwestern US university and involved 19 pre-service teachers. Participants were asked to read one historical graphic novel and participate in

class and group discussions. The data, a combination of audio recordings of literature group discussions, post it notes and individual interviews, reveals that graphic novels engaged the pre-service teachers in thinking about historical agency. For instance, one group read *Anne Frank* (Jacobson, 2010) and examined the political and economic contexts that limited the options available to the Franks as they contemplated leaving from Germany. The participants discussed the importance of historical hindsight in shaping their understanding and how the graphic novel enabled them to better understand the limited agency available to the Franks due to the rise of Nazism. Clark concludes that the use of graphic novels enabled the participants to better understand the reasons behind choices of historical actors and helped the participants understand events and change are not inevitable but a result of the agency available to actors at the time. The study established that the format of graphic novels allows the reader to focus on the interactions of historical agents within their context and better understand the actions of historical actors and the consequences of those actions.

Questioning and determining agency. A study by Clark and Camicia (2014) identifies the unease amongst readers in accepting the extent of agency depicted in certain graphic novels. The case study conducted over a three-week period at a public research university in the Western United States involved 21 pre-service teachers reading a graphic novel from a selection of six titles. The participants were asked to add 3-5 frames to any portion of the narrative and re-narrate 3-5 frames of their graphic novels and reflect and justify their additions and re-narrations. The study involved collecting position statements, illustrations and narrations, written reflections and

interviews. The study confirms Clark's (2014) study that the graphic novel enables the reader to visualize and understand the choices of historical actors. However, the participants in this study did not accept the author's interpretation of events and actors. Clark and Camicia underscore how the participants thought that too much agency was assigned to some actors and too little to others. For example, one participant read *The United States Constitution: A Graphic Adaptation* (Hennessey, 2008) and was critical of the author's decision to overly credit the role of the US Congress in pushing for equal rights for African-Americans. The participant felt that the author's decision to highlight the role of the US Congress downplayed the role of African-American Civil Rights Movement and the hard work of civil right activists. The participant's re-narrations portrayed how African-Americans did not enjoy equal rights until the hard work of the civil rights activists during the 1960s.

Such a critical examination of the text highlights the potential of graphic novels in teaching historical agency and equipping the students with the skills needed to question and evaluate sources and the credibility of authors. The research on historical agency reveals that graphic novels can assist students in connecting with historical topics and improve their understanding of historical agency. However, the research was limited to pre-service teachers and further inquiry is needed to determine if such learning can be replicated at the secondary level, especially considering the diversity of abilities and interests in high school social studies classes.

Developing historical thinking skills. In addition to supporting students develop an understanding of historical agency; graphic novels can assist in teaching historical

reading and thinking skills. Students need the ability to integrate, complete and challenge knowledge presented through multiple historical documents. Wineburg et al. (2013) identified three skills crucial to historical understanding including being able to contextualize, corroborate and source across multiple texts. Contextualization refers to the reader's ability to place historical actors and actions in time and space, while corroboration occurs when the reader is able to employ inter-textual links to check details in accounts against each other and sourcing involves understanding the source in terms of opinions, positioning and context of the author. Boerman-Cornell's research (2015) examines if the use of visuals and text in graphic novel can support the teaching of contextualization, corroboration and source. The research is premised on that graphic novels combine both text and visuals, including charts, maps and photographs, within the narrative and in doing so ensure that visuals are crucial to understanding the narrative as opposed to the standalone nature of visuals, such as sidebars, in history textbooks.

The study examined ways in which graphic novels can provide unique contexts and additional ways of questioning the text. The study involved the content analysis of twenty non-fiction graphic novels published between 1985 and 2012 and included a range of non-fiction texts including biographies, reportages, primary source accounts, historical summaries, adaptation of governments reports and historical narratives. The mixed method study examined the frequency of opportunities that arose for contextualization, corroboration and sourcing while also conducting a close reading of eight graphic novels to determine the relevance and value of the opportunities. The

results indicate that graphic novels offer opportunities for students to engage with all three skills. For instance, *Palestine* by Joe Sacco (2001) offers 714 opportunities for contextualization, 9 opportunities for sourcing and 34 opportunities for corroboration. More specifically only 11 of the 20 texts allow students to engage with all three skills.

Furthermore, the data shows that graphic novels offer the most opportunity for contextualization with a total of 7,363 opportunities across all twenty titles compared to 467 opportunities and 130 opportunities for sourcing and corroboration respectively. The results also suggest that graphic novels allow the reader to engage with all five subcategories of contextualization including geographic, temporal, social, political and economic contexts.

Contextualization, corroboration and sourcing in Palestine. A close examination of *Palestine* (Sacco, 2001) outlines the usefulness of the opportunities identified in teaching the three skills.

According to Boerman-Cornell (2012), Sacco (2001) relies on the print text and visual text when conveying context in *Palestine*. The use of bird's eye view, as seen on pages 146-147, assists the reader in understanding the social and economic context of Palestinians in the West Bank. The Palestinian neighborhood, as depicted on pages 146-147, shows us abandoned cars, flooding, piles of trash, corrugated roofs, blockades and limited green spaces for children to play. Furthermore, Sacco also uses embedded maps to provide geographic context. The maps not only help familiarize the reader with the geography of Palestine and the region but also most importantly are a crucial component of the narrative in that the narrative continues from previous panels

through the map panel and onto the following panels. As such, the reader must engage with both the print text and visual text in order to understand the narrative thereby increasing the likelihood of the reader reading and understanding maps, a crucial skill in social studies.

In terms of sourcing, Sacco often indicates the professions of the characters and as such the reader is able to draw conclusions on the reliability of the perspectives shared. For instance, on page 34, Sacco identifies his source as a medical technician and by doing so positions the witness as a reliable source when speaking of the injuries sustained by Palestinian civilians (Boerman-Cornell, 2012, p. 83). Furthermore, in terms of corroboration, Sacco provides multiple and often conflicting versions of events such as the different views amongst community members regarding the Israeli destruction of an olive grove (Boerman-Cornell, 2012, p. 84). The qualitative analysis highlights that the opportunities for contextualization, sourcing and corroborating are robust and meaningful and do indeed allow students to hone the skills needed for historical understanding.

Although Boerman-Cornell's research speaks to the value of using graphic novels in teaching history, additional research is needed. First, it is important to determine how to translate increased student engagement as a result of using graphic novels, as discussed earlier, into practical use of graphic novels in teaching disciplinary strategies. As such, there is a need to examine how to teach discipline literacy skills through graphic novels and also examine how students can then apply their new disciplinary literacy skills while reading other texts.

Summary

The research presents a strong case for the potential of graphic novels in providing meaningful teaching and learning opportunities in the social studies. First, graphic novels can help increase reading motivation and student engagement (Chun, 2009; Edwards, 2009; Hughes et al. 2011). Second, there is considerable evidence that graphic novels can assist in teaching disciplinary skills, such as historical agency, contextualization, corroboration and sourcing, and as such graphic novels are suitable texts to use to teach the skills needed in the discipline (Boerman-Cornell, 2013, 2015; Clark, 2014; Clark & Camicia, 2013; Cromer & Clark, 2007; Park, 2016; Rhoades et al. 2015). Finally based on the literature examined, there is merit in using graphic novels to supplement the teaching of social studies and most importantly evidence is emerging that graphic novels can be central to the teaching of the specialized disciplinary skills needed to develop in-depth disciplinary understanding and knowledge.

In chapter three I describe the design and implementation of a grade 9 social studies unit on migration. More specifically, I examine how the literature inspired my decision to have my students read and compose graphic novels in order to better understanding the complexity of migration.

Chapter 3: Reflection on Classroom Practice

My interest in examining the role of graphic novels in teaching social studies has led me to develop a unit that involved both reading and composing graphic novels. The unit entitled “Migration Narratives” invites all Grade 9 students to examine why individuals migrate as part of their MYP Individuals and Societies course.

Rationale

The purpose of the unit is to allow students to understand why individuals migrate and also to examine the nature of the journey itself. The aim of the unit was to go beyond a factual examination of migration by constructing multiple understandings and conclusions regarding why people migrate and the nature of their journey. I wanted students to grapple with the complexity and diversity of the migrant experience and graphic novels allowed for such a learning opportunity.

There are three components to the unit: reading graphic novels to better understand migration, visiting a Palestinian refugee camp in northern Jordan to facilitate students’ understanding of the role of the United Nations in assisting Palestinian refugees in Jordan and finally applying their knowledge and skills by composing a graphic novels that capture the experiences of migrants.

Context

I am currently teaching at an independent school in Amman, Jordan. The school is composed of mostly Jordanian students with a few international students from Syria, the United States and Norway. Many of the Jordanian students are of Palestinian

heritage as their families migrated in 1948 or 1967 to Jordan as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. Furthermore, a small minority of students of Syrian background are recent arrivals in Jordan as their families relocated from Syria to Jordan as a result of the Syrian conflict.

At the secondary level, the school has adopted the International Baccalaureate's Middle Years Programme (MYP) and Diploma Programme (DP). I currently teach both programmes, specifically MYP Individuals and Societies and DP Global Politics. I draw heavily on local and regional examples and my units are often based on issues relevant to my students including migration, regional conflicts, population dynamics and global development.

The migration unit is an ideal fit considering my context. Many of the students self-identity as Palestinian and are able to account for their family's journey from Palestine to Jordan. Many, if not all, have been exposed to the Syrian refugee crisis either through first hand experiences with Syrian migrants in the various Jordanian cities or through the news. The importance of learning about migration is clear to the students, as they are aware that Jordan is home to approximately 610,000 Syrian refugees and two million Palestinian refugees.

Understanding migration by reading graphic novels

My students were passionate about the topic and were keen to explore the reasons behind the current Syrian migrant crisis and to better understand the historic migration of Palestinians in 1948 and 1967. Examining the causes and consequences of the Syrian crisis and the Palestinian migrations addressed one of my inquiry questions,

“why do individuals migrate?” However, I also wanted my students to understand that there is no single narrative that can capture the diverse experiences of Syrian or Palestinian migrants. Therefore, the unit had to expose students to multiple narratives, voices and experiences that are often absent from traditional texts used in social studies, including textbooks, government and non-governmental reports and news articles.

The main inquiry question “how can we capture the experience of migrants in narrative format?” invited the students to use their factual and conceptual understanding of migration to portray the experience of a migrant in graphic novel format. The first section of the unit introduced the students to a range of graphic novels, including *Palestine* (Sacco, 2000), *Over Under Sideways Down* (Fransman, 2014), *Meet the Somalis* (Dix, 2013), *Almaz’s Story* (Dix, 2014) and *The Lost Boys of Sudan* (Disco & Clark, 2013). Mini-lessons facilitated instruction on the conventions of the genre, character development, theme and perspective. Additional instruction was provided to assist students in realizing they can use the literacy skills, such as visual literacy, taught in their English Language class in my class. Students read at-least one graphic novel and through literature discussions they identified the relevant social studies content and concepts and discussed how the author’s craft allowed them to connect with the characters’ context and experiences. More specifically, students explored how the use of visuals and text facilitated their understanding of the social, political and economic contexts of migrants and the various institutional and structural factors that either enhanced or limited the opportunities available to the migrants. In

addition, through group discussions and reflective writing students examined how the use of visuals and text portrayed the emotions and hardships that often accompany migration.

Based on my observations, I noticed that my students were engaged with the various texts and were able to use the graphic novels to identify and comment on the social studies content, and with necessary scaffolding comment on how the novel allowed them to better connect with characters and their lived experience.

Learning about Palestinian migration. *Palestine* (Sacco, 2000) was used to assist students in understanding the benefit of a graphic novel in aiding our understanding of migration. The novel was used as a read aloud text as part of a weeklong inquiry into the Palestinian exodus in 1948 and 1967. As part of this component of the unit, instruction focused on teaching the history of the 1948 and 1967 conflicts and the accompanying emigration of Palestinians to Jordan. In addition, students examined how the Palestinian refugees arrived in Jordan and the nature of the support provided to them by the United Nations and the Jordanian government. *Palestine* extended the students' understanding of the plight of the Palestinians as Sacco vividly portrays the reality facing the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Through group discussions and reflective writing students were invited to comment on how Sacco was able to show the context, emotions and voices of the Palestinians. Furthermore, the students compared the advantages and disadvantages of using a graphic novel, such as *Palestine*, with other texts, such as UN publications, in informing their understanding of the Palestinian migration. As a result of the first half of the unit, students were able to develop an

understanding of how graphic novels can help them better understand the migration by examining how visuals and narratives can inform their understanding in a social studies context.

Connecting narratives with reality

One of the goals of the unit was to enable students to understand the complexity and diversity of migration, especially the experiences of the migrants. I was fortunate enough to extend my students' learning by organizing a field trip to Azmi Al Mufti, a Palestinian refugee camp in northern Jordan. The trip was made possible by collaborating with Makani, a local NGO based in the camp.

Azmi Al Mufti was established in 1968 for 12,500 Palestinian refugees who left the West Bank as a result of the 1967 conflict. Currently, the camp is home to 25,000 refugees of which 23% live below the national poverty line, 25% are unemployed and 49% do not have health insurance. The camp is administered by the United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) and currently has 5 operational schools and one health center (UNRWA, 2016). Oddly enough, Azmi Al Mufti is considered to be one of the better camps in terms of socio-economic conditions.

The day began with an introduction to the camp by the Makani representative, Ibrahim. Ibrahim provided students with a brief history of the camp and its current social and economic status. Student questions focused on the social and economic welfare of the residents and the main challenges faced by the center. From there, the students toured the community center, a UNRWA primary school and were able to visit ten families. Each family hosted between 4-5 students and was chosen by the Makani

Centre as suitable candidates for questions that focused on the journey from Palestine to Jordan and their memory of Palestine.

Students engaged in meaningful and often emotional discussions with the community members and were able to hear personal stories about Palestine. Many, if not all, community members expressed a desire to go back to Palestine to reconnect with their memories of Jaffa, Haifa, Jerusalem or the various other West Bank cities. Common themes between all the conversations include memories of food, olive trees, and a sense of community. Many of the community members expressed their love for Palestine and a belief that Palestinian cities, such as Jaffa or Jerusalem, are unparalleled compared to other regional cities.

The trip exposed the students to the social and economic reality of a Palestinian camp and allowed them to connect with the issues at a personal and emotional level. In our conversations on our return journey, many students were connecting content and concepts mentioned in the various graphic novels with their new experience and were also beginning to formulate their ideas for their own graphic novels.

Composing graphic novels

The culminating summative assessment component of the unit involved the students composing their own graphic novel. The summative assessment task required the students to apply their understanding of migration and of graphic novel conventions by drafting their own panels. The mini graphic novel had to incorporate relevant content and concepts while also focusing on the experience(s) of the migrant(s). The students were free to focus on any current migration crisis and were allowed to draw their panels

or use graphic novel software, such as Comic Life, to assist them. With the support of the visual arts teacher, a series of mini-lessons provided instruction on how to apply the conventions taught earlier in the unit. Upon completion students were given a chance to read the novels produced and engaged in peer discussions in which they explained the process of drafting their own graphic novel.

Reflection

The unit, albeit with some difficulties, was a success. The following reflections are based on my own observations and discussions with my students as part of literature circle discussions or individual interviews.

Successes. First, students were thrilled to read graphic novels in their social studies class. All my students are English Language Learners with varying reading abilities so for many of them reading a graphic novel was a break from the textbook, news articles and official publications. The students found the text more accessible and were able to use the visuals to allow them to better understand the narrative. It must be noted that for many of my students reading a graphic novel was a new experience and they gained more confidence after class wide mini-lessons or individual support. My experience with allowing my students to read graphic novels speaks to the research regarding graphic novels and increased reading motivation (Alvermann, 2001; Edwards, 2009), especially with English Language Learners (Chun, 2009).

Second, the students were able to use graphic novels in improving their disciplinary understanding. For instance, listening to a group discussion on *Meet the Somalis* (Dix, 2013), students were able to identify the reasons behind the characters'

decisions to leave Somalia and migrate to various European countries. I recall students trying to determine which factors were most important and how their circumstances were shaped by external factors, such as conflict and government actions. Furthermore, the students that read *Almaz's Story* (Dix, 2014) struggled to accept the how the author portrayed the reality of female domestic workers in Saudi Arabia yet were happy to read a text that provided a critical interpretation of a topic often dismissed as irrelevant in Jordan. By listening to the discussions and reading their reflective writing, I realized that all my students had found a way to engage with the topic whether it was reading the text, participating in discussions or reflective writing. Furthermore, students were using correct terminology and were incorporating evidence to support their views and arguments. My students were not only engaging with the content but increasingly became confident with using graphic novels to extend their disciplinary understanding.

Finally, reading *Palestine* (Sacco, 2000) allowed the students to realize the advantages of a visual narrative. Literature circle discussions and reflective writing revealed that students were extending their understanding of the conditions faced by Palestinians in the West Bank and refugee camps in Jordan. Students commented on how the use of visuals allowed them to recognize the economic and social contexts of the characters and most importantly how the conventions of the text allowed them better connect with the characters and by association the topic. Many students expressed that they understood the implications of the statistics provided by UN documents but were shocked to “see” the statistics come to life, as Sacco was able to accurately portray the poverty afflicting Palestinian communities. Using graphic novels

certainly allowed the students to appreciate the importance of emotional content in extending their understanding of the migration. Furthermore, with significant scaffolding, students were able to express the benefits of including multiple and often conflicting voices in studying migration as the students thought it allowed for a more authentic reflection of the reality on the ground.

Challenges. The challenges arose when students were tasked with designing their own narratives. First, although they recognized the benefits of reading graphic novels in extending their understanding in the discipline, some students did not see the value of writing graphic novels in a social studies class. Two specific concerns are worth pointing out. First, some students felt that creative writing should take place in a language class and that they needed additional practice writing essays. Second, there was a major concern regarding how the graphic novel would be assessed and how it might affect their overall grade. Furthermore, students struggled writing the narrative, primarily due to difficulties with drawing and it is worth noting that Comic Life and other online programs were extremely helpful in alleviating stress.

Compatibility with the literature reviewed

The unit is firmly grounded in the research on multiliteracies, disciplinary literacy and graphic novels. The literature on multiliteracies (Jewitt, 2008; New London Group, 1996) particularly in relation to graphic novels (Chun, 2009; Cromer & Clark, 2007; Rhoades et al., 2015) has shaped how I think about the nature of the texts included in all my units. I recognize the importance of the cultural background of my students and their status as English Language Learners and by doing so I am considerate with the

texts I choose. My decision to include graphic novels is based on the accessibility of the texts, the use of visuals, which speaks to a medium of communication familiar to the students, and most importantly I strongly believed that graphic novels would allow them to form a richer and more authentic understanding of the reality of migration. As such, the unit privileged the visual text over the written text; as I wanted my students to understand the importance of visual texts as legitimize sources in deepening their disciplinary understanding.

Furthermore, I designed the unit to allow the different graphic novels to be central to the teaching and learning opportunities. I wanted to explore how graphic novels can be at the heart of teaching a specific unit as opposed to supplementing resources already in use. As such, it was crucial to consider how graphic novels can assist in developing disciplinary literacy and strategies.

Although the research on disciplinary literacy (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Wineburg et al., 2013) and the role of graphic novels in teaching disciplinary literacy (Boerman-Cornell, 2015; Clark 2014) is based on case studies involving historians and history classroom, it informed my planning as I realized the potential of using graphic novels in teaching disciplinary skills in a social studies classroom. The interdisciplinary nature of the migration unit draws on skills and content from history and geography but nonetheless the various graphic novels were used to teach disciplinary content, skills and concepts, including push and pull factors, contextualization, sourcing, causation and perspective.

Finally, the unit is in line with best practices in social studies. In *A Vision of Powerful Teaching and Learning in the Social Studies* (NCSS, 2016), the NCSS calls for a curriculum that is meaningful, integrative, challenging and active and the migration unit allows for teaching and learning that speaks to the aims of the NCSS position statement. The unit facilitates learning opportunities in which students are reading diverse and meaningful texts and using their disciplinary literacy skills to extend their understanding of migration. Most importantly they are applying their understanding to authentic situations by producing their own narratives. *Adolescents and "Autographics"* (Hughes et al., 2011) inspired my decision to have my students write their own graphic novels, as the case study showed how writing graphic novels was transformational for the participants involved in the study. Although the study was based on twelve at-risk adolescents, I was keen to investigate how my students would portray their conceptual understanding through a visual communicational medium and how might the experience of writing a graphic novel differ from writing an essay.

Recommended Reading

My experience using graphic novels in my practice has shown me the challenges of incorporating alternative texts into the teaching of social studies. The difficulty arose when convincing teachers and administration of the value of graphic novels in teaching and learning social studies, especially in an assessment driven program and school. As such, in order to better understand the usefulness of graphic novels the following four texts are recommended reading:

- Boerman-Cornell, W. (2015). Using historical graphic novels in high school history classes: Potential for contextualization, sourcing and corroborating. *The History Teacher*, 48(2), 209-224.

Boerman-Cornell examines how graphic novels can assist in teaching disciplinary skills in history by outlining the opportunities available in twenty historical non-fiction graphic novels to teach key history skills, including contextualization, corroboration and sourcing. The research confirms that graphic novels provide opportunities to teach all three skills, especially contextualization. The case study suggests that graphic novels can supplement the traditional texts used in teaching disciplinary skills. Furthermore, the study underscores the role of graphic novels in teaching social studies at the secondary school level, a setting often dominated by the use of textbooks and summative assessments.

- Clark, J. S., & Camicia, S. P. (2014). Fostering pre-service teachers' sense of historical agency through the use of nonfiction graphic novels. *The Journal of Social Studies Research*, 38(1), 1-13.

Teaching historical agency is a difficult undertaking especially as textbooks are written in a passive voice and primary sources are often difficult for secondary school students to read and understand. Clark & Camicia suggest that graphic novels can aid in teaching historical agency as the reader is able to visualize the context of the historical actors and as such is better placed to understand the constraints affecting the actors' agency. Furthermore, the study highlights how graphic novels enable students to evaluate the

author's interpretation of the actors' agency and understand the process of writing history. The study is crucial as it highlights how a multimodal text can assist in teaching historical agency and emphasizes the legitimacy of graphic novels as a suitable teaching resource.

- Rhoades, M., Dallacqua, A., Kersten, S., Merry, J., & Miller, M. (2015). The pen(cil) is mightier Than the (s)word? Telling sophisticated silent stories using Shaun Tan's wordless graphic novel, *The Arrival*. *Studies in Art Education*, 56(4), 307-326.

The Pen(cil) is Mightier Than the (S)Word shows how a graphic novel, in this case *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006), can be used to teach migration to elementary, middle and high school students. Furthermore, the study highlights how readers at all levels responded positively to graphic novels and were able to extend their understanding of migration. Rhoades et al. demonstrate how the use of a wordless graphic novel can result in meaningful and rich learning experiences and by doing so challenge the belief that graphic novels do not allow for challenging and in-depth learning.

- Sacco, J. (2000). *Palestine* Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics

Palestine portrays Sacco's travels around the West Bank and Gaza in December 1991 and January 1992. The narrative focuses on Sacco's experience in various Palestinian communities and his conversations with the different individuals and by doing so presents the struggles and humiliation faced by the Palestinians. The text is a valuable

addition to any social studies curriculum as it shows the reality on the ground and unlike other texts acts as an easy entry point into understanding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Furthermore, the strength of the narrative and visuals challenges the belief that graphic novels have no place in a social studies curriculum. I used *Palestine* as sample graphic novel to introduce my colleagues and administration to the value of using graphic novels in teaching social studies, especially when teaching a controversial and difficult topic such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Implications

There is considerable research documenting the merits of using graphic novels in teaching and learning Language Arts, especially at the elementary school level. The research examining the role of graphic novels in teaching social studies, especially at the secondary level, is limited. Based on the research conducted the following implications are identified.

First, further research is needed to determine how graphic novels can aid in teaching social studies at the secondary level. Researchers must distinguish between social studies, as an interdisciplinary subject common in middle schools (grades 6-8), and the standalone subjects of history and geography typically offered at the secondary school level (grades 9-12). The research by Boerman-Cornell (2012; 2015), Clark (2014) and Clark & Camicia (2014) all examine how graphic novels can be used to teach skills relevant in teaching history at the secondary school level. As such, future research should examine how graphic novels can help teach generic disciplinary skills relevant to social studies and specialized skills needed in secondary school geography and history.

Furthermore, the research conducted by Boerman-Cornell identifies the teaching and learning opportunities made possible by graphic novels, however additional research is needed to investigate the ease of using graphic novels to teach contextualization, corroboration and sourcing at the secondary level and how students response to such instruction.

Second, much research has focused on the benefits of using graphic novel with English Language Learners or struggling learners. Chun (2009), Hughes et al. (2011) and Park (2016) confirm how graphic novels can help English Language Learners and struggling students by increasing reading motivation, increasing confidence and providing them with meaningful learning opportunities to improve their literacy skills and understanding. Although research by Connors (2013) and Hammond (2012) examine how proficient readers are able to construct meaning, there remains a need to investigate the potential of using graphic novels in a typical secondary school classroom, which includes students with diverse interests, abilities and engagement levels. To this point the research has examined how graphic novels can be used with small groups of students with comparable abilities, but the reality is that secondary school classrooms are diverse. Therefore, future research must examine if the benefits confirmed in the various studies can be replicated with a larger group of students with varying interests and abilities.

All the research conducted examines how graphic novels can assist students construct meaning, extend their disciplinary understanding and improve their use of the various literacy skills. The research does not examine how increased motivation and

improvement in disciplinary understanding and application of skills translates into improved student achievement. It is crucial to examine how the inclusion of multimodal texts, such as graphic novels, can impact student achievement, especially in the contexts of assessment driven curriculum, such as the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, which I currently teach.

Third, additional research is needed to determine the value of writing graphic novels in secondary school classrooms. Two studies (Clark & Camicia, 2014; Hughes et al., 2011) shed light on the importance of writing graphic novels. Clark and Camicia (2014) highlight how re-narrations allowed pre-service teachers to examine how historical agency is portrayed in texts and by doing so develop an understanding of how knowledge in history is constructed. Hughes et al. (2011) underline how writing graphic novels honed the literacy skills of the participants and allowed them to effectively communicate their anxieties with adolescence. The research is not conclusive and is limited to pre-service teachers and an at-risk secondary school student, however, the research suggests that students are able to address difficult topics through writing graphic novels. Possible avenues for additional research includes examining how writing graphic novels can assist students in developing an understanding of how historical accounts are constructed and how writing graphic novels might allow students to cast light on the agency of historically marginalized characters.

Finally, there is no research on the use of graphic novels with Middle Eastern adolescents. Although some participants in the literature examined are of Middle Eastern background (Park, 2016) there is a need to examine how students in the Middle

East respond to graphic novels in both language and content area classes. Although graphic novels are gaining acceptance within educational settings in Canada, there is a need to examine how teachers and parent in the Middle East perceive the legitimacy of graphic novels as a suitable school text.

Conclusion

Including graphic novels in my own practice has been a rewarding experience. I've enjoyed the challenge of determining how to best plan and structure the unit and the various learning experiences. Most importantly, I've noticed that my students responded positively to the use of graphic novels and that it resulted in a more meaningful and richer learning experience for them. The research indicates that there is merit in using graphic novels in teaching and learning social studies, however it is clear that is a young and emerging field.

Moving forward, my practice will continue to be informed by multiliteracies and disciplinary literacy. I am particularly keen to continue to include multimodal texts in my social studies unit, as I believe it is essential students gain the knowledge and skills required to access multimodal texts. Furthermore, I am interested in examining how the delivery of my International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme courses, such as history or global politics, might be enhanced by the inclusion of multimodal texts such as graphic novels. These courses are often labeled as rigorous pre-university courses and as such I've noticed a tendency to rely heavily on textbooks and formal texts. Therefore, I am curious to determine how introducing a graphic novel, such as *War Brothers* (McKay, 2013) can facilitate the delivery of a peace and conflict unit in my global politics course.

Looking back at the experience of teaching my migration unit and the research into graphic novels I am pleased with how my understanding and application of multiliteracies is evolving. In conclusion, graphic novels can enrich the delivery of a social studies curriculum; however it is essential to bear in mind the advantages and disadvantages of graphic novels as there is still a role to be played by other texts, including the more traditional texts.

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