Theses and Dissertations (All)

2-12-2013

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

Brian Patrick Burke
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Follow this and additional works at: https://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd

USING COMIC BOOKS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS TO IMPROVE AND FACILITATE

COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS' LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Brian Patrick Burke

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

December 2012

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Brian Patrick Burke

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

_____   _____
Gian Pagnucci, Ph.D.
Professor of English, Advisor
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

_____   _____
Gloria Park, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of English
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

_____   _____
Michael M. Williamson, Ph.D.
Professor of English
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

_____   _____
Chris McCarrick, Ph.D.
Professor of English
Clarion University of Pennsylvania

ACCEPTED

_____   _____
Timothy P. Mack, Ph.D.
Dean
School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: Using Comic Books and Graphic Novels to Improve and Facilitate Community College Students' Literacy
Author: Brian Patrick Burke
Dissertation Chairman: Dr. Gian S. Pagnucci
Dissertation Committee Members:
<div align="center">Dr. Gloria Park
Dr. Michael M. Williamson
Dr. Christopher McCarrick</div>

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

The researcher conducted qualitative research that examined the literacy backgrounds and attitudes towards reading comics of a sampling of eight reluctant readers in the Intermediate Reading courses from Fall 2009, Spring 2010, Fall 2010 and Summer 2011. Data was collected from the participants' introduction and exit letters, literacy autobiographies, three reading reports, reflective journals of the students and teacher, and interviews.

First, based on a thematic analysis of the participants' data, research question one revealed that comics helped them to visualize and understand the concepts of reading comprehension. When reading comics, the reader was able to bridge the gap between the verbal text and the visual text and was still able to utilize critical reading strategies on a consistent basis as one would do reading a verbal-only text.   This act is referred to as "Closure" (McCloud 1993).

This study confirms the benefits of the use of visual narratives in reading and writing class. The researcher argues that comics are canon worthy because they possess literary value,

the same as traditional literature. However, the availability and costs of the comics is an issue.

Copy right laws make it difficult to possess comics for classroom instruction.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It has been a long hard road. I couldn't have done this without the support and encouragement from my committee - Gian Pagnucci, Gloria Park and Mike Williamson. I especially want to thank the fourth committee person, Chris McCarrick from Clarion University who has supported me since "day one" when I began this journey as an undergraduate freshman in his Writing II class.

Also, I would like to thank the IUP Library and the personnel who have employed me as a student and have supported my academic efforts. Thank you so much.

More importantly, I want to thank my parents. When I was thirteen, I would spend my Sundays watching old movies with my mother. One particular Sunday as we watched *The Absent Minded Professor*, my mother put this crazy idea in my head that I could become just like the "nutty professor" in that movie. …And here I am. I did it!

And last but not least, I want to thank Soyoung. Words cannot express the gratitude and awe I have for the amount of support, dedication and patience you have given me as I etched my way through this arduous journey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A Personal Research Quest: My Journey into the Study

In the early years of my primary education, I was a "full of life" kind of child. My mother would use that term to loosely describe how energetic and mischievous I was. I always wanted to be anywhere but in school. I disliked sitting still in the classroom on those hard wooden chairs. I wanted to be outside playing with my G.I. Joe action figures. I tended to frustrate teachers with my inability to sit still and do my work. Reading was something I lacked motivation to do.

Miss Bucci was my second grade reading teacher. I remember her sending concerned letters home to my mother about my lack of motivation to read. In one particular letter, Miss Bucci expressed her worry that I was not improving because I refused to sit still long enough to read. Simply, she felt that I lacked the proper motivation. In one correspondence, she asked my mother what cartoons I liked to watch. My mother wrote a letter back and I delivered it to Miss Bucci.

The next day, Miss Bucci had me sit at a different desk, away from the three other students who also received supplemental instruction in reading. I remember asking what I had done wrong. Miss Bucci only smiled and said, "Today, I have a treat for you." From out of a paper bag she pulled a booklet with a green tank and soldiers around it, a red "wagon" background, and a title that, remarkably, I could read: *G.I. Joe.* I was so excited seeing this book about *G.I. Joe* I had played with the toys and watched the cartoons. I was your typical eight-year-old boy who liked role-playing and fantasizing about army and war. *G.I. Joe* was the only thing I could sit still long enough for to watch on the television.

Figure 1. The exact issue of *G.I. Joe* #1 that was used as a teaching aid to create my personal investment in my learning to read.

Miss Bucci had read an article by Hallenbeck (1976). She had learned that comics could be used to help motivate children to read, because comics have various properties that may benefit developmental reader's educational needs. Hallenbeck's article at that time was considered fresh but controversial. In the early 1980's, educators and researchers saw very little application of comics within academia. But Miss Bucci was desperate.

When I tried to open the comic book, Miss Bucci pulled it away and said, "Wait!" There was a catch. I had to read the words on the cover and understand what they meant before I would be allowed to look at the first page inside the comic. We sat there at our own private section of the classroom, poring over and sounding out "A Real American Hero," "Blockbuster First Issue!" and "The Ultimate Weapon of Democracy" for the rest of the period. I then had to define these words for homework.

The second day, I was allowed to look at the action of the first page which had a lot of reading to it. At first, I wanted to just make whatever sense I could of the pictures, without reading the text, but Miss Bucci would not allow that. Instead, day after day, we worked at sounding out and reading every word in that comic book. When we finished that comic book, Miss Bucci must have been so afraid I might regress that she brought another *G.I. Joe* comic book for me to read, and then another, and another after that. Miss Bucci told me that if I wanted to understand what was happening in the pictures, I had to read the words. If I had trouble understanding the words, the pictures would help me understand them.

Miss Bucci also encouraged my parents to buy comic books for me to improve my reading. As I read all of these comic books, my reading skills improved.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study is to focus on how graphic novels and comic books affect and improve reading comprehension among community college students who have tested as intermediate readers on the Nelson Denny standardized reading assessment, and as indicated by their scores on the college entrance ACCUPLACER test. The central question that my study seeks to address will be: *in what ways could these visually constructed narratives facilitate literacy and reading and serve as a college-level literacy genre in an intermediate reading*

course? Student achievement will be measured by pre- and post-testing. My study will build on the work of Romanelli's (2009) study that examined how some adult readers of graphic novels and comic books make sense of the visually constructed narrative texts. From her study, we have a good idea of how adult readers process the multimodal text of comic books and graphic novels. My study will look at how these visual narratives such as comic books and graphic novels foster the community college adult reader's overall literacy development.

Teaching Journals

The following section will present narratives from my personal teaching journal. These narratives recount my interactions with students and colleagues.

Teaching journal – Intermediate Reading – October 14th, 2008. One-One-Thousand. Two-One-Thousand. Three-One-Thousand. Four-One-Thousand. Five-One-Thousand. "Okay, I'll repeat the question: Who can tell what follows the main idea?" I cast into the sea of pod people that oddly resembled the students of my Intermediate Reading class. Boredom, indifference, apathy, and ignorance hung in the atmosphere of the class. The only sound was the tapping of a pencil eraser as it drummed impatiently on the textbook of a student who sat in front of me rolling her eyes. The "five second wait rule" was not working. I was not reaching through to the students. There was no way they were going to be ready for the midterm next week.

My insecurities were bubbling to the surface. For six weeks, I had been teaching this Intermediate Reading course and its institution-enforced curriculum tri fecta of vocabulary, reading strategies, and Plato. Unfortunately, this curriculum did not seem to interest my students. I knew this coming into the position. The students did not understand what they needed to learn to do well in their pursuit of higher education. I had seventeen indifferent minds sitting in front of me yearning to be anywhere but in that classroom. And then, like a droplet of

water that preceded the overwhelming cascade, the complaints (or shall I say – the feedback) stated to rain in.

"I don't understand this stuff." "Why are we learning this?" "I know how to read." "I'm too dumb to understand this." "I hate reading." "It's time to leave! Class is over!" And just like that, I gave in. Defeated, I excused the class twenty-five minutes early, but not without giving the students their homework assignment of exercises from the reading textbook. I had never imagined that teaching that class would be so difficult. What was I doing wrong? How could I create personal investment for my students?

Teaching journal – Intermediate Reading - August 15th, 2008. It was just thirty six hours after I had been interviewed and had accepted the part-time instructor position at the branch campus. I was excited and anxious at the same time. I was teaching writing, which made me ecstatic. And I was teaching a developmental reading class whose curriculum perplexed me. I worried about the potential problems I was going to face with the reading class.

I sweated in the hot, blinding bright and cloudless sunny day outside. It was too bright, actually; it made my eyes ache. There was not a cloud in sight. It was scorching hot on my pale freckled Irish skin. My flip flops thought about melting on the sun baked pavement. I had just walked ten blocks to the post office on a Saturday morning to mail out my bill, not trusting the local mailboxes close to my house. As I climbed the steps to the post office, my colleague, Ryan was exiting the post office. "Hi Smiley!"

"Hi Ryan!" I greeted him in return.

"I heard you are taking over my old position at the community college," Ryan said.

"Yeah, thank you for the good word on my behalf. I heard Slippery Rock offered you a temporary faculty position."

"Yes they did," Ryan said in triumph. "I had to resign from the community college though. I just couldn't do both."

"I hear ya. Slippery Rock is a great school, and it is a drive from here. Oh, by the way, did you ever teach Intermediate Reading at the community college?" I asked, jumping on the opportunity to get advice about the thing that had been bothering me.

"Oh yes!" Ryan said with a sense of pride. "It was my favorite class to teach."

"How did you teach the course?" I needed to know. "I was just hired two days ago and the course begins on Monday. Could I get a copy of your syllabus for the course?" I asked with an edge of hope.

"Ack! No, sorry, I do not have a copy saved. When I resigned, I lost access to my department email, where I had everything saved. But I just had the students read novels and keep reading journals. I used the 'book club' approach."

"Really? What about this online thing called Plato, and the Nelson Denny, and the vocabulary text book? What did you do with those?"

"I did not use them."

"Aren't they part of the curriculum for the course?

"Well, yes and no," Ryan began to explain. "I still used the Nelson Denny and I still emphasized vocabulary and reading practice, but I did it in such a way that I created a personal investment for my students. I could do this since I was at the branch campus, and the folks at the mothership generally don't care too much about us at the branch campus. Besides, what the curriculum mandates teaching is all piece-mealed together, with little personal investment for the students."

"O…kay…, so I should ignore the prescribed curriculum and teach it the way I feel best?"

Teaching journal – Intermediate Reading – October 16th, 2008. Today was a day of utter boldness. I walked into class with a long, cumbersome, white cardboard box and a new assignment for the students. As soon as I set the heavy box down on the front desk where I give the class lectures from, I could see the piqued interest in the students. Some of the students suspected what this box was for, and leaned forward in their seats in an attempt to quench their curiosity.

"Alright class, open your books to the beginning of chapter 2. Look for the first bold faced word. What is it?"

"Main Idea," one student shouted out. A few others groaned, "Aw, we have to go over this again?"

"Not really," I defended. "We are going to try something different. For the past few weeks, we have been reading and taking in the knowledge presented in these first five chapters of the Reading Series textbook and we have been doing so in a passive manner. 'Passive,' you ask? Yes, P-A-S-S-I-V-E, in terms of how we are engaging the ideas and the exercises in the book." The bewildered students looked at me and wondered where I was going with this. I wondered also, but more-so wondered how well what I was about to do next was going to be received. "So, who can guess what's in this long white box?"

"Drugs!"

"Babes!"

"Food!"

"You killed your wife, chopped her up and stuffed her in the box," a fourth student chimed in with the rest of the jokers. I just looked at Charles and smiled cautiously at him. He was the most demented of my lovely students. "All of the above," I answered, "and more." Some of the students cocked their heads in confusion and intrigue. I possessed a smirk on my face of mischief and guile.

"Why do we, as a society, love to watch movies more than reading? Seriously, I'm asking. Why?"

Stan, who was one of the more talkative students in this class, sat off from the middle on the left side of the room, next to his girl friend, Patty. He boldly answered, "Because they ain't boring."

"Care to elaborate?" I prompted.

"Well, you can see the action and it's easier to understand," explained Stan.

"What is?"

"Um…the story or scene that is being shown."

"So, how is this different from the book version of the movie?"

"It's easier to understand," another student in the back row contributed.

"How so?" I prompted for a clearer answer.

"Because you can see what is happening, and the imagination is already there," Stan popped in.

"Oh, right," I said contritely. "So, what you are all saying is that words take more work to understand and to visualize, but the movie is all laid out for you and requires less work to understand?"

"Yeah." The heads bobbled in agreement. My head bobbled, too. "What if I told you that there are different types of being literate? And that being able to process and understand images is different from being able to decipher letters into patterns of words to create meaning. What if I told you that with all of the visually dominant media that is present in our society, you develop at an early age a form of literacy of visual understanding? That you become more visually literate at an earlier age than you become word literate?" The students bobbled their heads in agreement once more. So far, so good.

"How many of you would prefer to read a book than watch a movie?" Only one student raised her hand – Stan's sweet girlfriend. She lowered it sheepishly as the other students cast judgmental glances in her direction. Patty was one of the few students in the Intermediate Reading class who loved to read, but when she demonstrated her interest in reading to the class, some of the "reluctant" readers would goad her with comments about being nerdy.

"Patty, thank you for raising your hand. I, too, love to read, but I also love the visuals. What I have here in this box is a perfect example of somewhere the word coexists in harmony with the visual." I reached into the box and pulled out a stack of comic books. I handed some out to each row and asked the students to take 2-3 comics and circulate the rest of the stack to the person on their right. The joy in the faces of most of the students was evident as they thumbed through sample issues of *Spiderman*, *Batman*, *Superman*, *G.I.Joe, Spawn*, *Walking Dead*, and many more. "Lori, what kind of movies do you like to watch?"

"Murder mysteries and Harry Potter movies," she answered as she thumbed through an issue of *Star Wars*.

"George, your favorite movie genre?" I asked.

"Shoot'em ups and blood and guts and beautiful babes."

9

"Larry, and you?"

Larry paused as if he needed to think, and then answered, "Um, just about anything science fiction or fantasy or horror."

"Patty?"

"Love stories and drama," she answered in her mousy voice.

"Great! So… Why comics or comic books? What do these have to do with the types of movies you enjoy watching?" I prompted.

The class as a whole looked up at me, and I could see them begin to make the connection in their heads. Stan raised his hand to offer an answer. "Go ahead, Stan," I said.

"Aren't some of the better movies out there based on comic books?"

"Yep," I answered. "Want to clarify?"

"Comics have the same things that movies do: murder, sex, drugs, villain, heroes, and so on."

At this point I reached out to Stan physically in an exaggerated gesture of pulling the answer from him with my bare hands. "Soooo…." Stan followed my animated cue and thought about what I wanted him to say.

"So, comic books are just like a movie that we can watch at a theater, with the same themes and plot as a movie…but different from a book, because…" And at that point, Stan stalled out.

"Because a comic book has visuals or loaded imagery that work with the text to create a meaning," I added, just as if I were adding a cherry on top of the biggest, most delicious sundae ever made. My students were now interested. "So…why did I bring comic books to class?"

"Because you are a comic book geek?" taunted Charles.

"Besides that," I countered.

"Because you want us to do something with reading?"

On cue, I asked the students to look at the definition that followed the bold printed word in the textbook, "Main Idea". "Close the comic books that are in front of you. Place them next to each other, cover side up. Take that definition and copy it onto a blank piece of paper." The room was alive with the rustling of books and papers as students followed my directions. Not knowing where I was going with the lesson, the students struggled to keep up with what I was requesting. "Write that definition of what a 'main idea' is at the top of the paper. Then look at the cover of each comic book. Let's suppose that the cover of the comic – the visual that was drawn and colored to represent the content of this particular issue – is a paragraph. Look at the visual of the cover and write down in one sentence what the 'main idea' of each cover is. To do this, think about how comics exist. Both text and the visual imagery are used to create a meaning. Yes, you do not see as much text, but the text that is given to the reader is that much more valuable. So, in your own words, what is a 'main idea'?" This time, more than two or three students raised their hands. Almost eighty percent of the classroom had raised their hands to participate with an answer. "Let's see… Who have I not heard from today? Ah, Sarah!"

Sarah was a genuine reluctant reader. She found every chance she could to get out of reading anything. The first day of class she said, "I can't read. I am just too stupid." Since then, she had reminded me at least once a week that she was STILL too stupid to read. And most of the time, she didn't care to even open her text-books in class to follow along. She usually gave up, because she had been told she was "stupid" by her family and she believed them. But today was different. Sarah was actually still reading, thumbing through the pages of her comics and

not just skimming, but actually taking the time to examine each page, panel by panel, dialogue bubble by dialogue bubble.

"Sarah, can you tell me the definition," I quietly prompted again, afraid to jar her in any way that might hinder her from enjoying the comic books.

"Oh, uh. . . um, the definition is. . . Do you want the book's definition or my own?"

"In your own words, please," I said gently.

"Well, the main idea is the idea or understanding you get when you read a paragraph."

"Okay, good. How does one develop this understanding?" I asked Sarah.

"Uh, the supporting details…?"

"Bingo! Yes, you are correct. The supporting details. When you bring them all together . . . when you add all of the supporting details together, you have a mental 'picture' or understanding of what the main idea is. To decipher the main idea of the comic book cover, consider the text and the visual as two types of supporting details. Make a two-columned chart on the piece of paper in front you." With the only dry erase marker available in the entire classroom and half dried out to boot, I drew on the board two vertical, elongated boxes side by side to show the students what I meant. "Label the first column of the chart, 'Text', and the second, 'Visual'," I said as I labeled the top of each box. Now, look for the examples of text. Write each caption of text, including the title, in the first box. Remember to keep them separate."

I waited a few seconds as the students began to write the text examples from their first comic book. "Now, look at the visual of the cover. What action is being depicted in the artwork? In other words, what is happening on the cover? Are there characters on the cover, and what are they doing? Then write what you discover in the second column. Look over the two

columns and compare the examples of text and the visuals. When brought together, what meanings or messages do they convey? This is what the main idea is."

I instructed the students to take a few minutes to work on deciphering the main idea of each cover. The class became very quiet, with only the sounds of the writing utensils scratching into the paper. It was the quietest and most productive five minutes I had seen from the students all semester. I waited for most of the students to finish writing before I asked for individual responses. "Charlie, can you tell me what the main idea is of one of the comic books in front of you?"

"Uh, okay… I have a copy of *Green Arrow #1*." Charlie held up the issue of an old, tattered *Green Arrow*. "There are a few examples of text available on the cover. First, in green lettering, is the title of the comic, 'Green Arrow'. The second is the subtitle at the top of the page 'The Battling Bowman - - In His Own Magazine AT LAST'. At the top left-hand corner of the cover, there is text that is telling me 'Mini Series 1 of 4.' I guess that means that this issue is part one of the story about this guy dressed like Robin Hood on the cover, who is in front of a bulls-eye getting shot at big time, and is really fast with shooting arrows. Oh, and the Robin Hood looking dude is 'Green Arrow,' who is taking on a lot of possible bad guys at once, so I guess that means he's bad ass."

"Wow! Great job on pulling the cover apart." I was impressed with Charlie's answer. "So, tell me in one sentence what the main idea is of the cover of *Green Arrow #1*?" "Uh…Green Arrow can shoot arrows faster than all these bad guys can shoot bullets combined and this is his first solo adventure," said Charlie.

"Not bad," I praised. "Okay, who wants to go next?"

Tom sat in the front row on the far right with his hand raised. He was a very quiet student by nature, and did not participate much verbally in class. "Go ahead, Tom," I said.

"My comic is *Aquaman #2*. On the cover there are only two sets of text. First is the title, 'Aquaman,' and the second is at the bottom of the cover, 'to the bone.' The visual supporting detail shows a blonde-haired man being forced to place his hand in water where, it looks like his hand is being eaten off and it is causing him great pain."

"And the main idea in one sentence?" I asked with a warm smile.

"This is the issue where Aquaman loses his hand," Tom answered.

"Well done," I praised. "We have time for one more. Does anyone else want to go?"

"I will," volunteered Sarah. I nodded and smiled in contentment. Sarah began, "In the text column I have written a few phrases. The first is, 'Free Comic Book Day.' It is located at the top middle of the cover. Just below is the title, 'Star Wars'. There is more text under the title . . ."

"Do you mean a subtitle?" I offered.

"Yes," confirmed Sarah. "I couldn't think of what to call it. The subtitle says, 'A Jedi's Weapon.' The visual or art of the cover has just a person standing with no background. He is Anakin Skywalker. And he is holding a light saber, which is the brightest thing on the cover. The main idea is that the light saber is the weapon of a Jedi such as Anakin Skywalker." Sarah looked up from her notes and smiled a tiny smile of satisfaction because she now appeared to understand what a main idea was.

"Just curious, but how did you know that glowing thingy was a light saber and that the guy's name was 'Anakin Skywalker?' I had to ask.

14

"Duh, it's Star Wars. Everyone knows Star Wars and who Darth Vader is," Sarah playfully mocked. Sarah was right in her observation. Star Wars had become such a staple in western society; it was difficult NOT to recognize the iconography.

"Awesome," I praised. "You are correct. Now for the rest of the class today and for homework, I want you to do what you did for each cover of the three comic books you picked out, and pick one issue and tell me the main idea of each individual page, excluding the advertisements." All of a sudden, half the class looked very bewildered. I had done it again with giving too much information at once. "What I mean is, take one comic book that is in front of you. Since you told me what the main idea of the cover is, I want you to continue on and to fill out a chart for each page of the story, and then tell me what the main idea is for each page."

"Every page?" one of the students exclaimed.

"Yes, but there are roughly twenty-one to twenty-two pages of story per comic. That would be twenty-one to twenty-two charts of supporting details and main ideas."

Stan slowly raised his hand while he stared down at his one comic book, *Batman,* in confused horror. I gave Stan my attention by asking him what his question was. "Um, my comic is *Batman 80 Page Giant*' It has eighty pages of story. Do I have to tell you what the main idea is of each page…eighty main ideas?" he asked in horror. I laughed, as did some of the students. "As fun as it would be to make you suffer through eighty pages, pick one of the other two comics in front of you instead."

Stan sighed a breath of relief as I continued to flesh out the directions. "Okay, so we have roughly 40 minutes left of class. I am going to give you twenty of those minutes to begin your homework here in class. If you have questions, please ask. The last twenty minutes will be dedicated to your vocabulary homework that is due for today."

It was working. The students – both the avid readers and the reluctant readers seemed excited about what they were doing and they were learning the lesson objectives of the course. This was the most alive I had seen my class since it had started.

Narratives and the Traditional Dissertation Format

I am a story teller. I find it hard to present my voice, especially about my teaching and learning experiences, without the use of narratives. Pagnucci (2004) wrote the following in regard to graduate students faced with the task of writing the dissertation:

> My own dissertation, "Cyberwriting: A Story of Teaching, Learning, and Co-authoring" (1995), written as a kind of novel, tells the story of my teaching creative writing to a teenage boy named Dustin. And while I certainly don't want everyone to write a novel just because I did, I also don't want everyone to write the same old five-chapter dissertation studies that have been written for hundreds of years. (p. 24)

As he notes, many doctoral students just like myself struggle to find our voice. I realized within the first year of my doctoral studies that I had in fact lost my voice and in its place found insecurity, apprehension, and silence.

This dissertation is what Pagnucci (2004) terms a study guided by narrative ideology where the researcher uses personal narratives along with other narratives from the participants to create meaning. The narratives in this dissertation represent my voice returned, restored, and motivation renewed, a process that has taken many years to regain. Other narratives from the participants of this study also, in many cases, represent voices once marginalized. But why narratives? Pagnucci theorizes the reason why dissertations are not widely read is because they do not contain enough stories. "Perhaps, if we pushed for dissertations that contained more stories, we might find more people who would actually want to read dissertations" (p. 25). Yes,

16

this is one reason. I want this dissertation to be accessible and enjoyable for future teachers, so that they can benefit from the fruits of this study. But primarily, these narratives will illuminate the context of meaning by which the study is driven, because without these narratives, this is just a study that is impersonal and irrelevant to the reader.

Rationale of the Study

For the past ten years, I have been fighting an uphill battle advocating the implementation of Comic Books as an Academic Genre in the classroom. I have written papers, tried to publish them, given lectures, and presented papers at conferences about many different aspects of comics. I originally became interested in the idea of using comics as a way to improve reader comprehension when I read Fillingham's *Foucault for Beginners* (1993) during my first semester of doctoral course work. This book presented the complex theories of Foucault in graphic novel form, which made it easy, fun, and quick to read. I remember thinking how I had feared and faced such difficulty reading Foucault as a master's student, but in one afternoon with this graphic novel I had come to understand many of the fundamental principles of Foucault.

This dissertation study examines an aspect of media literacy where the nature of cognition in relation to the myriad of art and text is scrutinized. The dissertation seeks to increase our understanding of how the use of comic books and graphic novels can improve the cognitive process of reluctant readers at a community college, by examining student participants who are using comics as part of an Intermediate Reading Course.

The purpose of this study is to focus on how graphic novels and comic books affect and improve reading comprehension among community college students who have tested as intermediate readers on the Nelson Denny standardized reading assessment, and as indicated by their scores on the college entrance ACCUPLACER test. The central question that my study

seeks to address will be: In what ways could these visually constructed narratives facilitate literacy and reading, and serve as a college level literacy genre in an intermediate reading course? Student achievement will be measured by pre- and post- testing. My study is built on the work of Romanelli's (2009) study that examined how some adult readers of graphic novels and comic books make sense of visually constructed narrative texts. From her study, we gain insight into how adult readers process the multimodal text of comic books and graphic novels. My study will look at how these visual narratives foster the community college adult reader's overall literacy development.

Defining Comics

Before this phenomenon can be explored more, some key terms related to comics need to be defined. What does one mean by using the word *comics*? At the beginning of every presentation or unpublished essay, I have had to define my terminology, because, depending on the generation or a person's experience with the subject, comics have a different meaning. McCloud (1993) defines comics in general as "a vessel which can hold any number of ideas and images" (p. 4). It is "intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response to the viewer" (p. 9), much like any other piece of text. These images included with the graphics are referred to as "Icons" (p. 27). An icon is used to represent "any person, place, thing or idea" (p. 27). Fleming (1996) categorizes pictures or images, with or without accompanied text, as a form of argument. He rationalizes that pictures can be suggestive, persuasive, and driven toward a cultural and social rationale (p. 11). Blair (1996) also asserts that images/pictures can be "influential in affecting attitudes," and "more powerful than a single verbal assertion" (p. 23). Icons are used to focus the reader not on the lack of realism, but to amplify "specific details" (Flemming, 1996, p.10). A comic can also convey a story through imagery via graphics and

18

dialogue with similar function to a road sign (McCloud, 1993). Complex concepts can become more easily digested when reduced to imagery.

Within a comic, there is the "panel" which contains the art or iconography and the phonetic dialogue, as McCloud (1993) discusses. Panels are typical arranged in a left to right, top to bottom order. The space in between each panel is called the gutter. This gutter is the most important part of reading comics. The gutter is where the comprehension of the action being depicted in the panels occurs for the reader, comprehension McCloud calls "closure" (p. 63). Closure is where the reader makes judgments based upon the implications of the writer and artist. The closure a reader receives from reading comics "fosters an intimacy surpassed only by the written word, a silent, secret contract between creator and audience" (p. 69).

If one is talking about comics, or all comics in general, such as comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels, the commonly used term is comics as demonstrated by established scholars (Bongco, 2000; Eisner, 1996; McCloud, 1993). In this dissertation, comics may also be specifically referred to as comic strips, comic books or graphic novels. With these three separate classifications, there are differences.

A comic strip is linear panel of illustrations and text that tell a "quick" story (Eisner, 1996, p. 4). Examples would be political cartoons, or the Sunday funnies found in the Sunday newspaper as shown below in Figure 2:

Figure 2. Comic strip by anonymous student who remarked about receiving too much homework in class.

A comic book, on the other hand, is a booklet of stacked linear panels of illustrations and texts that act as an episode in a story line (McCloud, 1993, pp. 5-9; p. 22). Each episode is published as a biweekly or monthly periodical that is numbered in a series and can be connected to other comic books through story content which is also known as a mythology (Bongco, 2000). Comics can consist of a self-contained story with the ability to address "adult issues" (Eisner, 1996, p. 4). A comic book can contain the same literary and societal values as a novel or short story, but most comics are published in a periodical fashion with an ongoing plot.

A graphic novel is similar to a comic book, though it is usually longer and generally contains an entire story line of republished/reprinted work that was originally provided in single comic periodical form (Burke, 2002). In arguing the textuality of graphic novels, a proper definition is essential. A graphic novel is mimetic art with a "self contained story that uses a combination of text and art to articulate the plot. It is equivalent in content to a long short story

or short novel" (DeCandido, 1991, pp. 550-555). The graphic novel is the same as a comic book

except that the comic book is generally not a self-contained story with the ability to address

"adult issues" (Eisner, 1996, p. 4). Most comic books contain the same literary and societal

values but are published in a periodical fashion with an ongoing plot. Once more, a comic can

also convey a story through imagery with graphics and dialogue with the similar function of a

road sign. Again, complex concepts can be more easily digested when reduced to imagery. The

closure a reader receives from reading comics "fosters an intimacy surpassed only by the written

word, a silent, secret contract between creator and audience" (McCloud, 1993, p. 69).

There are graphic novels which are a collection of comic book issues, such as Alan

Moore's *Batman: Killing Joke* (1987), or a comic book like *G.I. Joe #6* (2002) that contains

mimetic art with a "self-contained story that uses a combination of text and art to articulate the

plot. The content is equivalent to that of a long short story or short novel" (DeCandido, 1991, p.

550). Eisner (1996) states that the story of a comic book or graphic novel has two functions.

The first function is explained as follows:

Stories are used to teach behavior within the community, to discuss morals and values, or

to satisfy curiosity. They dramatize social relations and the problems of living, convey

ideas or act out fantasies. The telling of a story requires skill. (p. 7)

An example of Eisner's first function of a graphic novel can be applied to Alan Moore's *The

Killing Joke*. *The Killing Joke* is about the ongoing debate between who is right and who is

wrong; who is good and who is evil. Specifically, the Joker makes an argument to Batman

proclaiming the difference between sanity and insanity. Another example of Eisner's first

function of comics can also be applied to Garth Ennis's *Hitman* series (#1-60, 1997) in which the

protagonist, Tommy Monaghan, and his entourage of morally grey characters act out the fantasy

of hunting down and killing superheroes and vigilantes. The story form is a vehicle for conveying information in an easily absorbed manner. The story form of a graphic novel can relate very abstract ideas, complex scientific theory or even unfamiliar concepts by the analogous use of familiar forms or phenomena (Moore, 1987).

For Eisner's second function of graphic novels, *The Killing Joke* is a perfect example of this type of intentional organization. Within the first page of this graphic novel, Moore uses the iconography of rain drops landing in small pools of water creating ripples. Each sequential panel is a progressive zoom outward to review the setting of the story. At the end of *The Killing Joke*, Moore chooses to close the story by returning the reader to the same rain drops landing in a pool of water that create**s** ripples that crash into each other. At first glance, these few panels at the beginning and end of the story do not seem relevant to the story, but in actuality, these panels act as a metaphor that describes, if not redefines the Batman mythos in a simplistic way – that for every action, there is another reciprocating action. In general, if something is considered to be a comic/comics, it is defined as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (McCloud, 1993, p. 9). The term "comic" originates from the late 1800's where drawn visuals and texts were meant to be humorous and satirical in nature (Stainbrook, 2003, p. 21). Stainbrook asserts comics literacy is "dependent upon the readers who are able to infer a wide variety of abstracted concepts from the iconic markings with the images" (p. 23).

Comics and the Reading Student

The starting point for this dissertation stems from a study I conducted in my second year of doctoral work (Spring, 2003), where I examined how readers cognitively processed comics. The study strove to answer several questions: Is the reader able to interpret a comic at a higher

level than the traditional verbal-only text? What does this say about the reader's ability to access

cognitive schemata? If so, does experience in reading comics have significance for the cognitive

process? That study focused on twelve students between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one, of

mixed gender, that were divided into two groups of readers: Inexperienced comic readers and

Experienced comic readers, with the assumption that inexperienced comic readers interpret

comics differently than experienced comic readers. The inexperienced readers said they had

little or no exposure to comics. The experienced readers had read comics on a regular basis. The

study procedure consisted of the students reading samples of comic books with varying topics

and then answering a questionnaire afterwards.

The results were very interesting. Surprisingly, I found that the inexperienced readers

were able to utilize their own narrative schema to respond to the comic books where I had

assumed they would lack that ability. My interest was focused on the inexperienced readers'

ability to cognitively respond to a comic book. Oddly enough, responses between experienced

and inexperienced comic readers varied only slightly. The majority from both sets of readers

were able to respond about the issue's plot in a semi-competent fashion.

My goal as I began that study was to examine the inexperienced readers and compare

them to the experienced readers thinking that they would not be able to understand the

connection between text and image. It turned out, however, that five out of six inexperienced

readers were able to somewhat competently identify a plot. The one reader who could not was

not able to follow the transitions between settings, nor was she able to follow the panel to panel

action. That student was the sort of inexperienced reader I expected. I had thought that all six

inexperienced readers would be like this one student who was completely illiterate of comic

books. That small study seemed to show that most people, whether they regularly read comics or

not, were visually literate enough and had a competent ability to put together a story visually and textually. This led me to believe that comics would be a useful learning tool for nearly any reader.

Other Relevant Studies

There is evidence that comic books can bridge the gap between the student and course lessons by utilizing the student's developed sense of multimodal literacy and interest in popular culture. Students generally learn this sense of multimodal literacy from the Internet, video games, and movies (Gee, 2004). The existing research investigating comics and reading comprehension includes Brown (1982), Stainbrook (2003), Wittrock (2003), Ujiie (2005), Rose (2007), Edwards (2009), and Romanelli (2009). Wittrock's study implemented reading comprehension lessons with creating comic books. The students' comprehension was assessed as they created a set of comic book instructional materials individually. Wittrock (2003) also studied reader's attitude and its effect on the reader's comprehension. Wittrock implemented a "freedom of choice" reading strategy that allowed his students to pick what they wanted to read, and thus improved their attitudes toward reading, which in turn improved their reading comprehension. Comic books as well as graphic novels were selected the most often to be read.

Edwards (2008) echoed Wittrock's study, investigating how using comic books as an option for students' free voluntary reading time improved their intrinsic motivation to read as well as their vocabulary and reading comprehension. Ujiie (2005) attempted to dispel the myth that comic books are "reading junk" by discussing the negative effects that Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* (2004) had on the comic book industry and its relationship with academia. Rose (2007) presents the notion of visual methodology to interpret a visual culture. Her idea is that comic books contain visual images that teach us to read more visual images and more texts.

24

Indirectly, she connects visuals to text because each coexists with the help of the other. Ujiie asserts that the visuals in comics facilitate reading comprehension and are "complex pieces of literature" (p. 7).

More importantly and in direct relation to my study, Stainbrook's (2003) dissertation explains how comic books are read and how their meaning is generated by readers. He also attempts to validate the use of comic books as academic and worthy of recognition based upon the comic book's aesthetic value. Overall, Stainbrook demonstrates the social impact of comic books on the reader through textual cohesion. Textual cohesion, when used in reference to comic books, is how the dialogue and narration bubble text co-mingle with the imagery/art work. This textual cohesion is contextual to the writer's and artist's intentions toward the reader.

Romanelli's (2009) dissertation continues where Stainbrook (2003) left off with his dissertation by examining Stainbrook's "textual cohesion" and how it applies to the reader's cognition as outsider literacy. She looks at how the reader, both experienced and inexperienced, cognitively processes the text and the visuals. Romanelli also examines the steps the reader takes to interpret the relationship between the artwork and the text. Her finding proved that although it is a popular belief, multi-modal texts do not perpetuate deficit literacy. With my study, I plan to answer in what way comic books and graphic novels affect the reader's comprehension of visual texts.

Research Questions

This study will center around three research questions that link teaching pedagogy, comics and the academic institution:

- How can a developmental reading course make use of comics as a learning tool?

- What impact does reading comics have on developmental students' understanding of reading comprehension?

- What impact does reading comics have on developmental students' attitudes toward reading?

What We Know about Comics

I argue that comic books should be considered viable in the academic sense based upon three criteria: they are a text that one can read and apply knowledge to create a reading; they exist as a mythology; and they are mimetic of the culture in which they originate. Why is this study about the value of comics and its uses for developmental readers needed? Historically, comics have been viewed with a stigma because they were seen as lacking significance and depth in the formal world of academia.

Comics are considered a form of popular culture. Though some scholars value popular culture texts, others hold an attitude that popular culture is the culture of the uneducated masses; therefore, the products of popular culture lack intellectual value. With regards to comic books, one of the first attacks against their content and lack of academic characteristics came from Thomas Sterling North (1940). He wrote about *Action Comics* specifically and referenced comics in general:

Badly drawn, badly written, and badly printed - a strain on the young eyes and young nervous systems - the effects of these pulp-paper nightmares is that of a violent stimulant. Their crude blacks and reds spoils a child's natural sense of colour; their hypodermic injection of sex and murder make the child impatient with better, though quieter, stories. Unless we want a coming generation even more ferocious than the present one, parents

and teachers throughout America must band together to break the 'comic' magazine.

(*Chicago Daily News*, 1940)

Sterling North was talking about the visual aspects of the art within the panels of each comic book issue. The explicitness of the art was one that assisted in the imagination of the reader, whereas before, in imageless texts such as novels, the reader had to rely solely on his own mental process of the scene being described to create an image. In the case of comics, the comic book was assisting, if not dictating, what the situation was, and, in the way it was drawn, whether the situation was silly, unrealistic or violence. This is what Sterling North was addressing in his column.

Another early critic of comic books was Dr. Fredric Wertham. He was known for, what Reibman (2004) describes as "an incisive, blistering attack on the violence and horror purveyed by the comic book industry" (p. ix). Wertham was the comic book industry's greatest opposition. He testified six times in front of a grand jury about the damage comic books were inflicting on the youth who read them. Wertham (2004) stated:

Many adults think that the crimes described in comic books are so far removed from the child's life that for children they are merely something imaginative or fantastic. But we have found this to be a great error. Comic books and life are connected. A bank robbery is easily translated into the rifling of a candy store. Delinquencies formerly restricted to adults are increasingly committed by young people and children. (p. 25)

Wertham believed that the violence and sex portrayed in the sequential art panels influenced the reader in a negative way, as if the reader was being told that these bad actions were okay. He also stated that comic books were, "Loaded with communist teachings, sex, and racial discrimination" (p. 34). It has been nearly to sixty years since the days of critics such as North

27

and Wertham. In that amount of time, the understanding of what comics are and how they

function has progressed. Today, most scholars feel that comics fall under the idea of textuality

from this view. The reader is the one who empowers the text. The reader reads the text and

creates meaning from the text by applying his/her own experiences to it. The text can be

anything that the reader can read, interpret, or critique. The text can have no words to it or it can

have as many as a million words. The text is also what the reader can reflect and act upon,

stimulating intellectual growth better known as "learning." According to Scholes (1985), "A real

text is … losing its own reality the moment we catch it, becoming simply a version of ourselves.

And suppose further that we ourselves are simply creatures already swallowed up by a social

leviathan" (p. 148). The text is an individual piece to which the reader applies his own

experiences. The text is then assimilated into the collective of experiences that comprise the

definition of the reader. The text can range from the pictures and the alphabet on the wall, to

literacy classics to the non-canonical comic book, or, in its collected form, the graphic novel.

For instance, the graphic novel is a text because it helps the student grow in their understanding

of the world around them. A comic can also convey a story through imagery with graphics and

dialogue with a similar function of a road sign. Complex concepts become more easily digested

when reduced to imagery. The closure a reader receives from reading comics "fosters an

intimacy surpassed only by the written word, a silent, secret contract between creator and

audience" (McCloud, 1993, p. 69).

In Will Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art*, the process people use to read comics is

tackled. Comics or graphic novels are different from most other books because, as stated before,

they incorporate images into the actual reading. The reader ingests the words and images

simultaneously. In addition, without text the images can still convey the message of the author.

This coincides with Scholes's concept of textuality. Eisner (1996) illustrates the function of reading a comic book in the following passage:

> The reading process in comics is an extension of text. In text alone the process of reading involves word-to-image conversion. Comics accelerate that by providing the image. When properly executed, it goes beyond conversion and speed and becomes a seamless whole. In every sense, this misnamed form of reading is entitled to be regarded as literature because the images are employed as a language. There is a recognizable relationship to the iconography and pictographs of oriental writing. When this language is employed as a conveyance of ideas and information, it separates itself from mindless visual entertainment. This makes comics a story telling medium. (pp. 5-7)

Bongco (2000) adds that the text has demands for the reader to process the text alone as well as processing the images, "which itself initiates further re-thinking of already formed inferences, the making of new hypotheses and so on" (p. 77). In *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud (1993) defines comics as "a vessel which can hold any number of ideas and images." Comics are "intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (p. 9), much like any other piece of text. These images included with the graphics are referred to as an "Icon" (p. 27). Eisner, on the other hand prefers the term "symbol". For the purposes of this paper, I will use the term icon liberally in reference to the images in the comics in question. An icon is used to represent "any person, place, thing or idea" (p. 27). Icons are used to focus the reader not on a lack of realism, but to amplify "specific details" (p. 10). The action in comic books is much more explicit due to the presence of icons.

These themes help the reader cope with and better understand their culture. In schools, some teachers implement the use of graphic novels as a creative springboard for teaching values.

McCloud (1993) rationalizes that the language of comics is based on literature (pp. 140-143). It is an extension of expressionism. Through expressionism, the values would consist of "modern societal issues," "negative aspects of the comics" in relation to the world (George & Mitchell, 1996). By using graphic novels in a classroom, a teacher can help a student develop values in an unbiased fashion, and thus be able to incorporate the values into their own moral ethics. Scholes (1985) states in relation to the use of graphic novels:

> As teachers of writing, we have a special responsibility to help our students gain awareness of discourse structures and the ways in which they both enable and constrain our vision. And the only way to do this is to read and write in a range of discursive modes. (p. 144)

Building on Scholes' explanation, one can argue that in order to facilitate effective education, it is necessary for the teacher to diversify the implementation of instruction by venturing outside of the traditional genres. For example, instead of demonstrating plot in a short story, a teacher could explain plot using a graphic novel.

Overview of the Dissertation Chapters

In summation of Chapter One, the aim of this dissertation is to examine how the use of comics in a college intermediate reading classroom can help the student's reading comprehension as well as create a sense of personal interest and personal investment for the students to learn reading. Chapter Two explains the phenomena of reading comprehension along with what research has been done thus far with the use of comics in the classroom. Chapter Three presents the methodology of the study whereas Chapter Four will present the data that was collected. Chapter Five discusses the findings and the implications of data and concludes the study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter provides a literature review of several key concepts in this study that focus on the use of comic books in developmental reading courses at a community college. The main concepts: are reading comprehension, developmental readers, and comic books and teaching. This study examines the value of comics for promoting literacy and reading education. Historically, many people have viewed comics as children's literature, or inferior literature, and not of value to educators. My study contests this view of comics and attempts to argue that comics can be a highly valuable tool for teaching literacy and engaging non-readers in the pleasure of reading. First, I will explore the literature that does examine the use of comics for educational purposes. Next, I will describe the literature on reading comprehension, developmental readers, and the challenges they experience. Finally, in the third section, I will look at research that shows how comic books can be used as a tool to help developmental readers improve their literacy by increasing a variety of skills: cognition, literacy, and multimodality skills.

Graphic Novels and Comics Use in Educational Settings

The focus of this section is to discuss the current trends in utilizing graphic novels and comics within educational settings. I will discuss the use of graphic novels and comics in the fields of NES, ESL/EFL, and in libraries.

Comics as a Literacy Teaching Tool

The traditionally negative image of comics has led to a reality that "comics as a medium with which to educate has not received [much] attention" (Alevio & Norris, 2010, p. 72). This

negative image of comics partly stems from Sterling North (1940) who was one of the first to denounce the medium of comic books. Wertham (1954) claimed that comics incited delinquency in children:

> Comics are often associated with cheapness, poor quality and disposability. Wertham and Sterling North's attacks on comics, as it is believed, are still felt today; comics still carry this black mark that prevents them from fully being accepted in academia. Rarely have comics been seen as appropriate reading material for children. (as cited in Alevio & Norris 2007, p. 70)

Comics have traditionally been perceived as simplistic. Comic book and graphic novel adaptations of canon classics have been condemned by curriculum committees in the past. Using these visual substitutes have been seen as a form of cheating or as bypassing the full experience of reading if used in place of full text versions as it is said, "these comics were seen by teachers in his era as cheating" (Gibson, 2009, p. 11). Comic adaptations of canon classics are also traditionally viewed as "dumbing-down" (p. 12) that promote the reader to become lazy and it disinclined to read the traditional non-visual narratives.

Conversely, Alevio and Norris (2007) claimed that "Wertham's attacks on comics lacked any serious theoretical or empirical foundation and modern investigations have suggested that the link between violence and comics is not well established" (p. 71). They also add that in Europe comics are seen as a "valuable medium appealing to children and adults alike" (p. 71). In Asia, comics or "Manga" are used in every aspect of life. Japanese culture specifically is saturated with this form of visual narrative (Schartz & Rubinstien- Ãvila, 2006).

Despite of the negative image of comic books, comics have begun to gain recognition as a resource material and have been used as supplemental materials in education for its benefits as

Griffith (2010) said, "Although I may not recommend a class study of a graphic novel, teachers can use parts of graphic novels that merge and connect with their instructional units or offer a choice for a graphic novel book club" (p. 185). For example, in one classroom, a graphic novel depicting urban life in a housing development was used to teach the students how to construct a narrative about their own life in an urban setting (Blitz, 2004).

By using comic adaptations as a supplemental text to the original, the teacher and students can analyze the visual translation to develop an understanding of the original text. Visual depictions of characters give readers a better grasp of who the character is in relation to the non-visual text. Specifically, graphic novels by nature appeal to readers (White, 2011, p. 19) as a form of "fringe" reading material along with the pop-culture-esque characteristics and "students like the graphic novels because the additional details provided by the pictures helped them understand the material" (Edwards, 2008, p. 57).

I do not mean to claim that graphic novels should replace traditional texts, but they can provide the teacher with a way of teaching conceptual understanding and academic vocabulary, thereby making subsequent traditional texts more comprehensible (Frey & Fisher, 2004, p. 24). Bucher (2004) asserts that teachers have begun to use graphic novels to "teach literary terms and techniques, such as dialogue to serve as a bridge to other classics, and as the basis for writing assignments" (p. 68). Simon (2008) shared his idea of using comics as a supplemental guide to canonical literature. Simon explains that there is often little connection between the reader and canonical texts. This can lead to issues with motivation, comprehension and confidence (2008, p. 186). He used the strategy of illustrating scenes of novels to demonstrate the complexities of the novel. By visually drawing out the scenes, the students were able to comprehend what was happening more and then critique themes and issues of gender and ethnicity. In short, reading

graphic novel adaptations of classics can create enthusiasm for reading and encourage the idea of

reading for pleasure.

Using comics as read-aloud texts is one way to use them as supplemental texts to other

school literature texts. In one case, students read comic books aloud as a class and took breaks to

talk through the content of the story. In Ranker's (2007) study, the students used their

background knowledge of what a plot was and they were quick to associate the plot of the comic

to a movie adaptation. This motivated the students to be enthusiastic about the lesson and helped

the teachers to teach the concept of a plot using the comic book. The teacher then had the

students individually write a comic strip of their own depicting a problem solving plot to

demonstrate their comprehension of the concept (pp. 297-299).

On a similar note, there can be cross curricular use of comics as a way to link more than

one subject (Gibson 2010; Schwarz 2002). Gibson (2010) was a guest speaker at a primary

school that did this kind of unit where History, English, Art and Geography were all linked

together by one project of using comics and graphic novels as well as creating their own comics.

At the end of the unit, the phenomenon of comics was celebrated with guest speakers who talked

about the origins of super heroes and villains and the possibilities of how to do more with comics

in the classroom. Teachers dressed about as comic book characters, and free comics were

distributed to the students. The students presented their group comics that demonstrated an

amalgam of themes and concepts that branched out over the various curriculum classes.

Using comics as material for reading circles is another way to implement them as a

teaching medium. Reading circles emphasize the use of all language skills, not just reading

(Jackson & Allen, 2007, p. 28). "Narrative informational book circles" (NIBC) can be arranged

in groups of three to five students and NIBC allows for critical thinking and reflection for

reading, discussing, and responding to trade book texts. Implementing this medium can increase students' interests to persuade and motivate them to read and connect to new knowledge, which can develop their reading comprehension skills.

Still, the issue Alevio and Norris (2010) raise is that using comics as a primary text for curriculum instruction is not being thoroughly explored. They assert that the Sterling North (1940) and the Wertham (1954) perceptions of comics being cheap, poor quality and inappropriate remain widespread (p. 72). In their argument calling for the validation of comics as a text book, Alevio and Norris (2010) called upon a study by Mallia (2007). In this study Mallia used a comic book as a text book to teach history to students in the fourteen-fifteen year age range. Mallia noted that (1) the students preferred the comic book textbook version rather than the traditional non-visual text and (2) the students enjoyed learning history and reading about it more using this alternative text.

In another study, comics were seen by students as an excellent medium for understanding the plot and key themes (Morrison et al., 2002). Carter (2009) feels that the use of graphic novels as a supplement for existing curriculums is much more effective than studying with traditional textbooks alone. The graphic novel form itself is conducive to the "connection-building method of using the material to supplement existing curriculums" to create a deeper understanding of the issues being taught (p. 69).

Comics and the ESL/ELL Classroom

Comics have been used to help ESL writers. Since ESL writers share some issues with basic readers, the fact that comics help ESL writers means this literature may be relevant to this study. From an ESL (English as a Second Language) perspective, Stephen Cary (2004) advocates the use of comics in the ESL Classroom. His perspective is based upon experience as

a second language learner specialist. Cary states, "comics provide authentic language learning opportunities for all students. The dramatically reduced text of many comics make them manageable and language profitable for even beginning level readers" (p. 4). Rankin (2007) adds that using comic books to teach lessons about text helps young English language learners with reading and writing" by linking the visual mode of comics to language and print (p. 296).

In the ESL/ELL classrooms, comics have many applications. Researchers have discussed various ways to implement comics in such classrooms. First, comic books facilitate students' language learning. Galley (2004) states that graphic novels "help English language learners put colloquial phrases into context, and introduce complex ideas in a format that is easy to understand" (p. 1). ESL teachers can implement instruction for students to create their own comics for ESL and EFL learners (Cary 2004; Liu 2004). As a result, students not only practice dialog discourse, but also help them express their comprehension of how dialog is used. This allows for students who are learning to grasp the language to do so in such a way that they can fully communicate the idea at hand without compromising it. In terms of writing dialog, Frey and Fisher (2004) use comics that have only visuals because "these wordless representations provide a foundation of a story. It gives us the opportunity to instruct about the mechanics of dialogue, while utilizing a compelling story" (p. 22).

However, as Cary (2004) points out, graphic novels are seldom used in ESL classes because teachers do not have enough information on how to implement comics into the curriculum (pp. 42-43). Chun (2009) recognizes that even though scholars have called for the implementation of graphic novels in the academic instruction setting, there is still little known about how to actually use graphic novels as multimodal texts that will foster the critical literacies of English-language learners (p. 144).

Comics and NES classroom

In the NES (Native English Speaking) classroom, comic books can enhance readers' interest in reading. One such way allows access to comics during free reading (Cary 2004; Liu 2004). Another activity for middle school reading is Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) where students have the freedom of choice to read what they want. If students are allowed to access comics freely during this time, more than likely they will be reading them (Cary 2004; Liu 2004).

Carter (2009) introduces his high school students to the comic book form to teach the writing process and uses an authentic composing activity where writing and drawing are both involved. He begins by teaching the conventions of a comic book to his students. Instead of freewriting about the prompt for a response, he has his students create a script as a response to a teacher guided writing prompt. The script is then given to another student to adapt to panels by drawing out the action depicting the actions dictated by the author of the script. The comic is drawn based upon the artist's understanding of the ideas presented by the author of the response.

Comic books also help students to develop reading strategies and comprehension skills. Ruppel characterizes graphic novels as an authentic literature. This "authentic literature can assist second language learners by providing engaging content in a sequential, logical order." (Ruppel, 2006, p. 1). This sequential, logical order not only demonstrates proper language, but it also facilitates it for English language learners. For kindergarten through grade 5 classes, a twenty-minute comic strip activity is used to assess and improve reading comprehension of students. The teacher guides the students in a read-aloud lesson where they take turns reading panel by panel as the teacher prompts them with questions about what they comprehend is occurring(Cary 2004; Ranker 2007).

Graphic Novels in the Library

Within the past decade, graphic novels have begun to find a place in libraries, not necessarily out of their recognition of literary value, but because of their perceived popularity among library patrons. Many librarians believe graphic novels motivate readers, especially emergent readers to read more, and they often feel that graphic novels belong in young adult collections (Griffith 2010; Peters 2009). In recent years, there has been an increase in nonfiction and education friendly graphic novels (White, 2011, p. 25). Peters (2009) discusses the relationship between power and reader base. The traditional base – books – is not the primary base that is in demand in libraries. Peters says libraries should not pursue their idea of what brand they want to serve, but support the power base of what readers demand. On the one hand, he explains that the way reading occurs is changing, and libraries find that reader demands are changing (p. 18). On the other hand, Peters acknowledges that there is a power struggle relationship "between authors, readers and gatekeepers in between who are the agents, editors, publicists, publishers, booksellers, content aggregators, resellers, and libraries" (p. 21). This complex relationship is "dependent on popular technologies, and social revolutions that create and inform reading opportunities" (2004, p. 21). Even so, school librarians are striving to put more of what students want to read on the shelves.

Reading Comprehension

Views of reading that define it as a skill of decoding text are now seen as narrow and limited. Over the last three decades, reading has become understood as "a complex process situated within dynamic social, psychological, and cultural contexts" (as cited in Appleman, 2010, p. 12). Reading comprehension is defined as "the process of simultaneously *extracting* and *constructing* meaning" (Snow & Sweet, 2003, p. 1). Readers usually create meanings and

interpret from sentences (constructing) after going through a decoding (extracting) process which involves knowing how the printed words on a page sound.

According to the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Framework For Reading, a mental model theory of reading comprehension is used. Reading comprehension is a skill and process to construct a textbase model and a mental model (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005): The first textbase model is related to decoding the printed words and analyzing microstructure and macrostructure of the texts to understand main ideas and supporting details. Then, the second mental model requires readers to integrate the findings from the textbase with the reader's prior knowledge, goals, and other factors. That is, reading comprehension is composed of lower level reading skills and higher level literacy skills depending on readers, activities, and texts.

Here, I present three dimensions of reading comprehension within a larger sociocultural context (Bursuck & Damer, 2011; Kucer, 2001; Snow & Sweet, 2003) in order to explain how to increase the comprehension skills of developmental readers. Reading comprehension involves the reader, the text, and the activity as well as a sociocultural context (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005; Snow & Sweet, 2003).

Reader Factors

Key factors impacting a readers' ability are the readers' linguistic capacities, cognitive abilities, background knowledge, and motivation (Bennett, Guthrie, McGough, & Rice, 1996; Bursuck & Damer, 2011; Snow & Sweet, 2003). Linguistic capacities are phonology, semantic knowledge, syntactic knowledge, and discourse knowledge. Cognitive skills are related to readers' ability to process information, and cognitive skills are attention, memory, critical analytic ability, inference, and visualization ability. Finally, readers' motivation can be

important as their interest plays one of the most influential factors in reading development (Valeri-Gold, 2003).

Linguistic capacities. The report of the National Reading Panel-Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction (2000) identified five essential elements for reading: Phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and strategies for reading comprehension (Blaunstein & Lyon, 2006; Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2006, p. 14).

Linguistic capacities are a basis of reading fluency. Awareness of phonemes (the smallest units of spoken language) and phonology (the larger parts of spoken language, words, syllables, rhymes) is very important for reading skill at early ages because "phonological abilities are the most crucial language skills for successfully learning to read, and that phonological weaknesses underlie most reading disabilities" (Scarborough, 2005, p. 3). Children's abilities to notice, identify, and manipulate individual sounds are important because phonemic awareness is essential in reading language. Beyond phonological and phonetic awareness, semantic and syntactic knowledge, such as vocabulary knowledge, word recognition, and grammar serve as important cues in decoding a text.

All these linguistic capacities reflect readers' reading fluency that is the ability to read text with accuracy, speed, and expression, and "reading fluency and reading comprehension have a reciprocal relationship" (Pikulski & Chard, 2005, p. 510). Readers' language knowledge builds reading fluency and this helps reading processes to reach the ultimate goal-reading comprehension. In short, various aspects of language knowledge and awareness are very important. Phonological skills are crucial factors in the early stages of reading development. Vocabulary skills can predict a reader's comprehension skills while syntactic skills are a less

effective indicator (Oakhill & Cain, 2007). After reviewing this literature, one finds that research shows the factors vary so it is hard to draw firm conclusion. None of the reading research has shown that any one of the factors is more important than the others because findings from the studies are not consistent.

Background knowledge. Reading comprehension requires readers not only to recognize and decode the words of the text, but also to involve a wide range of cognitive skills and processes. True meaning making precedes decoding the texts and requires a reader's prior knowledge and experience. A reader constructs *a situation model-* a mental model of the situation described by the text (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005, p. 73). While understanding main ideas and details can be attained through a reader's linguistic skills and text knowledge, drawing a situational model cannot be easily predicted and constructed with a lack of background knowledge.

Some researchers argue that background knowledge plays a more significant role than other language and decoding skills in reading comprehension. Recht and Leslie's (1998) study shows that "the reading comprehension of the knowledgeable poor decoders was superior to that of the less knowledgeable good decoders" (as cited in Catts, 2009, p. 179). In school, the term, "fourth-grade slump" and "eighth-grade cliff" describe the important role of background knowledge. Due to a lack of background knowledge, a fourth-grade student may begin to exhibit a decline in their scores on reading tests. As Hirsch (2000) said, "it takes knowledge to gain knowledge" (as cited in Bursuck & Damer, 2011, p. 279). Also, the National Reading Panel report (2000) explains the importance of prior knowledge to comprehension:

A reader must activate what he or she knows to use it during reading to comprehend a text. Without activation of what is known that is pertinent to the text, relevant knowledge

may not be available during reading, and comprehension may fail; this is analogous to listening to someone speak an unknown foreign language.

Cognitive skills. A great amount of knowledge itself does not guarantee a successful experience of reading comprehension either. Beyond decoding skills and background knowledge, readers are expected to use various cognitive skills and must process information simultaneously when reading. Subskills of reading comprehension are "extracting meaning from the text, constructing the situation model, and integrating the reader's prior knowledge and goals with information in the text" and more (Duke, 2005, p. 96). Reading is viewed as mental activities requiring a complex process in a cognitive perspective. A reader retrieves prior knowledge from his or her memory and integrates it with the new information that the reader gleaned read from the text. A higher level of reading comprehension - constructing a mental model from reading - is a complicated process that requires a collection of knowledge and skills. This practice takes many years to acquire while decoding skill, such as word recognition, may be achieved in a short period of time (Catts, 2009). For example, Kintsch and Kintsch (2005) gave an example of how people comprehend the functions of the human heart. In the beginning, readers would understand the macrostructure and the microstructure of the text by recognizing propositional ideas, headings and subsections, and following the linguistic structure of the sentences. Then, readers retrieve prior knowledge about the heart which they read previously and integrate it with new information. Finally, they can construct a mental model of the heart in order to comprehend the text clearly. These processes to create a mental or situational models require both cognitive skills and reading strategies.

One of these cognitive skills is the working memory. Working memory is vital because it predicts the readers' performance on reading tests and correlates with reading comprehension.

When the reader acquires knowledge and practices to build retrieval structures, he or she can retrieve the information and expand it in their long-term memory that is linked to the current contents of short-term memory. Another cognitive skill in reading is inferences. Reading demands not only for the gap to be filled, but to create a coherent textbase and to infer what is unsaid in the text. Inference skill actually can enhance reading comprehension. As Linderholm et al. (2000) said, "Comprehension, based on a coherent mental presentation, would be improved by revising text structure so that generation of inferences is facilitated" (p. 526).

Therefore, the reader' employment of cognitive strategies are essential to reading comprehension. E. Kintsch and W. Kintsch (1996) present several cognitive skills for reading comprehension as follows:

- Using words or imagery to elaborate the content;

- Rereading, paraphrasing, and summarizing in one's own words to clarify the content;

- Reorganizing the content into a hierarchical outline, diagram, or graph the shows the important relations between ideas;

- Consciously seeking relations between new content and existing knowledge;

- Consciously monitoring one's ongoing comprehension, identifying that source for a breakdown in comprehension, and attempting to resolve the problem rather than passively reading on (as cited in Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005, p. 84).

Jeffrey Wilhelm also argues that reading should be viewed as a form of cognitive and intellectual inquiry that people continue to develop as a lifelong literacy (as cited in Appleman, 2010, p. 16). Wilhelm says that students need to develop the habits of intellectual inquiry that expert readers use, such as visualizing, inferring, predicting, and summarizing.

Reading comprehension can be characterized as a comprehension process that is purposeful, constructive, motivated, skillful and strategic, and self-monitored (Blachowicz & Ogle, 2008, pp. 26-37). In other words, the reading comprehension process is significantly influenced by individual reader factors. Interest, persistence, experience, and style interact with each other and the text, as well as awareness and confidence as a reader.

Text Factors

Features of the text also impact reading comprehension. The difficulty or easiness of comprehending texts depends on the reader's prior knowledge and experience with various texts. These are referred to as text readability, text structure, and text organization (Bursuck & Damer, 2011). Factors of text readability are vocabulary, sentence structure, word length, and syntactic structure. Unfamiliar vocabulary or sentence structures can impede a reader's comprehension. Text structure refers to the various genres that contain certain patterns of organization, for instance, narrative text and expository text. Without text structure knowledge and genre knowledge, the reader may not recognize what the text is, or how to analyze it. Text organization means how clearly and coherently texts are organized. Coherence devices, such as pronouns and transitional words help readers find coherence at both the microstructure and macrostructure level. Fully explicit text is easy to read while a less coherent text can be challenging and may require active inference and interpretation skills. More importantly, visuals such as pictures, graphs, and animations can facilitate reading comprehension by serving to illustrate ideas and enhance understanding in the text. Reading text can be an easy or difficult process in comprehension based on the characteristics of the text, but other factors of readers' ability and the activities in which they are involved also influence reading comprehension.

Activity Factors

Activity is the dimension of reading that "involves one or more purposes, some operations to process the text at hand, and the consequences of performing the activity" (Snow & Sweet, 2003, pp. 7-8). The purpose of reading can be externally imposed (homework) or personally motivated (wanting to know for personal interest). Also readers partake in several processes at the different reading stages. Before reading, readers remind themselves of the purposes of reading. During reading, readers engage in actions like decoding and using reading strategies (skimming, underlining, or rereading) in order to analyze local and global knowledge and interpret the text. Finally, readers achieve the reading goal, gain new information, comprehend knowledge, and store them in their retrieval structures for the future use. All in all, the nature and purpose of the reading task, the process, and the consequences are all engaged in any reading activity (Moats, 2005).

Contextual Factors

For the purpose of this study, I adopted the textbase and mental model for reading comprehension (Bursuck & Damer, 2011; Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005; Snow & Sweet, 2003). So far, three dimensions (reader, text, and activity) in the model have been discussed. The fourth factor, the sociocultural context that affects reading comprehension will now be defined. Contextual factors include family culture, belief and value systems, communication styles, interpersonal relations and experiences, language use at home, school culture, classroom, neighborhood, ethnicity, and economic resources, etc.

The main physical context where reading occurs is very important. For example, in a classroom environment, students may receive reading instruction, increase reading strategies and background knowledge, as well as get support from peers and teachers. At the same time,

45

students bring their reading experiences and the reading abilities they practice in their home and neighborhood to school. Home and family culture brings different learning styles and belief systems. The neighborhood in which the economic situation, the learning resources and the cultural expectations of learning are differently available has a considerable effect on students' reading comprehension. More contextual factors will be discussed in detail when I discuss developmental readers later.

Beyond the traditional view of reading as decoding, reading comprehension involves two different levels: extracting textbase information and constructing a mental model. At the textbase level, the decoding process and the microstructure and macrostructure analysis are involved. At the mental level, "the process of meaning construction proceeds beyond the text itself" (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005). The three dimensions that influence reading comprehension are the reader, the text, and the activity. Readers engage in various reading strategies and processes with their language skills, cognitive skills and background knowledge, and then they construct knowledge. As Snow and Sweet (2003) view reading comprehension, it is a social phenomenon, and the broader sociocultural context that influences all the three dimensions should not be ignored. As reading comprehension theory has expanded and evolved over time, reading comprehension scholars have come to believe that reading comprehension should not be viewed as an isolated and unitary skill (Duke, 2005; Sweet, 2005). Among many factors, reading comprehension can be increased by expanding vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, and reading strategies (Kamhi, 2005).

Developmental Readers

In this section, I present a literature review on developmental readers in the U.S. context. I discuss the statistical facts regarding the increasing numbers of developmental readers, the

views of developmental readers, and the causes and effects of being developmental readers in terms of language, cognitive and affective factors, and environmental and educational factors.

Facing the Facts

It is notable that numerous studies and practical teaching guides for children who are at risk have been published over the past three decades (Blaunstein & Lyon, 2006; Bond et al., 1994; Bursuck & Damer, 2011, Cain & Oakhill, 2007, Carnine, Silber, Kame'enui, Tarver & Jungjohanna, 2006; Collins & Gunning, 2009; Gonzalez, 2001; Guthrie, 2004; Muth, K. E. 1989; Paris & Stahl, 2005; Stahl & McKenna, 2006). There are fewer studies of developmental college readers and these are mostly available in academic journals instead in books (Attewell, Lavin, Domina & Levey, 2006, Bower-Campbell, 2008; Caverly, Nicholson, & Radcliffe, 2004; Colonna, 2003; Henry, 1995; Peterson, 2004; Willingham & Price, 2009). There is also little information available about developmental college readers in qualitative studies (Barksdale-Ladd & Rose, 1997, Nash, 2008).

Some older studies show a decreasing literacy level in the U.S., along with an increasing number of people having reading difficulties: "The U.S. Department of Education estimates that one-third of the school population has significant learning problems," and most of these problems are reading related (Will, 1986, as cited in Richek, List & Lerner, 1989, p. 3). Lyon and Moats (1997) have reported that at least 20% of the U.S. population has reading difficulties.

The number of developmental readers at the secondary level has been increasing according to federal reports and standardized test results. According to Appleman (2010), the percentage of proficient readers has not improved for the past 25 years. For example, National Assessment of Educational Progress testing reported that "one-third of incoming [college] freshmen students are placed in a remedial reading, writing or mathematics class (as cited in

Appleman, p.50). In *Adolescent Literacy: An NCTE Policy Research Brief*, "less than half of 2005 ACT-tested high school graduates demonstrated readiness for college-level reading, and the 2005 NAEP reading scores for twelfth graders showed a decrease from 80 percent at the proficient level in 1992 to 73 percent in 2005." Thus, "20 percent of high school seniors can be classified as functionally illiterate at the time they graduate" according to the National Right to Read Foundation.

In *Why Kids Can't Read*, Blaunstein and Lyon (2006) studied the high percentage of children who face reading difficulties in the United States. They found that almost 40% of all fourth graders cannot read at their perspective grade level, and children in poverty are especially at risk. Ethnicity and race can be one of the factors of reading difficulties. Among several ethnic groups, "only 12% of African American students and 15% of Hispanic students are reading proficiently or better in the 4th grade. In New York City alone, over 60% of minority students cannot read at a basic level" (p. 8). This is in reference to children raised in low-income households.

The Orton Dyslexia Society (1986) reported that "about 23 million adults are functionally illiterate, having basic skills at fourth grade level or below. Another 35 million are semi-literate, with skills below the eighth grade level." The U.S. Department of Education (1986) also reported that "the lack of reading skills among large numbers of young adults threatens to divide society deeply between the literate elite and a low-income, low-achieving underclass unequipped for educational and professional advancement" (as as cited in Richek, List, & Lerner, 1989, p. 3). Children who cannot read "will not be able to compete in a highly skilled, technological world" (as as cited in Richek, List, & Lerner, p. 5). Chimera (2007) explains the problems that struggling readers face:

48

If you have trouble reading, your life is going to be affected on many . . . , many more than if you have problems in math or writing. For instance, being poor in math wouldn't necessarily prevent you from becoming a social studies teacher or a writer. However, not being able to read will certainly affect your ability to learn array of subjects and thus impair your ability to earn the education and abilities needed to become what you like. (p. 78)

The current state of reading development in the U.S. has a direct relevance to this study. The goal of this study is to help development readers grow into competent readers so that they do not later find themselves in the situation Chimera has above explained.

Developmental Reader

The terms, struggling readers, at-risk readers, reluctant readers, remedial readers, and poor comprehenders have all appeared in published articles and books. Scholars cannot agree on the most accurate term to use. The term "developmental readers" is used in this study for several reasons. It is a constructive term, not about deficiency. The college in which I conducted this study uses the term in the course name, Developmental Reading. Importantly, as it implies helping students to improve their reading skills, my study is also positioned as one which advocates from help my students to improve.

For developmental readers, reading and language arts curriculums often seem to be boring and uninteresting. These readers appear to be distracted or unfocused in reading class, and not engaged in class discussion. Lack of interest in reading also causes students to not perform successfully in group-discussions, essays, quizzes, and tests in school (Gunning, 2009; Snowball, 2005).

Developmental readers face various difficulties and are generally indentified as those who appear in class to be distracted, less engaged, or not listening during reading, who seem to be either not reading or unable to read at grade-level proficiency; or who achieve low grades on reading tests or placement tests. These readers fall behind, lack motivation and engagement in assigned reading activities, and perform poorly on standardized tests and classroom-based assessments; therefore, they can be slow readers or need special attention to achieve grade-level proficiency. Sometimes developmental readers can be fluent readers who can read and decode at a lower reading level but cannot comprehend the text. These poor comprehenders may have significant or mild deficits in reading comprehension despite their reading fluency skill (Catts, Adlof, & Weismer, 2006).

The term, "developmental reader" is complicated to define. Developmental readers are not simply nonreaders. Surprisingly, developmental readers can be active and expert readers for a particular text. But they may be temporally struggling in reading depending on genres, topics, contexts, or disciplines, as anyone can be a struggling or proficient reader with a particular text (Appleman, 2010). As Appleman explains, a developmental reader is a student who has trouble engaging in reading actively and shows little interest in reading texts. But what this reader does in class may not reveal that they are proficient readers with non-academic texts. In other words, this reader may have a favorite genre of text that he may enjoy reading, while at the same time he can have difficulty reading traditional school literature.

It is important to be aware that the identification of developmental readers at the college level is not precise but varies among different academic institutes (four-year research college vs. two-year community college, or private vs. public institutions). More selective universities may admit a smaller number of developmental students while less-selective institutions put a number

of students with low academic skills into the developmental reading courses. Classifying true developmental students requires a closer look because there are many underlying factors, such as test scores, academic skills, and personal characteristics (Peterson, 2004). One study found that remedial courses are given to a number of students with strong high school backgrounds rather than students with limited academic skills (Attewell et al., 2006). Identifying true developmental readers is complicated by an individual's various reading skills, preferences, and other non-linguistic factors that cannot always be easily detected through reading assessments in school.

In order to understand developmental readers, the characteristics of successful readers should also be explored. Blachowicz and Ogle (2008) introduce the four qualities that good readers exhibit in school: 1) the readers' preferences in materials; 2) their preferences in styles of engagement in reading; 3) their use of strategies; and 4) their active and reflective roles.

First, due to the varied interests of the individual, a student can show different attitudes toward different reading materials. Two issues may cause a reader to become not interested or less interested in reading certain genres of text. The first is the amount of time a student takes to cognitively connect his interest in reading. The second is the amount of reading materials to which the student is exposed. Therefore, developmental readers could become successful readers if they have more positive experiences in finding their own favorite reading materials.

Second, according to Blachowicz and Ogle, a good reader has his own preference of how to be engaged with reading. This means that each reader prefers different places and social arrangements when reading. Some readers may do well in reading by themselves and lose themselves in their reading. Other readers may work better through classroom activities and small group discussions, or teacher guidance and direct explanation. Because an individual's

attention for reading varies, a developmental reader may not have found his preferred style of engagement with reading or a particular comfort zone easily in class.

Third, a good reader employs his/her own reading strategies. While good readers tend to prefer to use certain comprehension strategies, such as formulating questions, organizing story structure and characters, and focusing on details, developmental readers are still in the process of learning and utilizing a variety of the strategies required of different reading materials and purposes. If useful reading comprehension strategies are not introduced in class, some students may not be able to read effectively and broaden their views of reading strategies. A developmental reader may not be aware of various reading strategies and may not employ them, and some strategies he/she uses may not be suited to particular reading materials.

Finally, Blachowicz and Ogle say that a good reader reads actively in different reading stages (before/during/after) physically and mentally by adopting different strategies: questioning, taking notes, and scrolling the eyes. Also, a good reader engages in reflection about reading and constructs meanings by comparing and contrasting authors' ideas with their own ideas. However, developmental readers may lack one or more of the characteristics that successful readers bring to class: a strong foundation of reading strategies, or the personal interest and energy to carry on reading tasks in both personal and school levels.

Reading Problems: Causes and Effects

The problems developmental readers face are discussed and widely understood. The causes and effects of being developmental readers will be illustrated according to linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural dimensions.

It is noteworthy that I exclude physical factors as causes of being a developmental reader. Physical conditions, such as visual, auditory, or speech impairments, or neurological status are

not considered because these factors are more likely to relate to serious reading disability and dyslexia, which are not a focus of this study.

Linguistic dimension. As explained previously, language ability and reading comprehension are highly correlated, especially for early-year readers. Phonological skills, word recognition skills, and semantic skills (vocabulary knowledge) are important for reading fluency. First, phonological knowledge is a basis of reading skill. Some parents may hold a myth belief that a reading problem exists momentarily and their children will eventually outgrow reading difficulties. However, delay of effective instruction can hinder children's phonemic and phonological awareness development and their success in reading. Kame'enui (1996) and Smith, Sommons, & Mane'enui (1995) conducted studies that show how early phonological and phonemic awareness help children to become more successful readers than those who do not experience this awareness (as cited in Carnine, Silbert, Kame'enui, Tarver, Jungjohanna, 2006). A longitudinal study monitoring the two groups' reading progress from kindergarten to high school found that the gap between poor readers and good readers remains (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2006, p. 21). Shaywitz and Shaywitz say one cause of being a developmental reader might be related to trouble with oral reading fluency. Early phonics instruction is important because it can help children avoid the possibility of being poor readers from their early ages. Some developmental readers may suffer from not knowing how to recognize words and read them correctly. Reading proficiency depends on listening and speaking skills as well. Particularly, listening skill is strongly related to reading achievement. However, several studies show mixed results in looking at the close relation between phonological skills and reading comprehension (Muter et al, 2004; Parrila, Kirby & McQuarrie, 2004, as cited in Cain & Oakhill, 2007, pp. 9-10) because phonological skills do not necessarily predict reading comprehension in the future.

53

Other language skills at the semantic and syntactic level are very important for decoding and predict reading skill development. Catts, Adolf and Weismer (2006) discuss how developmental readers with a normal ability in phonological process skill are more likely to have a language problem with semantic and syntactic processing, which partially can cause reading comprehension problems. In general, a deficit in general language comprehension at the phonological, semantic, or syntactic level seems to cause reading comprehension problems. If a reader's skills in non-linguistic areas are not strong, they also may face reading comprehension problems.

Discourse dimension. A successful reader is able to access unknown words in the text, connect information from various parts of the text and make inferences to fill in missing information when constructing a coherent mental model in order to comprehend the text (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). Reading comprehension requires higher-order skills at the discourse-level. Cain and Oakhill (2007) consider three discourse-level skills with which developmental readers face difficulties: inference and integration, metacognitive skill (e.g., comprehension monitoring), and text or genre knowledge (e.g., narrative structuring skills).

First, it is well documented that developmental readers are poor at making inferences and integrations (Long, Oppy, & Sleely, 1994). A less-developed reader is poor at making inferences, incorporating general knowledge with new information in the text, and recalling information. A development reader also has difficulty with the use of context and cohesive devices. Compared to readers with good comprehension, readers with poor comprehension are able to hold much less general knowledge and produce fewer inferences due to not incorporating information from the text and holding less information in memory (Cain, Oakhill, Barners, &

Bryant, 2001). This impaired use of the various clues does not facilitate the understanding of words, establish meanings, or inference meanings of unfamiliar words or idioms.

Second, genre knowledge is important for reading comprehension. Cain and Oakhill (2007) found that knowledge of narrative skills and knowledge of structure narratives seem to be an indicator of later comprehension success. Knowing text readability (easiness of reading text based upon its organization), text structure, and text organization facilitate reading comprehension, especially when more American children at an early age are exposed to narrative structure. This experience with various text structures is important for laying the foundation in a child's reading comprehension. Without this experience, it can create a concern over a lack of knowledge in a variety of genres.

According to National Center for Education Statistics (2004), "U.S. students have the highest gap in performance favoring literacy reading over informational readers" (as as cited in Duke, 2005, p. 97). As a student becomes older, he is expected to read more expository readings and increase text structure knowledge. When facing unfamiliar texts, he/she may lose interests in a particular genre and possibly become developmental readers.

Cognitive dimension. The cognitive dimension of reading is viewed in terms of decoding skills and metacognition skills. Cognitive skills facilitate the student's ability to process knowledge when reading. Reading requires not only language skills, but also mental skills while receiving and generating information from the text. Some developmental readers may have a lack of cognitive skill when "decoding, establishing local and global coherence, using their prior knowledge to build a situational model, and so on (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005, p. 85). Several studies, including Huelsman (1970), Sattler (1982), Bow (1988), Rugel (1974) and Spache (1963), found that several characteristics of developmental readers become apparent at a

young age when their cognitive abilities are challenged. The difficulties these readers may have are recalling specific information, working with symbols, maintaining concentration, sequencing, summarizing, and recognizing relationships among paragraphs (as cited in Conlon, Sanders, & Zapart, 2004). Developmental college readers seem to be weak at studying and note taking skills (Barksdale-Ladd & Rose, 1997). Yet in Sannomiya's (1984) study, developmental readers seem to better understand through listening than through reading when text is difficult to process (as as cited in Bond et al., 1994; Hinchley & Levy, 1988).

Another affect that causes a student to be a poor developmental reader is related to metacognitive skills (Cain and Oakhill, 2007). Cain (1999) shows that a developmental reader is less capable of using metacognitive skills than good comprehenders (as cited in Cain and Oakhill, 2007). Metacognitive skills are three-fold for the reader: the reader's ability to monitor their goals and process of reading; the reader's ability to apply strategies to read effectively; and the reader's ability to enhance comprehension. For example, monitoring skill helps the reader to succeed in comprehending by using various reading strategies, such as asking self-directed questions, summarizing, visualizing, and skimming (see Kintsch and Kintsch, 2005). Metacognitive strategies help developmental college readers to develop their abilities of self-regulation, self-efficacy, self-esteem and foster positive views on reading (Caverly, Nicholson & Radcliffe, 2004; Nash, 2008).

Affective dimension. Readers' affective factors, such as anxiety and attitude, play a significant role in reading development. Importantly, the comprehension process is influenced by both individual and social aspects. Affective factors include interest, persistence, knowledge, experience, style of interacting with others and text, awareness, and confidence as a reader. Among children, the differences in personal and social adjustment are great when comparing

56

developmental readers with successful readers. In one study, ninth grade students who are developmental readers said that reading was "boring, it was too difficult, it took too long . . . . reading was hard work" (Snowball, 2005, p.43). With these attitudes, developmental readers show more behavioral and emotional problems. Horn and Packard (1985), Gentile and McMillan (1987), and Harris and Sipay (1990) studied students with reading problems. They found these readers exhibited stress and disturbed behaviors when reading, and various types of emotional problems affected reading difficulty. The symptoms are anger, aggression, extreme distraction, daydreaming, shyness, irritation, avoidance, negative attitude toward reading, discouragement, fear of success, frustration, feelings of insecurity, a lack of self confidence, and depression (as cited in Bond et al., 1994, pp. 74-77). Fourth-and fifth-grade children with reading difficulties are more likely viewed as less preferred in class, less intelligent, and less emotionally stable (Harris & King, 1982). When students with reading problems receive compensatory reading instruction or are placed in developmental reading courses, they feel stigmatized as well. All these experiences and negative self- images lead to low self-conception. Low self-esteem creates additional problems in learning achievement as well as reading achievement. Failure in academic achievement also can create personal maladjustment.

Affective factors influence not only emotional problems, but also self-efficacy and personal interest in reading. Self-efficacy can be a great indicator for understanding students' motivation and self-regulatory skills. Self-regulatory skills and processes involve metacognitive skills, behaviors and motivation and facilitate learning achievement, which directly and indirectly lead to academic achievement (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1997). In addition, Jakubowski and Dembo (2004) explored how high-self regulation is closely related to contemplation, willingness, self-awareness, and self-identity

as students in learning. Bowers-Campbell (2008) claims that the use of Facebook can enhance developmental students' self-efficacy and self-regulated learning. These relating factors can lead students to focus on learning achievement. Finally, personal interest in reading tasks can be a major factor that impacts reading ability in college. Valeri-Gold (2003) examined college developmental students' self-perceptions of the factors that affect reading ability and found that 43 developmental college readers put interest as the major factor in reading ability while other studies showed different results with different ranked factors (i.e., attitude, effort, schools, materials, and teacher). In conclusion, reading problems can cause emotional instability and low academic achievement, and they can influence personal adjustments and self-efficacy. Blachowicz and Ogle (2008) took a closer look at reader-based comprehension as they analyzed good readers' reading strategies. They believed that reading comprehension can be enhanced with readers' attitude, interest, and energy. Affective factors and attitudes rather than language skill itself can impact on reading improvement and personal development.

Sociocultural dimension. In this study, I particularly examine sociocultural theory and constructivist theory in order to understand how social and cultural factors influence people to be or become developmental readers in a broad context. Literacy practice at home and school is critical to the development of reading comprehension. Receiving appropriate reading practice instruction is essential as it increases readers' background knowledge and reading skills and helps them to become more active and autonomous readers.

The notion of reading has been expanded through the frame of sociocultural research on literacy in the past three decades as "literacy studies grounded firmly in an understanding of literacy as sociocultural practice" (Lankshear, 1999). Several scholars, such as Gee (2008), Fairclough (1989), and Stree (1995) have argued that sociocultural factors influence student

learning and should be examined to better understand literacy. The shared ideas among the sociocultural scholars are as follows: first, they believe that cognitive and behavioral aspects do not solely explain a complex learning process. Second, they believe that examining sociocultural dimensions including social, historical, political, and cultural aspects can help illuminate the learning process. Therefore, literacy skills are acquired or learned through a social practice.

Home and community factors. Development of reading comprehension skills depends on various language, affective, and social factors. Among many factors, family culture shapes reading skills considerably. A successful reader's home environment is usually a place where affection, support, understanding, and learning opportunities are provided. Positive attitudes toward reading and learning through home literacy practice facilitates improvement in reading and leads children to be successful readers. On the other hand, a broken home, a destructive relationship with parents and siblings, a general indifference with life, or child neglect are more likely to produce poor readers with feelings of insecurity, negative attitudes toward learning and reading, and stress (Bond et al., 1994). In several studies on family characteristics of children with severe reading disabilities, Melekian (1990) shows that the head of household holds low occupation and low educational levels. Klein, Altman, Dreizen, Friedman, and Powers (1981) found that family members' attitudes toward learning and reading, and their relationship with teachers, the principal, and school are influential on children's reading achievement. Werner and Strother (1987) revealed that parents' over-control of their children can cause them to be very dependent and rebellious (as cited in Bond, Tonler, Wasson, & Wasson, 1994, p. 79).

Valeri-Gold and Errico (1998) and Valeri-Gold and Commander (2005) studied family influences on college developmental reading and found that reading factors vary as previous research shows. The factors related to family are formal instruction, book accessibility, the use

59

of the library, parental observation, reading back to parents, and reading advice. Absence of these factors, of course, cause developmental college readers to lack necessary reading strategies, motivation to succeed academically, and self conception about reading and to face difficulty recalling and retaining information. These underlying home and family factors reflect these students' alliterate status: they possess the ability to read, but do not quite succeed in reading comprehension as they reveal attitudes, feelings, and values that put a low priority on reading as a personal activity.

Moreover, home and community influences play a significant role for students' language development and reading comprehension based on the sociocultural aspect. Children's language learning is developed or encouraged through social interactions with their peers and adults in their home environment. The availability and assistance from adults in the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD) increases children's language acquisition and concept development (Vygotsky, 1986).

Ruddell and Ruddell (1995) emphasize the importance of literacy practice at an early age. A child's early developed language knowledge and his skill to connect key meaning elements in sentences increase the comprehension of printed text as well. Also, Heath (1982) and Labov (1970) studied how children acquired social interactions and learning attitudes toward literacy from different home and communities and used them at school. They found that children who were exposed early to both reading and writing literacy practices and questioning routines became more successful at school than other groups where only verbal skills or written skills were valued (as cited in Ruddell & Ruddell, 1995, pp. 40-51).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the report of *Reading Literacy of U.S. Fourth-Grade Students* in an international context (2007) presents readers' performance

based on background characteristics (sex, race, and ethnicity): Average scores for White (560), Asian (567), and non-Hispanic students were higher than the scores for Black (503), Hispanic (518), and American Indian/Alaska Native (468) in the United States. As this shows, certain cultural and racial backgrounds seem to bring stereotypical ideas of developmental readers. Due to contextual factors associated with reading, including a lack of language and literacy practice under family or cultural influences, students of color and English as a second language (ESL) learners tend to be considered as developmental readers.

Educational factors. Under educational factors, school administrative policies, the methods of teaching, and the role of the teacher should be considered. First, readiness and effectiveness of educational policies, administration, and curriculum from primary to higher education have been questioned. Higher education is positioned critically whether or not institutions acknowledge developmental students' needs (Barnes & Piland, 2010; Malnarich, Dusenberry, Sloan, Swinton & van Slyck, 2003).

Some reading curriculums may create reading difficulty and fail to implement instructional adjustments if reading instruction is provided by grade level (age) rather than by students' reading skill. In this case, poor readers may fall behind by receiving very advanced reading instruction, but not receiving needed instruction. Also negative reading experiences in school at an early age can cause them to become developmental readers. Preparing social skills (cooperative group work) and developing visual and auditory perceptual skills are helpful before reading instruction.

Franzak (2006) conducted a qualitative study to evaluate how current pedagogical models (reader response, strategic reading, and critical literacy) work for developmental adolescent readers and suggests that changes in reading policy and intervention are needed to help these

learners perform better. Perin, Keselman and Monopoli (2003) assert that community college instruction in remedial reading class does not effectively prepare developmental students to move to a higher education setting because reading and writing skills are taught only as separate skills.

The relationship between reading comprehension and reading comprehension instruction is important. In school, reading instruction is one of the most significant factors in reading development. In other words, faulty reading and a lack of educational adjustment can create developmental readers (Ruddell & Ruddell, 1995).

In a provocative book, *Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It*, Gallagher (2009) claims that readicide, defined as "the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools" (p. 2) is widespread in American schools. Gallagher says many school practices contribute to the death of reading. The following practices could prevent students from increasing their interest in reading: demanding students to read difficult texts without support instruction, focusing only on academic texts, and emphasizing the ideas of test-takers rather than lifelong readers.

The Rand Reading Study Group (2002) found that the value of the teacher's role and explicit instruction of specific comprehension strategies are important. There is criticism that developmental reading courses may not be useful for the target students (Henry, 1995; Maxwell, 1997) if compensatory instruction in the developmental reading course is not implemented correctly. More importantly, roles of reading instructors and their relationship with students are relevant. Based on teachers' effectiveness in organizing and operating reading programs, students can acquire essential knowledge and useful instruction. Several studies have found that effectiveness of strategic reading instruction shows a significant growth for true developmental

student readers to achieve higher scores on a standardized reading tests, and increase their metacognitive awareness, along with increasing their beliefs in strategic reading (Caverly et al., 2004; Simpson & Rush, 2003; 2004).

Carbo (1983, 1985) provides several tips for developmental readers to improve reading skills while acknowledging that developmental readers need more attentions in various areas. Carbo shows that developmental readers are able to overcome reading difficulties with careful lesson plans and tactful instruction in school:

(1) under conditions of quiet, (2) when allowed intake of food or drink, (3) if given opportunities to move about, (4) under carefully structured instruction, (5) in informally designed classrooms, (6) when provided chances to work with peers, (7) if provided tactile-kinesthetic learning experiences, and (8) when given major instruction at times during the day other than early morning. (as cited in Bond, Tonler, Wasson, & Wasson, 1994, p. 67)

By examining the problems and the needs of developmental readers, I hope that my qualitative study contributes to improving reading instruction for developmental college readers.

In short, section 2 of chapter 2 explored two main concepts: reading comprehension and developmental readers. The definitions and the causes and effects of reading comprehension and developmental readers were explained. Research findings seem to agree that discourse and metacognitive skills and background knowledge are more likely to predict later reading comprehension success than linguistic skills. Generally, developmental readers are viewed as poor comprehenders who are less competent than good comprehenders in the use of cognitive, metacognitive, semantic, and syntactic skills.

<center>**Comics and Developmental Readers**</center>

In this final section, I argue how helpful comics and graphic novels can help developmental readers improve their reading skills and build their literacy abilities. Comics can facilitate students' interest in reading, develop their multiliteracy skills, and help them to become life-long readers.

Comics as Cognitive Aids

As mentioned earlier, reading comics requires more than language skills because, as literature, comics are "a layering of text, visual and pictorial" (Carter, 2009, p. 71). Students with a normal phonological ability can still be developmental readers if they lack the intellectual skills for comprehending texts. Comics can help with this problem. First, when reading demands higher cognitive skills, the pictures and drawings in graphic novels and comics can help students to find clues in the pictures that help demystify the text and increase comprehension (Cary, 2004, p. 3). Comics also tend to have a "low readability level" making them more accessible to developmental readers (Snowball, 2005, p. 43). Visuals can help developmental readers to understand the story (White, 2011). Graphic novels can represent complex material in ways that reduce the cognitive demand of reading dense text while portraying sophisticated concepts.

Not only can comics help readers to comprehend easily with pictures, but can be challenging cognitively as students interpret both text and pictures and use several cognitive skills, such as inference, prior knowledge, and reading strategies.

Reading and comprehending comics requires the same cognitive skills needed to read and comprehend more traditional works of prose fiction. As Snowball (2005) points out, graphic novels are at the same reading level as *Time* magazine. Gibson (2009) feels comics are actually

<center>64</center>

more complex pieces of text. Since graphic novels employ the same medium as comic strips and comic books, they use pictures and text to present information (White, 2011, p. 20). The presentation of information via sequential art allows the reader to engage the text, thus making comics a great tool for engaging students to read and to learn. Graphic novels are seeing more use in the classroom as supplemental texts for this reason. These visual translations are demanding in nature. Readers are required to concentrate to understand the relationship between text and image (p. 13), fill in gap between what is shown and what is not shown, and infer unsaid meaning and messages.

Pictures in comics play roles as contextual supports and they "offer access to information in a way that is both content-rich and high-interest" (White, 2011, p. 24). Cary (2004) and Chun (2009) discuss the dilemma of using comics in the high school classroom setting. One belief against using comics to teach reading is that "developmental readers rely on pictures while a good reader relies on text only" (Alevio & Norris, 2007, p. 70). However, comics can increase reader comprehension (Morrison et al., 2002) as the words and illustrations are meant to be "read" (comprehend) together.

In other words, comics are used to deepen the students' understanding of course content by using visual literacy skills. Using comic strips that are a "text structure with a story to tell" (McVicker, 2007, p. 85) requires a form of comprehension where the reader must combine the verbal text with the iconography to receive the communication. The brain is constantly searching for patterns to create meaning by connecting new information to current information. "The brain makes sense of the world based upon the learner's needs" (Cary, 2004, p. 3). Frey and Fisher (2004) explain that "students are taught to use every available text feature to aid in

65

building comprehension – so it makes sense that graphic novels, which are full of text features, help build comprehension" (p. 24).

Comics as an Advanced Literacy Tool

Even if comics cannot be used as a cognitive aid, they can be used as an advanced literacy tool (Carter 2009; Seelow, 2010). Some educators make use of graphic novels and comics to develop students' advanced literacies skills as well as traditional reading and writing skills (Carter 2009; Gee 2004; McTaggert 2008).

Using popular media and comics can be very helpful when teaching reading and writing and their sub skills. Many students today are at ease with combining visual and text information, and as new media becomes mainstream, comic books offer a way to reinforce traditional grammar and spelling within a layout that's familiar to your people (Cleaver, 2008, p. 28).

In a class observation, the teachers wanted to enhance literacy acquisition for English language students from diverse backgrounds. Graphic novels were used as samples of popular culture to develop students' writing skills. A think-aloud technique of reading the graphic novel text was used. The teacher and the student would then use a brainstorming strategy to conjure descriptive vocabulary to match the visuals and the iconography of the graphic novel. The class was then asked to take the graphic novel story they had just read and convert it to a non visual-text only story. The visual narratives presented the students with the opportunity to discuss how the authors conveyed mood and tone through images (Frey & Fisher, 2004, pp. 20-21). The researchers found mostly positive benefits to using graphic novels in the classroom. The graphic novel use allowed readers to tap into their own understandings of the texts and rely as much on a visual vocabulary as written vocabulary (Frey & Fisher, 2004, p. 20).

Comics and graphic novels can promote advanced literacies skills. Specifically, the idea of comics as an advanced literacy tool stems from four areas of thought – visual literacy, multiliteracy, critical literacy, and New Literacy Studies – that center around the idea of comics being multimodal.

The first area, visual literacy can be approached in two ways: (1) "visual literacy refers to a group of vision competencies a human being can develop by seeing and, at the same time, having and integrating other sensory experiences" (McVicker, 2007, p.85); (2) in regards to learning to read, children often learn to read with picture books, making sense of pictures before even reading a single word. The picture can also be used in conjunction with the text to synthesize a narrative. In most cases such as this, the comprehension of the narrative is dominantly dependent on the picture or "visual" (Giorgis et al., 1999). Visual literacy helps explain how comics are read; where not just textual literacy is called upon to "read" comic panels, but visual literacy is needed as well.

The second area is multiliteracies which Cope and Kalantzis (2000) define as "the multiplicity of communication channels and media" and "the increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity" (p. 5). McTaggart (2008) maintains that reading graphic novels "promotes better reading skills, improves comprehension, and complements many areas of the curriculum" (p. 33). Also graphic novels are "serious" reading where the development of literacy skills and critical literacy take place simultaneously (Chun, 2009, p.146). Comics are being used in the classroom to build upon visual literacy as an attempt to foster the multiliteracy skills of students. Comics can satisfy the need for authentic reading and writing experiences (Carter, 2009).

The third area is the importance of critical literacy: the "ability of a reader to understand his or her role in the transaction that occurs between the reader and the text" is emphasized (Frey

& Fisher, 2004, p. 24). Readers need to possess the ability to analyze what they read and understand the motives of the author. Readers have to be taught to become active users, "not merely vessels to be filled. . . Graphic novels offer a forum for these essential discussions" (p. 24).

The critical thinking toolkit with comics is a particular way of framing the conceptualization of critical literacy where students are encouraged to discover the multimodality of texts as they talk about, interpret, and critique them (Morgan, 2005). Leekee (2005) argues that students use more "higher-level" thinking skills when they read both the pictures and the text. "Both their analyzing and synthesizing skills actually require more involvement and focus in their reading" (p.31). Exposure to both pictures and written text in picture books developed primary students' critical thinking and comprehension of narrative texts in Leekbee's study. Comics can even be used as a tool to develop analytical and critical reading skills (Maderazo et al., 2010; Schartz & Rubinstien- Ãvila, 2006, p. 47). Kress (2000) asserts that using comics in this fashion encourages a student's reflexivity about the use of popular culture that help students view themselves in a world where power shapes "our emotional, political, social and material lives" (Alvermann & Xu, 2003, p. 148).

Comics as Cultural Empowerment

Students can analyze power of language and power relationship, and interpret authors' perspectives, and hidden messages behind pictures and texts. As Gretchen Schwartz (2002) said, "students can explore such questions as how color affects emotions, how pictures can stereotype people, how angles of viewing affect perception, and how realism or the lack of it plays into the message of a work" (p. 3). Ward and Young (2011) state that graphic novels provide "benefits for readers who develop critical literacy skills along with a keener sense of observation and

68

enhanced prediction skills while literally learning to read between the lines" (p. 285). "Using graphic novels in the classroom can help explain how language works both for and against people and enable students to acquire an appreciation for critical literacy" (Chun, 2009, p. 144).

Moreover, students are able to draw upon the features of multimodal texts by examining the relationship between the written word and the visual images (Chun, p. 149). In doing so, students are able to develop a critical awareness of these visual images as visual rhetoric to manipulate and influence.

For many readers "growing up with television and video games, contemporary young adults look for print media that contain the same visual impact and pared-down writing style and contribute to their enthusiasm for visual rather than written literacy" (Bucher & Manning, 2004, p. 67). Readers are attracted to the "currentness" of comic books as their monthly publication allows their creators to react more swiftly to social and cultural changes than is possible for films or trade books. Thus, readers feel as though what they are reading is cutting edge, making them cognizant of popular culture (Ward & Young, 2011, p. 284). Popular culture in the classroom nurtures a student's multiple literacies (Alvermann, 1999, p. 3).

Educators encourage students to consider connections between the examples of popular culture and critical literacies. One example is how Frey and Fisher (2004) used a graphic novel about urban city life in a classroom of urban city youth. These educators encouraged students to reflect on the graphic novel and collectively list the techniques the artist used to convey his attitude toward the issue of living in a housing project (p. 24). The purpose of this unit was to use this graphic novel as a way to get students to question issues that they face living in urban developments as well as become "critical consumers of ideas and information" (p.24). Rankin (2007) observed a teacher who used comics as a critical think tool. The teacher used a critical

media literacy approach in association with the students' visual literacy skills with two comics – *Catwoman* and *The Hulk*. The teacher used the read aloud strategy with the class, after which she posed a question, "Who do you think is stronger?" This created the opportunity for student to explore gender and society roles, knowledge that students already have from exposure to mass media (pp. 297-299).

Chun (2009) advocates that the use of graphic novels, as a language, to deepen the reading engagement for the student. Texts like *Maus* can offer this deep reading engagement as a critical literacy tool-kit in the secondary school classroom (p. 144). The approach that Chun takes in implementing the critical literacy tool-kit (Morgan, 2005) is based upon a pedagogy of multiliteracies that is four tiered: Situated practice; overt instruction; critical framing; and transformed practice. The situated practice pulls from the life experiences of the student. Overt instruction introduces metalanguage to be used to deconstruct the "myriad and multimodal ways" of constructed meaning. Critical framing is looking at the culture in which the multimodal text is presented. Transformed practice resituates all of the meaning-making practices to other cultural contexts (p. 145).

According to Frey and Fisher (2004), a negative element of using the graphic novel was the "predominance of violence and sexual images in many of the graphic novels" (p. 20), which the school curriculum may not condone for use of as an in-school text. Other drawbacks to the implementation of graphic novels as an advanced literacy tool came in the form of graphic novels being a challenge for teachers of struggling adolescent readers in that their "level of sophistication in understanding complex issues exceeds their ability to access traditional texts" (p. 23). With this dilemma in mind, teachers are faced with two poor choices: implementing watered down censored text that does not meet a standard of conceptual complexity, or

70

implement a text that is far beyond the reading level of the student. Both choices are unsatisfactory for the students.

Comics and Multimodality Learning

One argument against using comics to teach reading is that "developmental readers rely on pictures while a good reader relies on text only" (Alevio & Norris, 2007, p. 70). The root of the criticism for the use of comics is based on the perspective of what comics are or were for the person as a child. At one period, comics were condemned as facilitators of violence (Sterling North, 1940; Wertham, 1954) while at a later age comics are now seen as a gateway advocate for reading. Why? Literacy development is constantly changing, as Schartz and Rubinstien- Ãvila (2006) argue that today's students need to learn multimodal literacy:

> Those of us who have not been socialized from a young age into the postindustrial, saturated consumer culture of computer games, film, interactive toys, e-mail, and DVDs may find the visual grammar and storytelling used in manga challenging to follow. Not to mention that its multimodality is difficult to comprehend and build upon to make meaning. (p. 40)

Schartz and Rubinstien- Ãvila articulate two main reasons why comics should be utilized by educators. First, there is the popularity of comics, especially in the United States. Comics are a staple in today's popular culture. Comic book icons have branched out to other mediums, such as posters, toys, television, and Hollywood big screen productions as well as many other product licensings (p. 41). Second, comics cognitively demand a multimodal reading along with a critical mind set, which "extend the traditional notions of text and literacy (Carrington, 2004, p. 215; Schartz & Rubinstien- Ãvila, 2006, p 41).

Chun (2009) notes that graphic novels exist as "part of a literacy continuum of multimodal resources" (p.146). As the reader engages with a wide variety of iconography and dynamic plots laid out in sequential art, the reader is able to create associations between the texts of the comic and graphic novel and his own life experiences (Allender, 2004; Frey & Fisher, 2004; Schartz & Rubinstien- Ãvila , 2006;). Graphic novels allow the reader to experience a nonlinenear, rich imaginative world, but also allow the reader to tap into in the complexities of human experiences (Schartz & Rubinstien- Ãvila , 2006, p. 42). Graphic novels allow the reader to engage in critical discussions in ways that are not always possible with written texts. The visuals of the graphic novel can allow for scaffolding of textual meanings (Chun, 2009, p. 146).

With the rise of comic book and graphic novel literature, educators need to broaden the institutional understanding of literacy. When viewed as multimodal, literacy is seen to include not just the ability to read text, but also the ability to read the visual, the spatial, and the aural (Chun, 2009, p. 145). Many literacy scholars call for a shift from the "traditional perceptions of literacy as an autonomous set of skills to be mastered" to a social epistemic view where the social practice and socioeconomic status, race, or gender is linked to broader social goals (Barton& Hamilton, 2000; Schartz & Rubinstien- Ãvila , 2006). Furthermore, New Literacy Studies refers to the critical studies of new literacies that have birthed forth as a result of technological advancements in communication that help readers and writers comprehend and share information through non-print or digital formats, such as the Internet , social networks, media devices and digital storytelling.

Moreover, the multimodality applies to not just one's ability to "read" or a mono-literacy based upon the ability to read the standard word, but to one's ability to read multiple forms of literacy. The days of reading just one form of literacy are over. A competent reader in today's

society is one who can not only read the written word, but he/she can also read iconic images as well as make sense of other literacies at the same time to derive meaning. Multimodal literacy is important for interpreting digital texts that possess multiple features, such as words, images, sounds and movement (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Hedin & Conderman, 2010, p. 377). As Falk–Ross (2010) states, "Internet technologies and the new literacies that align with them are not static; they are dynamic, interactive, multimodal, and ever evolving. . . and they involve creative constructions for learning and socially situated practices for meaning making" (Slide, 2). Today's post industrial society has become immensely saturated with multimodal texts (Carrington, 2004, p. 215).

Multimodal literacy fits within the theoretical frame work of New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Hagood et al., 2008; Schartz & Rubinstien- Ãvila, 2006). NLS scholars encourages a "critical reexamination of what counts as literacy, and also seek to broaden the definition what is a text. In a sense, NLS draws upon Scholes's (1985) concept of "textuality" in that if meaning can be applied to something, then it can be "read." As members of western society, we can apply this idea of textuality to the media of popular culture as a way of making connections to it and evaluating it.

Alvermann (1999) asserts her own term for multimodal literacy called "critical media literacy. This form of evaluation is rooted in cultural studies and has to do with understanding how print and non-print texts are connected to the various social, economic, and political positions where readers are expected to exercise some degree of agency in deciding what textual positions they will assume or resist (Alvermann , 1999, pp. 1-3).

Hagood (2003) notes that many students find multimodal literacy more engaging. Students are more engaged in the many online formats which are multimodal in nature that

73

emphasize multiliteracy because there is more of a connection for the student than to the traditional mono literacy instructional approach (Slide, 4). Educators who support this shift to a multimodal literacy feel a responsibility to encourage students to embrace and partake in the multiple forms of literacy that constitute their lived experiences (Jacobs, 2004; McVicker, 2007, p.85; Schartz & Rubinstien- Ãvila, 2006, p. 43; Williams, 2001, p. 26).

Why is there such a push for using comics in the classroom as multimodal texts? The impact of new technologies, a marriage of reading and technology (McVicker, 2007, p.85) has changed the way today's students are learning and how we think of language, literacy and communication (Jacobs, 2004; Leu, 2002; Leu & Kinzer, 2000; Schmar-Dobler, 2003).

Given the increasingly complex delivery systems of information in our globalized societies, it follows that the more students are exposed to and grounded in multiple modes of representation, the more they would appear to have a chance to succeed in school and beyond. One such multimodal text that is engaging to students is the graphic novel. (Chun, 2009, p.146)

Comics possess "the overlapping nature of image and text and the shift toward the primacy of the image" (Carrington, 2004, p. 218). Multimodal literacy education is needed because colors, shapes, textures, positions in space, sizes, and patterns are best read as visual texts as opposed to verbal texts (Schartz & Rubinstien- Ãvila, 2006, p. 43; Williams, 2001). Comics can be used to teach students multimodal literacy. Gee (2004) also argues that using multimodal texts for adolescents to practice negotiating semiotics is beneficial for developing critical and multidimensional thinking.

If an educator wants to make a difference in the classroom, then instruction has to change. Comics can make a difference in the classroom. At this juncture in education and

society, comics are provocative enough to be considered as a tool with a unique edge. McVicker (2007) states, "comics can have a unique and powerful voice in the classroom . . . Comics are a living, daily representation of real life, often representing the world as it changes." Comics are thus excellent tools for teaching multimodal literacy.

Comics as a Form of Motivation to Read

Although some teachers have argued that graphic novels do not constitute "good literature," a graphic novel can be strategically used as a "hook" for grabbing the attention of developmental readers, especially if these graphic novels are offered as "free choice" classroom reading (Ruppel, 2006).

A significant decrease in reading often occurs between the ages of 14-20 (Snowball, 2005, p. 45). At this age, however, the adolescent students can be very receptive to the visuals of popular culture. Popular culture can be used to draw students into in-school literacies (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000) because popular culture texts are "visual treats for the eyes that entice kids to read" (Ward & Young, 2011, p. 284).

Importantly, Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) validate the use of comics as a form of motivation by stating, "because reading is an effortful activity that involves choice, motivation along with cognition is crucial to reading" (p. 57). McTaggart (2008) adds, "even a comic's 'slow' times keep the kid's interest because the action is visual" as "a student reads the words, sees the action, comprehends the meaning, and is motivated to read more" (p. 29). Cary (2004) further explains the motivational benefits from the reading of comics:

> Relevant curriculum attracts and engages it. For a number of reasons -- the humor, heroes, movement, pop culture themes, real-world language, novelty, and perhaps, above all, artwork -- comics consistently engage students. (pp. 42-43)

Comics can make the reading experience pleasurable which is one of the primary aims of developmental reading teachers (Alevio & Norris, 2007, p.72).

In addition, exposure to comics can not only motivate reading, but can also improve literacy acquisition as McTaggart (2008) explains:

> The reduced amount of text and attention-grabbing graphics help ELL and struggling readers infer, predict, and reflect on what they read. Their skills improve as they read more, improved skills lead to greater comprehension, and enhanced comprehension creates a desire to read more. (p. 33)

Ward and Young (2011) also note that comics can be used to motivate reluctant readers:

> These visually appealing reading materials are not only excellent choices to hook reluctant readers, but they also may prove useful in reviving the flagging interests of once avid readers. These reading materials require different reading skills, necessitating readers to move across panels and pay attention to illustrations as well as text. (p. 283)

McVicker (2007) also points out that comics can aid struggling readers who are either reluctant readers or exhibit reading deficiencies. Comics offer a visual element that can help the student to comprehend the text more easily and this visual element can offer the student a sense of success reading (p. 87). As Thompson explains:

> Struggling students can find comic books and graphic novels less threatening, because the pictures in the graphic format offer that additional support needed to help students understand the meaning of the text, figure out new and unknown vocabulary words, and move the storyline along. (2007, p. 29)

Finally, Gibson (2009) argues that using comics in the classroom will build the confidence of developmental and emergent readers.

In conclusion, comics can motivate struggling readers to read more. Comics also can open the reader up to other forms of reading. Children who read for pleasure unconsciously improve their reading, writing and grammar skills (Krashen, 2004). The combination of text and pictures that is employed in learning materials has proved to be of high interest to readers and offers ways to be successful in their literacy activities. As comics are becoming an increasingly popular format, readers will continue to select those books they want to read in their leisure time, and many of these titles will be graphic novels. Educators have observed this format as a possibility for reading motivation and learning, and some may be considering possible action research working with students in their classrooms (Griffith, 2010, pp.186-187).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of this study is to focus on how graphic novels and comic books affect and improve reading comprehension among community college students who tested as intermediate readers on the Nelson Denny standardized reading assessment, and as indicated by their scores on the college entrance ACCUPLACER test. The central question that my study seeks to address is: in what ways could these visually constructed narratives known as comic books and graphic novels facilitate literacy development and the reading process, and serve as a college-level literacy genre in an intermediate reading course? Student achievement was measured by pre- and post-testing of improvement in their reading skill. My study was built on the work of Romanelli's (2009) study that examined how some adult readers of graphic novels and comic books processed visual narratives at a cognitive level. In her study, Romanelli worked with participants who read samples of visual narratives (i.e. graphic novels) and recorded the think-aloud procedure of each participant as he/she interpreted the text and imagery of each sequential panel. Romanelli's study is significant because it challenges and disproves the popular bias that comics foster literacy deficiencies. Romanelli's study shows that graphic novel readers can perform critical and creative reading. From her study, we have a good idea of how adult readers process the multimodal text of comic books and graphic novels. My study looks at how these visual narratives can foster the adult reader's overall literacy development.

Researcher's Positionality

As a child, I was not successful with traditional reading instructional methods. However, my reading specialist used *G.I. Joe* comic books as primary reading sources to teach me how to

read. Comic books empowered me as a reader by helping me to visualize actions depicted in the text. My interest in the visuals was rooted in my own personal interest in the G.I. Joe toy franchise. This interest prompted me to learn the new vocabulary presented in the dialogue bubbles. Over time, reading comics has helped me gain fluency and confidence in my reading. Due to my own experience, I believe that comic books and graphic novels can help developmental readers increase their reading comprehension. The idea for this dissertation study stems from my own literacy development using the comic genre and my teaching practices within the community college reading courses. This qualitative study focuses on nine reluctant adult readers in an intermediate reading course at a community college extension site campus. Here I propose the following research questions:

- How can a developmental reading course make use of comics as a learning tool?

- What impact does reading comics have on developmental students' understanding of reading comprehension?

- What impact does reading comics have on developmental students' attitudes toward reading?

Research Design

My study attempts to understand reluctant college readers' attitudes and experiences toward using comic books in the three developmental reading courses at a satellite campus of a community college. Since this study focuses on how students with reading difficulties make use of comic books and how comic books facilitate their reading comprehension, a number of personal, circumstantial, and contextual factors should be considered. Therefore, I adopted a qualitative approach due to the nature of the research questions, the need to present detailed

views of the topic, and my aim to study a particular group of people in a natural setting which fosters a naturalistic methodology. Creswell (1998) defines this approach as:

> An inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) also explain that "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 4).

In this study, first, I sought to gain in-depth understanding of individuals' lived experiences and their perspectives including their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs: "the province of qualitative research, accordingly, is the world of lived experience, for this is where individual belief and action intersect with culture" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 11).

Second, I relied on a variety of data: participant autobiographies, interviews, participant reflections, and a researcher's journal. I believe these data "describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives" (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 4). This allowed me to trace the development of the participants' literacy practices and reading comprehension as well as their experiences and their attitudes.

Finally, Marshall and Rossman (1999) emphasize that "qualitative methods help debug policy. . . identify how policies are changed as they are implemented at various levels" (p.15). I hope that this approach recognizes the need to inform reading/writing curriculum-makers and educators on how reluctant college students' lived experiences with comic books can generate reading improvement, and how reading curriculum could be reconsidered or reevaluated.

Narrative Inquiry

One way of understanding the individuals' thoughts and experiences of reading is to examine participants' personal learning stories. I believe that experience is the key that helps us understand how learning takes place in individual's lives, and narrative inquiry is a valuable tool for understanding such experience.

Educational researchers Connelly and Clandinin (2000) argue that "Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it" (p. 18). They emphasized that "educational experience should be studied narratively" (p. 19). Connelly and Clandinin argue that educational curriculum can be best understood through individuals' experiences rather than only through curricular objectives and goals. For these scholars, narrative is both part of the phenomenon and the method of social science (Clandinin, 1992, 1995, 2006). For example, several researchers in educational settings conducted a narrative inquiry research to discover the experiences and lives through the stories of children, teachers, and parents in multicultural settings where they face struggles and dilemmas, such as a conflict between two possible realities whether to provide the best educational setting with cultural diversity or to achieve the expectations from the Standardized Achievement Testing (Connelly & Clandinin, 1996; Clandinin et al, 2006). It is found that people make knowledge through a narrative construction.

My study aims at listening to the stories of how developmental readers who struggle with reading experience comic book reading in three developmental reading courses in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the current reading curriculum and explore alternative views.

Growing use of narrative. Narrative inquiry can be a particularly valuable approach for literacy educators to understand a target group of students, and I have selected narrative inquiry as the main methodology in my study.

Narrative inquiry has become popular in a wide range of disciplines and professions (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). Examples of early narrative included: Freud's Vienna Circle, 1938's Murray's Thematic Apperception Test, 1940s laboratory experiment reported by Sarbin (1986) all have began to weight individual psychology, the functions of language, and the voice of narrative. Thus, narrative work has been originated from different fields and shaped by various researchers' disciplines (Chase, 2008). These fields include psychology (Bruner, 1986; Sarbin, 1986), sociolinguistics (Gee, 1991; Labov, 1982), education (Dewey, 1997), literacy criticism, language education (Spack, 1997), ethnography (see Bell, 2002; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Sarbin, 1986), and teacher education in the field of TESOL (Park, 2006, 2009, 2011). Recently, narrative research approaches have been growing more popular. Scholars, such as Pagnucci (2004), Trimmer (1997), and Park (2011) have argued for the value of using stories in educational settings.

Defining Narrative Research

While the understanding of the term 'narrative research' may vary among researchers, I adopt two definitions with different methodological emphasis. On one hand, Lieblich (1998) and her colleagues emphasize narrative as a variety of data in the following definition:

Narrative research. . . refers to any study that uses or analyses narrative materials. The data can be collected as a story (a life story provided in an interview or a literary work) or in a different manner (field notes of an anthropologist who writes up his or her observations as a narrative or in personal letters). It can be the object of the research or a

means for the study of another question. It may be used for comparison among groups, to

learn about a social phenomenon or historical period, or to explore a personality. (p. 2)

On the other hand, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) accentuate the interactive nature of narrative

research in their definition:

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between

researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social

interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this

same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and

retelling, the stories of the experience that make up people's lives, both individual and

social. Simply stated . . . narrative inquiry is stories lived and told. (p. 20)

Working from the first definition, I used a wide range of data in my study: I collected data

through storytelling, including student literacy autobiographies, introduction and exit course

reflective letters, student reflective journal entries, and interviews in which students expressed

their lived experiences. In order to analyze this qualitative study, other types of data were also

collected: pre- and post-Nelson Denny reading comprehension tests and students' reading

reports, which could be used to increase the validity of this study.

As the second definition emphasizes, storytelling is a dynamic and collaborative activity

between listeners and tellers who need to interpret the particular cultural, social, and historical

contexts and processes. So, I included my own teacher-researcher journal in which I reflected

upon my observations of my participants and collected my personal thoughts and interpretations

throughout this study.

The Context of the Study

In this section, I discuss the context of the study. By context, I mean the community

college where my reading course sections were housed. I also explain my participants and my

role as a teacher and researcher in this study.

The Satellite Campus and the Students

I am using a pseudonym for the school where I did the research. The pseudonym I am

using is Western Pennsylvania Community College (WPCC) which has many satellite campuses

off the main campus. I conducted the study at one of the branch campuses located in the rural

outskirts on a bigger university town. This satellite campus is located in one small, two-story

building in a small industrial office park. Originally, the building was a Pennsylvania State

Police barracks. The classrooms that I taught in did not have advanced instructional technology,

such as overhead projectors, multimedia carts, or access to the Internet for use with class

instruction. They only had a dry erase board with dried-out markers.

The satellite campus community college students ranged from the ages of 18 to 34 years

old. The majority of the students grew up in the surrounding rural communities. Some are the

children of farmers and coal miners and live in low income housing. Most students are attending

WPCC through state and federal financial aid. The majority of these students worked full-time

jobs in between their classes. Some of these students worked the night shift at local nursing

homes and Wal-Mart and then would attend class afterwards. Most of the students in the 18-22

age-bracket graduated from one of the four rural high schools in the county, but do not possess

the funds to attend the university in town. The older students or returning adults are coming

back to school because of their current unemployment. For these students, education is primarily

a means to employment, and little more.   When surveyed at the beginning of each semester,

most students did not have access to a computer or the Internet besides what was offered at the campus facility. This was problematic, since the satellite campus hours were limited to only weekdays from 8 am to 9 pm. These "working" students were limited in how they could access the technology required in their courses, especially the developmental reading class. Also, the majority of the students did not have proper funding to attend school. Some students could not afford their own text books.

I was employed at this satellite campus where I taught Intermediate Reading to rural western PA students. I had been teaching this course for three years in the Fall and Spring semesters since 2008. When I first applied for the job, I was replacing a friend to fill his position when he took a leave of absence to teach at a big name university full time as an adjunct. I assumed my friend's role as an instructor and took on his course load of two classes: a basic writing class and a developmental reading course called RDG 080: Intermediate Reading.

The Curriculum and the Intermediate Reading Course

The target population for this study was my students in this intermediate reading class. The purpose of the course is to provide the students with instruction in how to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate written texts and oral communications, as described in the course syllabus: "The students will be able to utilize the necessary study strategies to be successful in content courses that involve analyzing and synthesizing information. The students will develop a plan of study that meets his/her individual needs" (Burke, Course Syllabus, 2009). Prior to scheduling any classes, the students must first take a placement test called "Accu-Placer." The WPCC ACCUPLACER exam measures the newly enrolled student's math, reading and writing skills and is used to determine his/her first year class eligibility. Students who have taken the College entrance ACCUPLACER exam are eligible to take the developmental reading class if

85

they have earned a score between 61 and 85 points. Students who have scored below 60 points

or above 85 points on the college ACCUPLACER entrance exam will be excluded from this

study because they are not eligible to enroll in this class. The purpose of developmental courses,

such as Intermediate Reading, is to prepare students for credit courses that will lead to a diploma

(see *WPCC 2009-10 College Catalog & Student Handbook*, p. 9).

The main problem with the course has been a somewhat piecemealed curriculum. The

curriculum mandates a trifecta focus for Intermediate Reading 080. Simply put, the instructor is

required to teach from two texts, Fifer and Kimball, *College Reading Series* (2006) and *Building

College Vocabulary Strategies* (Pabis & Hamer, 2008*)* along with teaching from an online

tutorial site called PLATO. These are three separate course materials that are loosely related to

each other while at the same time detached from each other enough that the students often have

trouble seeing the relevance of all three. Some students fail to relate to the texts and the online

tutorial (PLATO) and this can affect their willingness to take the class seriously.

The Intermediate Reading course is the second course in a 3 course reading series at the

community college. The curriculum is designed to "refine study skills and comprehension

ability" specifically associated with critical reading skills such as "distinguishing fact from

opinion, indentifying cause and effect, and effectively using figurative language" (*WPCC 2009-

2010 College Catalog & Student Handbook*, p. 209). These skills are deemed by the college as

essential for students to progress successfully into other courses that will make up their academic

career. Strong reading ability is clearly essential for every college student.

From my experience talking with students, the majority of my students in this class over

the past three years, say they are fearful or reluctant to participate in the activity of reading.

Because the course curriculum takes a fundamental approach, the texts work in progression from

looking at the proper attitude toward reading to reading strategies to the logical fallacies that writers commit in their texts. It can be assumed that the Intermediate Reading course objectives have been created to work with students who are reluctant readers. These are readers who struggle with reading comprehension. The goal of Intermediate Reading is to help students gain the ability to read critically in order to write critically in College Writing, which is the target writing course after the students take the Intermediate Reading course. The course description for the College Writing is as follows:

> This course covers the fundamentals of college writing including the paragraph, expository essay patterns, and the argumentative essay. Emphasis is placed on developing a coherent thesis, writing concisely and clearly, and adapting one's writing to a particular audience. In addition, it will foster an appreciation of cultural diversity, explain how experiences and attitudes shape an individual's reading, and demonstrate how language can shape thinking. This course also emphasizes self-editing mechanics, grammar, and word choice. It provides the basis for students to produce a range of effective writing from technical and business communications to research papers and critical essays. Prerequisite(s): ENG 070 (Intermediate Writing), RDG 080 (Intermediate Reading) or satisfactory Placement Test score. (*WPCC 2009-2010 College Catalog & Student Handbook*, p. 188)

Intermediate Reading is meant to prepare students for the college writing course. Students who tested into the second developmental course were given the choice of taking Intermediate Reading at different times with a different professor. Students volunteer to enroll in this class section more than likely because of their schedule or because of my reputation as an instructor who uses comic books in the course.

As I noted earlier, when I was first given a model syllabus for the developmental reading course that outlined the curriculum, I was worried about how to go about teaching this developmental reading course. I spoke with the instructor before me, my predecessor and friend, for advice. He told me that the curriculum was problematic and that he taught the course through a book club pedagogy using reading journals and he ignored the curriculum. I was hesitant to do this, so I tried to teach using the established curriculum. It wasn't until five weeks into the course that I could see problems occurring with the piece-mealed curriculum, especially with PLATO, the online tutorial program. It was at that point that I modified how I taught the course content and began to bring in comic books for the class to read and to use for applying the reading concepts to them. That was my first semester teaching in the fall semester of 2008.

My second semester of teaching Intermediate Reading was much more organized and integrated because I had modified certain parts of the curriculum with comics and graphic novels. I noticed a huge difference with how the students perceived the class and their grades were much better, but I was technically not teaching Intermediate Reading in the way my job description mandated. This bothered me because I believed I was teaching the students the best way I could, but I was not following the established protocol which could cause me to not be rehired.

At the same time, I needed a focus for my dissertation. I wanted to write about comic books and the current generation of students' increased innate ability with visual literacy, and how these visual literacy skills could be used to teach reading. As I wrestled with trying to narrow my focus on the topic, I was dealing with the dilemma I faced in my Intermediate Reading Classroom. I spoke with both the chair of my department at WPCC and my dissertation chair. As I proposed this study, I (the researcher) would teach my reading class using a modified

curriculum of my design using populous literature to teach reading to generate results that might support a case for adjusting how the curriculum committee mandates how the course would be taught. The goal would be to create an understanding for more latitude in the instructional planning for the reading instructors at WPCC.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Even though the students have tested into the intermediate reading class, each student has voluntarily enrolled into the class section I teach. At the beginning of the course, students were made aware that I was conducting a study where the course instructional procedure would be used to generate data for research. Students were able to exclude themselves from the study at any time, even after signing an informed consent form. The data were collected for this study during the course of study even if the study were not to take place. Also, students who chose not to participate in the study may exclude themselves at no risk to their grade or relationship with myself (the researcher). Lastly, these students were not students who have identified disabilities.

The collection of data began in fall of 2009, and continued through the consequent semesters when the data collection ceased at the end of fall 2010. I collected four semesters' worth of data. For each semester, the process of recruiting students was the same. Starting from fall 2009, spring 2010, fall 2010 and summer 2011, I addressed the Intermediate Reading classes on the first day of class about the study. The students were asked to be participants on a volunteer basis free of any reprisal that would jeopardize their grade for the course if they were to decline participation in the study. The students were informed of the purpose of the study, which was to help improve the department curriculum for the course by using the instructional material in connection with another set of materials, such as comics and novels of personal interest. The study goal was to bridge the gap between student and course content and eliminate

the most frustrating elements for the course: PLATO and the feeling of disconnection that seemed to exist between the content. I informed the students of the types of reading materials used to teach the reading concepts and increase comprehension of the core concepts through personal investment. This was meant to empower the students to give them a sense of control in their learning process.

By the second class meeting of the semester, the students were given a choice to partake in the study by signing a consent form (see APPENDIX A). Each student would have the same course regardless of his/her participation in the study. I asked the students for permission to collect and analyze their Nelson Denny scores, reading reports, letters, and journals in this study, in addition to collecting audio of the focus groups and possible follow-up individual interviews.

If the students chose not to partake in the study, they could decline from participation by not signing the consent form or by withdrawing at any point from the study by contacting the site administrator to withdraw from the study, not the course, anonymously. If the individual student was willing to participate in this study, he or she was instructed to sign the statement on the final page of the consent form packet and return it to me. The individual student was given an additional unsigned version of these forms to keep for their records. If any student decided to withdraw confidentially from this research study, the student only had to contact the branch campus faculty coordinator. In addition, if the student chose not to participate in the study and wished to directly notify the researcher of his/her withdrawal, he/she could do so at the address listed on the consent form. Consent forms were administered and collected by the branch campus site coordinator and held until the end of the semester. I was not made aware of who my participants were until the end of the semester, after grades were submitted.

Each semester yielded a good number of participants. In the fall 2009 semester, nine students consented to participation in the study. For the spring 2010 semester, fifteen students consented, and seventeen students consented to participate in the fall 2010 semester. The summer 2011 semester was the final semester of collecting data. I was able to recruit ten participants. From this participation population, nine participants were selected who offered unique sociocultural perspectives as well as unique cognitive perspectives toward using comics in a developmental reading course. The identity of each participant was protected with anonymity by issuing pseudonym names from comic book mythology. Specifically, student participants were given names of comic book characters. For example, names such as Clark Kent, Bruce Wayne, etc were used to identify each consenting student in the study.

Benefits to the Participants

The students who enrolled in the sections of Intermediate Reading that I taught found themselves offered a chance to be empowered to read successfully. The students were asked to develop an understanding of their own learning process in regards to reading, and they explored their evolution as a learner of literacy. This understanding of a student's own literacy development led to more empowerment and also allowed the opportunity for the student to create a personal investment in literacy. Finally, the students as a whole were exposed to more than one genre of reading. Genres used in the class were popular literature, i.e. novels, comic books, and graphic novels that are now prevalent in Western society and tied to the sudden influx of visual literacy usage.

This study could have benefits for not just the students, but also for the WPCC faculty who teach the curriculum. This study was designed to provide insight for the WPCC Reading Curriculum Committee to reflect upon in their curriculum planning. Previously, there was an

attitude that comic books lacked academic value; therefore, they should not be allowed in the classroom by a professional teacher. This attitude has changed and become less stingent in the last ten years, but it still exists in a fashion such that curriculum committees in higher education institutions still frown on the implementation of comics as a primary source for reading content.

Complex Positionality as Teacher and Researcher

As the primary researcher of the study in the class where I was also the teacher who evaluated and administered grades, I could see an area of difficulty. As a researcher, I had to be objective and neutral while at the same time, I had to assign a grade to each student for work that also would be evaluated and interpreted for the study. In every assignment, I incorporated a section for reflection where the participant could give an opinion about the assignment and the instruction around the assignment. This was one dilemma that I faced. As a researcher, I needed the reflection from the participants to evaluate my modifications to the curriculum, but as a teacher, I might not agree with what the students had written or might find offense at what was said about my teaching.

On the other hand, Connelly and Clandinin (2000) clearly explain the role of the narrative inquirer in terms of the importance of relational and collaborative aspects. In order to increase relational responsibilities, inquirers are expected to be respectful of participants' lived stories and to be actively engaged with participants by walking into the midst of stories and co-composing texts. I tried to be careful not to be judgmental by asking the participants to clarify their ideas, thus honoring their authority in their stories, and respecting their privacy as their stories were retold in the research texts.

And foremost, for this relationship of reflection to work, an element of "trust" must be built between the researcher and the participant. Trust, as Marshal and Rossman (1999) define,

92

is "the reciprocal relationship between host and field-worker [and] enables the latter to avoid foolish, insulting, and potentially dangerous behavior; to make valuable contact; and to understand the acceptance and repayment of obligations" (p. 86). Fontana and Frey (1994) state that "gaining trust is essential to the success of the interviews, and once it is gained, trust can still be very fragile" (p. 367).

Trust is often gained through developing a rapport with the participants. Rapport, as defined by Fontana and Frey (2008) is a camaraderie of understanding between the subjects and the researcher: "the researcher must be able to take the role of the respondents and attempt to see the situation from their viewpoint rather than superimpose his or her world of academia and preconceptions on them" (p. 132). The drawback to developing such a close rapport is that the researcher may no longer have the essential distance and objectivity that is needed. As a result, the researcher may be perceived as a member of the group being studied and thus lose his scholarly credibility.

In my case as the researcher of this study, I was also the teacher. I tried my best to lay my biases on the table at the beginning of the course by declaring my struggles with reading while at the same time trying to exist in the world of academia; and I confessed my love for comics and how I came to love comics by learning how to read as a child using comics. I also shared my own literacy autobiography with the students. I saw my students/participants twice a week for ninety minute sessions (a formal class) where we navigated through the course content with jokes, eccentric anecdotes, and light heartedness – all to create a sense of connection for the students in regards to course material.

As a teacher, I seemed to have an ability to be empathetic of my students' needs and understandings of the course. I tried to use this to address the concerns and issues the students

had. I hope my efforts to be fair and laid back helped relax my students. I tried to make the students more willing to take risks, but also more with understanding the course content as a form of personal investment. The focus groups that were conducted over the semester were referred to as "Happy Hour with Mr. Smiley" where students were encouraged by bringing food in the fashion of a pot luck lunch and to have a casual discussion about the course content and reflect on what was working and what was not working along with the reasons behind it. I also permitted my students to address me informally as "Mr. Smiley" (my nickname) instead of the formal title, "Mr. Burke." This seemed to add to the relaxed atmosphere in the class and helped generate camaraderie (Fontana & Frey, 2008, p. 132). At the end of the course, this echoed even more with the location of the final follow up interview taking place at my home or at a restaurant over dinner and dessert.

Bias of the Researcher

I am not an unbiased researcher. I have biases that may affect the way I teach, collect data, evaluate and interpret it. As it has been pointed out to me numerous times by my family, friends and colleagues, I tend to champion the underdogs because I too was an underdog of sorts. What do I mean by "underdog"? I am referring to the black sheep, the disenfranchised in academia who suffer from a lack of competency in reading. This lack of competency can be the result of a learning disability, the result of a negative learning experience which caused someone to become a reluctant reader, or the mere fact that a student was perceived as incorrigible. As the teacher and the researcher, I wanted to change this perception with the way reading was taught, especially in my Intermediate Reading course. I did not want my students to feel that they were not good enough for a formal education because they did not fit in the range categorized as normal.

My attitude toward comics, and my identity as a struggling reader with a learning disability affected how I view the teaching of reading specifically. The "normal way of teaching reading" pedagogy or the traditional pedagogy as I caught myself saying as I talked about this study tended to marginalize students, especially the reluctant readers in the course. I was challenging the "norm" of the curriculum by teaching comics. This was where my biases were even more evident. I believed using comics to teach reading comprehension worked. I am the proof that it worked twenty five years ago. I have taught comics as a substitute to a text book and even as a form of mythology literature. And even though comics may not work for everyone, I am still confident to this day that it is not at the lacking on behalf of the comics, but more to the student who is hesitant to engage the comic itself. Even though this could be said about teaching other forms of media and genres, with comics, there seems to be more motivating factors behind why we read them.

Ethical Issues and Considerations

When designing a qualitative study, the researcher must take into consideration ethical issues such as protecting the anonymity of the participants and administering a consent form that is both informative and addresses expectations.

I complied with the legal and procedural aspects of ethics held by my university's Institutional Review Board (IRB).The basic ethical principles and guidelines for the participants, beneficence, and justice have been incorporated into the mission statement by The Belmont Report (1979) to assist in resolving ethical issues. The Institutional Review Board of my university approved my proposal, which followed the guidelines for the methodology and data collection as well as the required consent form.

Informed consent papers were distributed at the outset of the course. Following the recommendations of Marshall and Rossman (1999), potential participants received a verbal overview of the study along with a brief summation of expectations of the participants and the researcher. Students had the opportunity to not participate and could withdraw from the study at any point without repercussion. For participation where the person or persons enrolled in the study are expected to donate their time, it must be on a voluntary basis.

I made participants aware of the nature and purpose of the narrative methodology and explained that there would be no potential risks or harm by participating. This was made clear in the consent form and reiterated verbally (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Kimmel (1988) mandates that the consent form must notify potential participants that the participation in and withdrawal from study is voluntary with a description of the intended methods and purposes along with risks. The researcher must also include a statement in the consent form informing said participant of his/her right to ask questions. The researcher may also include information on how the collected data may be used (pp. 68-69). Based upon this, I was aware of the ethical issues that revolved around my research questions, my methodology, and my data collection as well as its analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2003).

In regards to the ethical concerns of this study, the privacy and confidentiality of the participants were protected with pseudonyms of comic book characters. The subjects' names and specific demographic information, such as addresses and names of workplaces were altered post-session when the research findings were included in the dissertation (Marshall & Rossman 1999).

Data Sources and Data Collection Procedures

In this section I will discuss the nature of the data collection. Data collection will be divided into student Nelson Denny scores, introduction and exit letters, literacy autobiographies, reading reports, student reflective journals, teacher reflective journals, and focus group interviews.

Length of Data Collection

Data was collected over the course of three semesters: Fall 2009; Spring 2010; Fall 2010 and Summer 2011. The rationale for collecting data over such a long period of time was due to the nature of the course. As the researcher, I was appointed to teach the course each semester as an adjunct faculty, and it was unclear if the course would be offered to the researcher until a few weeks before the upcoming semester. Secondly, the population of the course was dependent on the number of incoming freshmen that had qualified for Intermediate Reading course. And of that number of incoming students, these students had to select the section of the Intermediate Reading course taught by me as the researcher.

The participants' work samples were produced while they enrolled in the Intermediate Reading course sections during Fall 2009, Spring 2010, Fall 2010, and Summer 2011 academic semesters. The work samples (or data sources) were as follows: Student's written work in the form of reflection essays, reading reports, and optional reflective journals in addition to Nelson Denny aptitude scores. I hope this set of data could help me construct understandings of the student's reader identity. The follow up interview at the end of the semester was used only as a "fill-in-the-gap" procedure for clarification of statements made in the individual student's work.

Data source 1: Student Pre and Post Testing on Reading Comprehension (Nelson-Denny Assessment)

One of the curriculum requirements for all developmental reading classes at WPCC is that the instructor has to administer the Nelson-Denny Reading Test twice a semester. The test is given first at the beginning of the semester, before the student is taught the course content. The second administration of the Nelson-Denny is at the end of the semester after the student has been exposed to the course content. The purpose of the Nelson-Denny Reading Test is as follows:

> The primary purpose of the *Nelson-Denny Reading Test*, Forms G and H is to provide a
> trustworthy ranking of student ability in three areas of academic achievement: vocabulary
> development, reading comprehension, and reading rate. These important skills are
> related and interdependent. (Brown, Fishco, & Hanna 1993, p.3)

For WPCC, the Nelson-Denny test is used to measure the growth of the student in the areas of reading comprehension and vocabulary. The test is meant to show the progress a student makes and is representative of the student's understanding of the reading strategies and reading concepts as well as the instructor's effectiveness in the classroom.

The Nelson-Denny Test is comprised of two parts – vocabulary and reading comprehension. The Vocabulary section is an eighty question test with a time limit of fifteen minutes, whereas the Comprehension section is a thirty-eight question test with a time limit of twenty minutes. Validity of the results is contingent on the strict observation of the time limits (Brown, Fishco, & Hanna 1993, p. 4). I adhered to the time restrictions as dictated in the Nelson-Denny Test manual (Brown, Fishco, & Hanna 1993, pp. 3-4), and no extra time was

given for either section in any of the three semesters that I administered the test. I relied on two clocks to confirm the accuracy of the time limits.

The purpose of using the Nelson Denny Pre- and Post-test scores is to provide hard data that presents a formal measurement of the learning growth of the individual student. These exams were already required by the WPCC Reading Curriculum Committee to be implemented as a way to validate the effectiveness of the instructor as well as a way to see how students progressed by the end of the course. I am using the data collected from the Nelson Denny to help support or validate the implantation of comics in the classroom as opposed to traditional texts.

Data Source 2: Introduction and Exit Letters

At the beginning of the course, the students were asked to compose a letter of stories/experiences that affected their attitudes toward reading in general and if there were any issues that I should be made aware of in general (see Appendix B). Typically, these issues consisted of "I hate reading", or "Don't make us read boring stuff." At the closing of the course, the students were asked to write a second letter or a post-course reflection letter that stated their current attitude toward reading and if it changed since the onset of the course and why it had changed if it had. This was the first and last narrative sample collected from the students, unless an individual follow-up interview was necessary. A follow-up interview was only necessary if the participant did not provide enough feedback or properly give enough support for their opinion. Additionally, a follow-up interview was necessary if certain themes became apparent in the participant's writings. At the point, the interview would be used to flesh out those themes.

Data Source 3: Literacy Autobiography

While I was aware of some resistance to writing literacy autobiographies in composition class (Boegeman, 1980), assigning literacy autobiographies can be a useful tool for both students and teachers because these autobiographies discuss the literacy environment and provide insights on the students' lives and their understandings about reading and writing throughout their lived experiences within their home, school, and communities to which they belong, especially in the fields of teacher education (Brown 1999, Daisey 1997; Kramer-Dahl, 2000; Alvine, 2001, McVee, 2004) and language education (Fox, 1999; Park, 2010; 2011; Saracino, 2004; Steinman, 2007). As stories are shared, this can help both teachers and students to recognize how they made sense of each experience and dealt with it. That is, writing literacy autobiographies does "enable students to gain understandings about literacy and language as semiotic systems and practices within a multi literacies framework, and about the variety of experiences that contributed to their language and literacy learning" (Edwards, 2009, p. 58).

Literacy autobiographies were important data in this narrative study. These personal narratives not only definitely provided me with an intimate understanding of my students but also became important sources for answering my research questions.

In my personal experience, I had a professor who used literacy autobiographies in his literacy development classes. I had to write three literacy autobiographies for this professor over the course of my academic career at the university: first, as a freshman writer in his Writing II class; second, in the pre-service student teacher literacy class; and finally in a graduate literary theory course. Each time I completed the literacy autobiography assignment, I gained more awareness of my own attitudes toward literacy as they were fleshed out in the narratives of these

assignments. Only by understanding our past and who we are, can we then hope to make progress and grow.

At the third week of the Intermediate Reading course, the students were asked to compose a narrative that discussed their literary evolution, i.e. the genesis of their literacy(see Appendix C). The students were asked what they thought literacy was, and how it had shaped who they were. They were also asked to reflect on the positive or negative experiences that they remembered most about learning to read. The students were asked to focus on how reading had been taught and emphasized to them from the early years up to taking Intermediate Reading. The goal for this assignment was to get the student to lay out and recognize his/her fears and hang ups in regards to reading so that these could be addressed. If a student had a negative or positive attitude, why did the student have that attitude? What was nurtured in their literacy development? What was not fostered? Hopefully through this writing, the student could come to a better understanding of their attitudes toward reading and move forward.

Data Source 4: Three Reading Reports

One of the curriculum modifications for the course that I implemented was using reading reports. The WPCC curriculum calls for the instructor to implement an online reading comprehension tutorial program called PLATO. PLATO is used in conjunction with the *College Reading Series 2* text (2006) to reinforce course concepts, such as main ideas and supporting details and transitions. But the demographics of the students revealed that most of the students did not have Internet access at home, let alone a computer, and the only access to PLATO was through the limited hours of the WPCC branch campus lab. Plato was thus not a practical teaching tool at the satellite campus. Adding to this problem were the technical difficulties of Plato, such as the tutorial not downloading properly. This prevented the student from

progressing forward and forced them to repeat the tutorial. Compounding this problem was the

fact that it was difficult for the instructor to address specific issues on how to complete a tutorial

based upon each student's journey through PLATO. The time involved in completing PLATO

was very intensive. Depending on how well the student navigated PLATO, the student needed to

spend at least 8 to 36 hours involved in trying to complete the entire assigned online tutorial. For

students who were working either full time or part time, had a family and or commuted at least

one hour to the campus, PLATO was just not beneficial.

As an alternative to the PLATO online tutorial, I designed my own reading report

assignments to be used with a popular literature, such as contemporary graphic novels. There

were three reading reports. The first was the traditional **Novel Book Report** where the students

applied the reading theories from Chapters 1-3 of the *College Reading Series* text to a novel (see

Appendix D). Each student had to acquire a novel, read that novel first and then examine the

novel chapter by chapter. The student had to determine the main idea of each chapter as well as

determine the action of a given chapter and support the main idea of the chapter. In addition, the

student had to write a brief but creative synopsis of the novel that hooks a potential reader's

interest. Lastly, the students had to write a critique on their own novels, addressing issues: why

they chose this novel; what they thought was interesting and unique about their individual novel.

As a summation of the Novel Book Report, each student was asked to assess his/her own

individual attitude toward reading at this time.

The second reading report was called the **Comic Book Report** (see Appendix E). The

second reading report assignment dealt with expanding on what the students had learned in

Chapters 1-3 of the *College Reading Series 2* text: understanding how main ideas were implied,

what transitions were used, and how ideas were connected together in patterns of organization in

texts. Comic book issues of the individual student's choice were the focus of this second reading assignment. Before assigning the Comic Book Report, students were taught how to read a comic book and how to break it down into its individual parts and terminologies. McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993) was used as a supplemental text for this instruction.

Specifically, the purpose of this second Comic Book Report assignment was to have the students dissect a visual narrative into its different hierarchical parts. Much like reading a "traditional" text-only passage, the visual narrative has a thesis, main ideas, and supporting details. At this time in the course, we had covered these concepts in chapters 2-5 of the *College Reading Series 2* text. For this report, the student had the task of reading a comic book (not a graphic novel) that had 20-22 pages of actual story content. The student then had to break the comic down into parts such as the thesis, main ideas, and supporting details where they would organize these parts into an outline. In doing so, they would be demonstrating their understanding of the relation between the thesis, the main idea and the supporting details.

The student was asked to look at the title (cover) page. What is the thesis of the comic book? To determine the thesis, the student was instructed to use the steps in Chapter 4 of the *College Reading Series* text for determining the implied main idea. The student was then instructed to approach each page of the comic book story/narrative as having its own main idea. The student had to answer what was the main idea of each page? Look at the panels of text and art and how they exist as sequential icons. How do they contribute to the main idea of the story? The third task of this second reading report for the student was to take a step back and look at the overall action within the pages of the comic book and determine how the individual panels support the thesis (from the cover) and whether or not the cover mislead at all. The next task for

the student was to figure out the author's intent. They had to explain what the author's intention was for this story by looking at the artwork. Then, the student was able to make conclusions about the artist's intentions of drawing. Lastly, the student had to think abstract about what the political agenda of the comic book was.

The third, **Graphic Novel Report** was assigned toward the end of the semester as we finished the college reading textbook (see Appendix F). The purpose for this third and last reading report assignment was to have the students apply the reading theories from chapters 6-10 to the *College Reading Series 2* text to a graphic novel of their choice. The students individually selected and purchased their own graphic novels. With graphic novels varying in lengths of forty-eight to a thousand pages, the students were instructed to select a graphic novel of interest that could be read in a week's time.

The first task of this third reading report was similar to the first two reports with the novel and the comic book. The students had to look at the graphic novel chapter by chapter, scene by scene, and action panel by action panel. As modeled in chapter 10 of the *College Reading Series 2* text, the students had to divide up the graphic novel into an outline form that placed the action of the chapter into a hierarchical formation. The second part of the graphic novel reading report dealt with the student writing a brief synopsis of the graphic novel in the same creative fashion as he/she did with the book report (the previous two reading reports). Also, the students had to write a critique of the graphic novel in the same fashion as he/she did for the first report with the novel.

The final task for the third reading report had the student assess his/her attitude toward reading the graphic novel. The rationale behind this was to plot any change in how the student viewed reading. By this point in the course, the students had read political cartoons and reported

on the subtext of them; read a comic book and demonstrated his/her understanding of the thesis, main ideas and supporting details in relation to the pictures and text; and read a novel of his/her choice. Among the comic book, the graphic novel, and the regular novel, as well as the text book, the students were asked to assert which was the most pleasurable to read; which allowed them to retain the most knowledge; which was the easier for them to read and understand; and which was the fastest read and why. This helped me judge how student attitudes impacted their reading of the assignments. Lastly, I asked the students to comment on reading the comic book, the novel, and the graphic novel and to talk about how they were similar and or different from each other.

Students were given the freedom of choosing what they read. Each assignment had its own guidelines that the students had to follow for each report. The success of each assignment was partly based upon the students' personal interest that motivated them to take part in and complete the assignment.

Data Source 5: Student's Reflective Journals

The student's Reflective (see Appendix G) Journal, due to the amount of work the students had to complete in the course, was strictly optional and worth bonus points. Students discussed what they were writing, what they were reading in relation to the assignments, and how reading related to other readings they were doing or have done. The students were asked to spend about 15 minutes once a week writing the Reflective Journal. Topics of the process log varied. I suggested that students focus on keeping track of what they read and their attitudes toward the reading. Other issues for the student to reflect on dealt with how they were progressing on their reading reports and what they were learning in the reading class. Lastly, the

students were encouraged to reflect on their growth as a reader. A handout was given to the students for the Reflective Journal work (see Appendix E).

Data Source 6: Teacher's Reflective Journals

As the researcher, I kept a journal for reflection on the experiences in my classroom for later reflection and scrutiny in relation to the student's journals. The purpose of this form of data collection is self-observation as a way to preserve the clarity of my thoughts at the time of their origin.

Data Source 7: Focus Group Interviews

"Happy Hour with Mr. Smiley" was a social arena as a focus group meeting where the participants meet as a whole with the researcher and discussed issues related to the study. With the participant's permission, what was discussed was recorded and treated as data to be analyzed (Genat, 2009; Krueger, 1988; Motha 2004; 2006). The context of the focus group "Happy Hour with Mr. Smiley" was meant to be a pot luck lunch for the students. It took the place of the normal class, occurring at the same meeting time as the class and lasting the same amount of time – seventy five minutes. During this time, the researcher met with the participants to discuss concerns and reflections the students had about the course, the use of comics, and the writing assignments. The focus group was a semi structured-interview with a set of pre-established questions that the class was asked to respond to individually or collectively. The focus group occurred three to four times a semester instead of a regular class meeting. Students that agreed to participate were encouraged to attend.

Data Source 8: Exit Interview

The follow-up interviews were conducted with participants after grades had been submitted at the end of each semester. These interviews were also semi-structured in nature. For

the first part of the interview, I asked a prescribed set of three to five questions to the participant (Fontana & Frey, 2008) (see Appendix H). The second half of the interview was unstructured in nature as I followed up with the participant to ask for clarification of the statements made in the reading reports or through the focus group interview. This second half of the interview was custom designed for each individual participant. The interview was audio recorded for later transcription. Each interview was transcribed for textual data analysis.

During the follow-up interview at the end of the semester, the participant had the opportunity to clarify any unclear statements from his/her reading reports, literacy autobiography, and reading reflections (Genat, 2009). Participants were also notified that they would have the opportunity to read the transcripts of their follow-up interview to make modifications (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Data Analysis

Narrative (content) analysis contains a broad range of conceptions as a research tool, data, or process while the use of narratives in research has grown enormously over three decades (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Understanding of narratives should be emphasized here. In narrative analysis, narratives are not simply treated as stories or as a set of facts or truths about the world (Lawler, 2002). Narratives are considered as social products and interpretative devices where people present their cultural and social identities as they make sense of the particular world. Therefore, I considered narratives as "a means of constructing personal identities" (p. 242) with "facts and the interpretation of the facts are envisaged as necessarily entwined" (p. 243).

According to Daiute and Lightfoot (2004), "narrative analysis is a mode of inquiry based in narrative as a root metaphor, a genre, and discourse" (p. x). It has various functions: working

as an interpretive tool, providing contexts and insights, and permitting the incursion of value and evaluation into the research process to examine phenomena, issues, identity, behavior, and development (pp. xi- xiii).

Among different types of narrative analysis, the categorical-content approach, often called "content analysis," in which "categories of the studied topic are defined, and separate utterances of the text are extracted, classified, and gathered into these categories/groups (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, p. 13) was selected for data analysis in this study. This method of content analysis was used where the narratives are broken into small units of content, statistically or descriptively, and examined according to the nature of research and data materials. My interest was to learn how the students in the developmental reading courses made use of comic books and graphic novels, and how the visually-oriented books improved their reading comprehension and attitudes toward reading.

The procedures took several steps (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Webster & Mertova, 2007). First, I prepared all textual data and I read data to select subtexts that were relevant to the research questions. In addition to the autobiographies, reflective journals, and homework, the recorded interviews and focus group conversations were transcribed using Microsoft Word. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), Creswell (2003), and Davies (2007), qualitative study protocol dictated that it was acceptable to begin data analysis of the participants' texts before the follow up interviews. Since the follow up interviews occurred after the end of the semester, I read through the transcripts at a later date and made notes about particular moments in the conversation where connections could be made to other collected data. I took notes of these comments and used them to reflect upon as I read through

the students' work. I was able to revisit the students' texts as well as the focus group interviews for analysis to better understand them and kept my thoughts in the teacher- researcher journal.

Once I read the data several times, I marked selected texts. The initial line by line data analysis was crucial for developing an understanding of the participants in order to create a semi-structured line of questioning that would allow for potential themes to be fleshed out in the narrative inquiry.

Second, Dewey's ideas of continuity, interaction, and situation in his theory of experience were adopted in analyzing individuals' narratives. Based on his key notions, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) developed categories for a metaphorical "three-dimensional narrative inquiry space" that are "the personal and social (interaction) along one dimension; past, present and future (continuity) along a second dimension; place (situation) along a third dimension" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 46). They show how different individuals' stories can be structured based on these categories.

Building on Clandinin and Connelly, I started generating my own content categories. The categories were for various themes or perspectives selected from subtext as forms of words and sentences. According to Patton's processes of inductive analysis, the categories or taxonomies were created from "indigenous typologies" (1990, p. 306) that were expressed by the participants or "analyst-constructed typologies" (pp. 393-400) generated by a researcher through the analysis (cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 154). Hence, narrative analysis required a quite intensive focus and time for me to gain interpretations on apparent-seen observed in their narratives in creating categories. Themes, such as personal investment, reluctant reader identity, and disenfranchisement of the students became evident throughout the textual data analysis.

Third, in the coding or sorting data stage, I marked and underlined passages that were closely related to each category with different colored pens. I also tested if emergent categories and themes were appropriately matched with the passages and reconsidered alternative explanations. As a way to honor the narrative architecture of each participant's stories of literacy development using comics, I organize the chapters into sections that discuss their reactions to the reading reports, PLATO and the teaching pedagogy of the instructor.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Overview of the Data Collection

I originally designed this study with the intention to collect data for the duration of one semester. But, as I read other dissertation studies, and I considered the nature of my research questions and the situation I was in as an instructor and researcher, I came to believe that one semester of data collection would not give me a full enough picture. This conclusion is based upon the rationale of the fundamental dynamics that make up a classroom (Chazan, 2002; Tobin, 1993). These dynamics presented many variables that could easily affect the data collected from the students. Therefore, I collected as much data as I could for four semesters over a time period of Fall 2009, Spring 2010, Fall 2010, and Summer 2011. In this fourth chapter, I have processed the data for the four semesters.

At the end of four semesters, I had collected forty hours worth of raw, audio interview data. Every one of my students gladly consented to be participants at the end of each semester. This had yielded a file cabinet's worth of student work and reflections from the Intermediate Reading course. The total number of participants for the study from the first four semesters was fifty-one student volunteer participants.

A number of themes became evident through the analysis of audio interviews and of the student-participant-generated work from the course. Among the fifty-one participants, I chose a sampling of nine participants who performed a follow-up exit interview. Each of these participants brought something unique to the course and to this study itself because these participants were the focal point of these reoccurring themes: reader reluctance, empowerment, and community.

The Mandated Reading Curriculum

Before I present the data collected from the nine participants, it is essential to have an overall understanding of how my teaching of the course was significantly different from the prescribed curriculum. It is also crucial to understand how the individual assignments come together and interlink with each other with one assignment building upon the objectives of the previous assignment.

Intermediate Reading as Taught by Other Faculty who Follow the Curriculum at WPCC. The standard curriculum for all Reading instructors, which was approved and mandated by the WPCC Reading Curriculum Committee, called for a three tiered instruction – Reading comprehension strategies and concepts, vocabulary, and PLATO – the online tutorial program that was supposed to bridge the gap of the *College Reading Series* textbook and the vocabulary text book. From the three sample syllabi I received at the beginning of my teaching career at WPCC, the instructors focused on assigning one chapter of each text at a time and only covering exercises. Tests consisted of two huge exams, a Midterm and a Final where the students were simultaneously tested on the vocabulary and the reading comprehension concepts of the *College Reading Series* text. Two huge grades came from these tests. However, in reality, the vocabulary and the reading comprehension concepts could not be accessed properly in one fifty question midterm and one fifty question final exam. This meant that a lot of the reading concepts from the *College Reading Series* text and vocabulary work book had to be excluded from the departmental exams. Every class had the same departmental midterm and final exam that was created by the Reading Curriculum Committee.

Plato was also taught in class. Students would be given class time to complete PLATO after every third class meeting. The fourth class meeting would be held in the computer lab

where the students had the entire period to work on the online tutorials. Working on PLATO in the campus computer lab was best because the computer PCs had the necessary software already downloaded. All the student had to do was to enter a URL address and log into PLATO to begin. It was not uncommon to have students who did not own a PC of their own. For these students, the computer lab was the only access to a computer they had. The teacher following the curriculum would assign PLATO at the beginning of the semester, and he/she would allow the students to have the entire semester to complete the tutorial.

Class lectures consisted of going over homework. In classes that were modeled for me by other WPCC instructors, homework consisted of completing the section exercises of each chapter and completing a reading journal exercise.

The fall semester of 2008 was the first time I taught Intermediate Reading. I followed the curriculum with very little deviation other than using comics to explain the idea of "thesis and support." I did this because my students were not grasping the concepts as I explained them using the book. However when I used comics, the student's positive response made it evident that finding a way to help students relate to the reading material was valuable for their success.

Deviating from the Curriculum

I discovered early on in my first semester of teaching that this curriculum had problems. The curriculum was designed to be implemented by a hired part-time instructor who would just follow the curriculum of what and when to teach. This approach is much like a "ready-made" course. Just plug in the instructor and it is ready to go. What I learned was that every class is different, with students who have individual needs. I found that one class was never the same as the preceding class. The reason I deviated from the curriculum was because I wanted to make my class much more individualized and flexible for the students. I wanted, ultimately, to apply

the course to the students and not vice versa. I wanted to make the course more engaging for the students. More importantly, I felt that creating a pedagogy that encouraged an 'interest of relation' for the students would help me understand how graphic novels and comic books affect and improve reading comprehension in community college level students. In doing so, I crafted my own assignments and tests to implement the reading concepts, the reading strategies and the vocabulary.

In my course, my students began the semester defining what it meant to be in an "Intermediate Reading" course. What did it mean to be "intermediate"? Many students misunderstood this title. They thought it was a label of their reading skills.

During the second class meeting, students were given a "Pre" Nelson Denny test to assess their vocabulary and reading comprehension levels. Students were also assessed on their reading. This test was not graded. It was mainly used to act as a basis or starting point to measure the students' growth in a quantitative fashion.

Also for the second class meeting, the students had to write an introduction letter that talked about their attitude toward reading. This was an important first step to understand who the students were as readers. Within the second week, the students were introduced to the Literacy Autobiography assignment (see Appendix C). Students were asked to write about their reading experiences that had affected their reading attitudes. The assignment began with taking time to read sample literacy autobiographies and analyze the content for themes. Students were given two weeks to write a draft to turn in for comments. I graded their revision.

At the same time I taught the concept of "main idea" in the *College Reading Series* text, and I assigned the first reading report – Novel (Book) Report (see Appendix D). The Novel Report is where the students have to read a novel of their choosing. Then, chapter by chapter,

they have to assess what the main idea is. I usually tended to give a week to two weeks for the

students to complete this assignment. This depended on how fast the students could read. Some

semesters I had given up to three weeks for this assignment because the students were slow

readers.

The "implied main idea" concept was taught by using political cartoons. Students were

asked to follow the four steps for locating the implied main idea to their own political cartoons.

Before this assignment was given, sample political cartoons were brought to class where the four

steps for locating an implied main idea were modeled for the students.

Each week of the semester was initially devoted to one chapter from each course

textbook. Students were prompted to have a new chapter done each week from the vocabulary

and the class reading text. In regards to the vocabulary textbook, students were encouraged to

double check the definitions of the text since some of the vocabulary terms have the wrong

meanings written in the book. I gave bonus points for the first student to find the vocabulary

words that contained incorrect definitions as well as for locating typos in the text book. The

vocabulary text was filled with typos and formatting errors. I checked the vocabulary homework

by assigning note cards. For each chapter, students had to write the vocabulary terms

(approximately eighteen to nineteen words) on note cards. Every week I checked note cards. I

chose this method of handling the vocabulary because it seemed to be more active way for the

students to learn vocabulary. During the semester term, I gave the students four tests on

vocabulary. Each test covered two consecutive chapters of the text book.

As the class began to learn about the patterns of thought or essay patterns such as

narrative, cause and effect, compare and contrast, etc, they were asked to locate three comic

books that they wanted to read. I highly encouraged the students to find comic books in which

they were truly interested. After the students had the comics, I gave a workshop on how to read comics where I introduced the students to comic book terminology and McCloud's (1993) idea of "closure". Student read Chapter 3 of the graphic novel, *How to Read Comics*. In following class, I had students explain the idea of "closure" and we applied this concept to the comics the students were reading in class. Before the end of class, we were using McCloud's closure concept to explain the relationship of sentences and the ideas of pattern of thought from the class textbook.

Of the three comic books the students were asked to find, each student had to pick one comic book to dissect into parts of an essay – thesis, major supporting details, minor supporting details and then answer questions about how the information is presented. This was called the Comic Book Report (See Appendix E). It was taught at the same time the class covered the chapter about the patterns of thought in the course textbook.

After the class covered patterns of thought, the class was ready for the first big test – the "Midterm from Hell." I chose this nickname for the midterm as a joke in an attempt to ease the tension students might have in regards to the midterm. Ten days before the Midterm, I asked that students study for a practice midterm. This practice midterm was the departmental midterm that all Intermediate Reading classes were supposed to give to their classes. After this midterm, the instructor was supposed to give an analysis report of what questions were missed and how many times those questions were missed. The data collected from each Intermediate Reading class was then given to the reading curriculum committee to be analyzed. I felt that the departmental midterm was not a thorough and proper assessment of the course content. Students who knew very little about the course content could pass the test without studying, based on what they already understood about the reading concepts prior to taking the course. Intellectual

116

growth that would occur during the course could not be measured.   This was problematic.

Students were taking this course to gain knowledge on how to read more effectively so that they

could excel in future classes. This was why I created my own midterm which was more

thorough for assessing the students' understanding of the instruction, as well as the student's

knowledge base. Students were encouraged to do their best work on the departmental midterm

which was being used as a "practice midterm." Students were informed if they had a higher

score on the practice midterm than the actual midterm I gave; the higher score was what would

be recorded in the grade book.

As we drew closer to the Midterm, I provided two review sessions. One was given in

class a day prior to the midterm, and a second the night before the midterm (with food) where I

incorporated games in which students competed for the prize of me revealing actual test

questions from the exam. The Midterm was my own test mixed with questions that the students

wrote during the review session. The midterm consisted of two parts. The first section consisted

of "Theory," in which students were tested on their knowledge of the concepts from the reading

text. The second part was "Application" where the students were asked to apply the concepts

from part one to reading exercises like the ones we had covered in class and for homework. The

results of this midterm were quite impressive. The majority of the class passed within the

ninety-first percentile range.

After the midterm, the concepts of tone, bias, and inference were taught. Sample writings

were brought to class for the students to analyze for tone and bias. The students learned about

connotation and denotation. A lesson on colloquial slang reinforced their understanding of these

concepts. The idea of inferences was then taught. Students learned about the dichotomy of

inference and implication; a writer implies, whereas a reader infers. Students were then assigned

the Graphic Novel Report (see Appendix F).

The Graphic Novel Report was designed to act as an abstract way to bring together the

first nine chapters of the *College Reading Series* text. Students were asked to deconstruct the

graphic novel into an outline as demonstrated in Chapter 10 of the *College Reading Series* text.

Students were also asked to analyze the graphic novel text for its author's implications and tone

about the subject being written about. For example, one student chose the first volume of Garth

Ennis's *The Boys*. The student analyzed the content of the story and came to the conclusion

based upon the author's implications, that "Superheroes were a blight on society" (Jean Loring's

Graphic Novel Report, April 15, 2010, p. 7).

After the Graphic Novel Report was assigned, students began to prepare for the series of

tests at the end of the semester. The first of three finals was the "post" Nelson Denny test.

Students were tested using a different form of the Nelson Denny than used for the "Pre" test.

Students were motivated to do their best on this test because the Nelson Denny reflected

"intellectual growth" or an understanding of reading comprehension and how to perform the

various reading strategies. In truth, the reading curriculum used the Nelson Denny to measure if

a student has progressed. Some students had a negative attitude toward standardized testing and

therefore would not try to complete the Nelson Denny competently. For this reason, the reading

curriculum insisted that the Nelson Denny be graded and calculated into their final grade. I

instructed the students that the test was graded, but to think of the test as an extra way to

demonstrate how much they have learned and get an additional test grade that can offset any

other bad grades. This standardized test also gave a quantifiable measurement for growth in

reading comprehension of each student.

The second "final" was the book final. I followed the same procedures as I did for the Midterm, especially with using the departmental Final as the practice Final. The third final was what I called the "Final of Insanity." Instead of doing what instructors do in other class like giving cumulative multiple-choice final, I chose to turn the last final into a game where the whole class had to participate and earn points/lose points as a collective. Students were still responsible for knowing the vocabulary, but the test itself was much more fun and engaging.

The last requirement that the students had to do was to write an Exit Letter. The purpose of the Exit Letter was to allow the chance for a student to reflect on what they had learned and experienced throughout the semester.

Students seemed to respond very well to this pedagogy of teaching. Not only did it appear to foster a community of camaraderie among the students and the teacher, but the students were also empowered to read very freely, thus allowing them to be able to overcome years of reader reluctance.

The third research question I proposed asked, "What impact does reading comics have on developmental students' attitudes toward reading?" The students had many perspectives about being placed in the intermediate courses and how comics could help them to overcome negativity as several writing assignments and reading comics were implemented in the reading courses. In short, comics had a huge impact on the Intermediate Reading course. For the first time, I was able to reach out to the marginalized students in class and find ways to motivate them to read. More importantly, I was able use comics to show the students who were reluctant readers how rewarding reading could be.

<center>**Nine Focused Participants**</center>

The following narratives of nine participants who I assigned pseudonyms based upon comic book characters – Donna Troy, Artemis, May Reilly Parker-Jameson, Elisa Cameron, Connor Kent, Dinah Lance, Billy Butcher, Cassie Sandsmark, and Sue Dibney, illustrate these implications.

Participant #1 – Donna Troy

Donna Troy was the free spirit of the class who possessed an underlying turbulent waters persona. Although she was the quietest student in the Fall 2009 class, her work and personal chats revealed a very complicated and yet refreshing look at what it means to struggle with reading today. She was a self proclaimed "visual learner," who said she discovered the pleasure of reading comics in this course (Donna's Graphic Novel Report, November 2, 2009, p. 6). She stated in the reflection part of the report that "comics . . . have an abundance of information in the panels of pictures which is a good thing because that's what helps me retain the information stated" (p. 6). Her attitude toward reading at the beginning of the semester was negative. She did not care for reading for a few reasons. First, she said reading was something that she had struggled with since grade school. It made her "feel stupid" (Donna's Literacy Autobiography, November 29, 2009, p. 1; Donna's Introduction Letter, September 6, 2009, p. 1). She only wanted to read when it was absolutely necessary because of how frustrated and demoralized it made her feel (Donna's Exit Interview, August 10, 2010).

Second, the texts that Donna had to read were seldom for pleasure. She had difficulty understanding reading assignments. One explanation she gave in the Exit Interview was that she could not "get into" what she was reading. She had little interest in most assigned reading; therefore she could not relate to reading. I asked her what she read for pleasure. She answered

<center>120</center>

that "I never have time, but Star Wars and X-men have always been cool to read" (Donna's Exit Interview, August 10, 2010).

Third, Donna talked in her Literacy Autobiography about embarrassing situations that had occurred with her reading in school. In one example, as Donna stated:

Teachers would constantly want the students to read a passage and then talk about it. I would always get picked to answer questions about specific details that I could not answer because I did not understand what the passage was about. I felt so dumb-founded when it was my turn to talk. Other people in class would make comments such as, 'Wow, how did you miss that?' To this day, I don't like to participate in class, even when I have all these questions (Literacy Autobiography, November 29, 2009; Donna's Exit Interview, August 10, 2010).

Besides receiving grief from students, the teachers that she had had in class had also contributed to her negative attitude. Donna hinted about this in the written reflection aspects of the assignments, including the Introduction Letter, (September 6, 2009), Literacy Autobiography (November 29, 2009), Comic Book Report (October 9, 2009), and Graphic Novel Report (November 2, 2009).

In the Exit Interview data, Donna was more explicit:

A lot of my teachers that I have had in high school and college so far have been very boring. They show no enthusiasm toward their subject that is being taught. These teachers are so strict; their way is the only way of teaching that subject. The teachers that I had for reading were also more bored with the reading class than we were. There was no excitement in the class. I wanted to sleep in his class. Why should I like reading or find it interesting if the teacher shows the same attitude?"

121

Donna said a "good class" is a class that has a fun teacher that loves to teach and loves his students. Unfortunately, Donna said she had never had a reading class like this. She described all of her teachers as "rigid, too serious", and without a "fun bone in their body," (Donna's Exit Interview, August 10, 2010). For Donna, this made reading not fun and more like a chore because the pedagogy of the teacher was not exciting or interactive enough for her.

Donna stated in her Introduction Letter (September 6, 2009) that a good teacher, in her opinion is able to do two things:

> First, it really helps when the teacher is enthused about the subject and helps keep things interesting. Second, allowing different strategies and a variety of small ways to build skills also help me benefit because I can feel the improvement and want to read more often. (p. 1)

In her literacy autobiography, Donna wrote. "I want to be in control of my reading. I hate being confined into someone else's boundaries of what they think we should read," (November 29, 2009, p 2). Reading had to be on her terms. She had to be able to relate to it and find it exciting. Donna claimed to never have had this experience in any of the classes during her academic years. On the other hand, as Donna's teacher, the reading reports that I assigned were "free choice," meaning that the student could choose the novel, comic books and graphic novels that he/she had an interest to read. Donna said this was very beneficial for her because it made her want to complete the assignments in class (Donna's Exit letter, December 9, 2009, p. 2).

Donna admitted in her literacy autobiography that she struggled with reading in school. She had difficultly processing large chunks of information, (November 29, 2009, p. 1) as she explained that "I have a hard time reading due to the fact that I lose interest in it very quickly. Most of the time I read, I don't get much out of it, and when I do, it's just the general idea, not

122

the important ideas," (Introduction Letter, September 6, 2009). In the exit interview, she explained further that she struggled with this because she did not understand the basic fundamentals of reading comprehension. Donna said the course helped her gain an understanding of this challenge she faced.

Donna had many positive things to say about the reading course. First, she described how her attitude toward reading had changed:

> I like reading now. This class has so far inspired me to make myself a better reader. I now understand how to read a passage and break it down into a thesis, a main idea, and the supporting details. I can answer those questions about specific details. I am not afraid to raise my hand in class or be chosen to answer the teacher's questions anymore.
> (Donna's Exit Letter, December 9, 2009, p. 1)

Donna, who had little confidence when it came to reading, now was more confident in her capabilities. She felt she could pass future classes because she now understood how to process information in reading.

In regards to having another "boring reading teacher," Donna compared the reading courses and the materials as follows:

> Most reading courses just use the traditional textbook and a few internet articles to teach their courses. This method is good if the teacher incorporates combinations of visual, kinesthetic, and auditory methods to accommodate the learning styles of each student. This rarely happens though. Most teachers I have had have you just read from a book and then it's up to the student to seek the importance of the text. By using just the textbook method, it tends to leave some students struggling because the teacher is only portraying one learning style. (Donna's Introduction Letter, September 6, 2009, p. 1)

In the reading class I taught, this was not the case. Text books weren't the only primary text for teaching the reading concepts and strategies. I used the text book to explain the concepts in one way, and I used the comic books and graphic novels along with regular novels to explain the concepts in another way. In doing so, class instruction played upon more than one mode of learning. Donna had more to comment about this practice:

> Your method of using comic books and graphic novels was a new experience for me. I've never even picked one up before. I found that this strategy really worked for me. The textbook gave me the information that gave me an overview of what it is I should know, which was okay, but expected. The textbook had exercises in it for us to do, but I found myself doing one or two of those exercises then calling it quits because it was boring and I wasn't getting much out of it. Whereas when we used comic books, I was able to take the information I was learning and apply it to the actual comic. The comics really helped me to understand how I would use the ideas from the text in my everyday life, instead of reading a made up passage that has statistics or something in it. Using the comic book allowed my brain to process the information and forced me to use what I have been taught. This was more exciting for me and I could visually see how the information was to fall in place. I was able to retain the information better this way because "closure" was a natural thought process. Everything you needed to know was drawn right in front of you. Comic books and graphic novels made it easier for me to understand the chapters of the College Reading Text and process that information so I could move forward with the right knowledge. So, the comic book allowed me to actually apply the information without needing aid which made me more confident as a reader. (Donna's Exit Interview, August 10, 2010)

This process of learning the course concepts is a cognitive one where the students are practicing with the application or concepts in abstract. Students are utilizing the text not as a text that teaches, but as a source of information. This process is about creating personal investment where the student begins to really see the value of the lessons taught in this course.

> Donna also reflected on the value of her experience in the Intermediate Reading course:
>
> From taking this course and using the different strategies you have shown me, I feel I have gained a better understanding of reading strategies and I can tell I have made a great amount of progress that I'm proud of. You have done a good job incorporating every type of learning style during this course which helped dramatically. (Donna's Exit Letter, December 9, 2010, p. 2)

It was difficult to summarize her entire Exit Letter without sacrificing the context of it. In this letter Donna discussed how the implementation of multimodal instruction benefited her in the most positive ways, while at the same time she was exposed to new forms of media that she most likely would never try to experience on her own. My goal of using this type of instruction was to rehabilitate a reluctant reader into an empowered reader like Donna had become.

Donna's overall final comments pertaining to the course were that "I really liked this new way of teaching. It's very helpful. I enjoyed this style of teaching better than having a teacher that teaches only from the book" (Donna's Exit Interview, August 10, 2010).

Participant #2 – Artemis

The following is an excerpt from my teaching journal that I kept for self reflection. This journal recounts an interaction I had after class with Artemis.

  Teacher's Journal - October 19, 2010. Artemis is detached from the class lectures more so today than ever before. She was resistant to the book reports and simply reading in general. She had not done the initial book report, and she barely did the first section of the book reports. Today I collected the revised book reports of the first two report assignments – The Novel Report and the Comic Book Report. I requested the revisions after I read the reports the first time around. Some of the students did not give enough information while other students did not follow the directions correctly.

  And then there is Artemis. She never turned in the Novel Report. Artemis refused to do the revisions on the Comic Book Report. As class ended with a mad rush to the classroom exit, I kindly asked Artemis to stay behind. She frowned.

  "Talk to me," I said jumping straight to the point. "What's up? You haven't turned in your Novel Report not to mention the revision on the Comic Book Report." Artemis sat in her chair and skulked. "C'mon talk to me," I prompted once again.

  Artemis would not make eye contact. She sat with arms crossed staring at her text book which rest front of her on the desk. It looked so "new" and unused as if she hardly used it after talking it out of the shrink wrap. After five weeks into the semester, that was a bad sign. I still stood at the front of the classroom behind the podium. Her body language kept me standing there like repellent to a mosquito. And then she spoke quietly, "I hate reading."

"Okay. That's totally acceptable. You are allowed to 'hate' reading, but can you tell me why?" In Artemis's Literacy Autobiography, she had said that she disliked reading immensely, but provided no real explanation why.

"I just do," she replied in a slightly louder voice.

"You know, reading is a pain in my butt also, but I make it work because it is an important tool in what I do. You need reading for many things. Hating it is fine, but if you understand how reading comprehension works, it can open your mind to so many things." Artemis still sat there in her frigid state. She did not want to be sitting there listening to me coercing her into giving reading a chance.

I decided to change my approach. "What if I told you that if you bombed the Book Midterm and the Book Final, but you completed the book reports, you'd still pass this class with a B for the final grade? All you have to do is do the reading reports." And then I overplayed my hand, "Besides, you need this course so that you can get the tools you need to succeed in your future classes."

"I hate reading!" Artemis screamed at me as she rose from her chair. I knew this. She had stated it before. "This class is a joke! I don't need this class! My parents say that reading is a waste of time and is not important. I am only here because my boyfriend said that I had to go to school because he would dump me if I didn't."

"Wow," I said calmly. I was having trouble comprehending what I heard. My initial reaction was to try and understand her statement. "First of all, why would your parents feel that reading is a 'waste of time'?"

"I just want to farm. We don't have time to read when we work sun-up to sun-down." I actually understood this logic. I come from a huge family of farmers. My parents were sheep

ranchers. I grew up as a "wooly boy." Reading was privilege that did not happen unless I finished my chores and I had time before bed or I found a way to shirk out of working.

"Then why are you here? What's the purpose of going to college?"

"I am just taking enough classes so I can enroll at the state police academy. And I don't need reading to be a state trooper." Artemis's eyes were beginning to glisten with water and that was her signal to leave. She took her abnormally near mint condition reading textbook in hand and began to walk toward the classroom exit.

"Wait, Wait, Wait," I pleaded. Artemis paused for a moment to turn and look at me. As soon as I had her attention, I said, "You need to know how to read and write to be a state trooper, because 75% of the time you are reading and writing reports on your activities. If you can't do that, how effective of a state trooper can you really be?" It was an honest question that I somehow thought would get her to change her mind about reading. I envisioned a response such as, "Yes, that does make sense. I didn't consider that," or "I thought being a state trooper was more like what you saw on the television show *Cops*. I will reconsider your advice."

But what really happened was this: She said, "You are a Jerk! And I hate reading. And I hate this class" Artemis said this as she stormed out of the classroom with huge tears in her face. In her mind, I was the villain who badgered her about something that was being held above her head as it had been done to other members in her family by other "gate keepers." "Reading was the key."

Artemis's Reading Reports. Later that semester, Artemis turned in her Graphic Novel Report. The Graphic Novel Report had five parts to it. The first three parts dealt with reading and breaking down the graphic novel of their choice into manageable chunks of information. To do this, the student had to actually read the graphic novel. The last two parts – Parts Four and

Five were more analytical questions that dealt with the student's overall attitude toward reading the graphic novel and his/her perceived effectiveness of the graphic novel in an academic setting.

Artemis boycotted the first three parts and began the fourth part, her attitude on having to read a graphic novel:

> A graphic novel is worse than a comic book. A graphic novel is longer than a comic book and makes it even more confusing. If you understand the first chapter of the graphic novel then you might be okay reading a graphic novel. Not knowing what the first chapter is in the graphic novel, it will be the worst read material. It will be confusing and complicated. I don't like to read anything ever but if I had to choose to read one of the three we did in class, a novel, a comic book, and a graphic novel, I would chose to read the novel. (Artemis' Graphic Novel Report, November 22, 2010, p. 1)

However, her justification for preferring the traditional novel was as follows:

> The novel was the fastest for me to read, comprehend, and do a report on. It was the longest item I had to read, yes, but it was easy to follow, and picture what was happening. It flowed; it was not one picture to another with a background picture that confused me when things were related to the panel or the background picture. It was just downright confusing for me. (Artemis' Graphic Novel Report, November 22, 2010, p. 2)

Ironically, her motivation for finally completing the Novel Report was extrinsic in nature. Seven weeks later, she turned in the report because her boyfriend forced her to do it. He threatened not to buy her a Christmas gift if she did not complete all of her assignments.

In her revision of the Graphic Novel Report, Artemis also provided feedback for the assignment and the teaching methods that revolved around the assignment. In her Graphic Novel Report, Artemis stated the following:

The novel gives you all the details and you formulate the picture where with a graphic

novel or a comic book it gets you the pictures and you have to look at the gutters and

closure to figure out the story behind them. To teach comic books and graphic novels in

a college class to me is pointless. I feel that in high school it might be okay to teach other

ways to formulate stories and idea. In college you are here to get your degree and credits.

Most people are not interested in new ways of writing or teaching. They're just trying to

get a degree and get out into the world to make a living. (Artemis' Graphic Novel Report,

November 22, 2010, pp. 2-3)

In regards to the comic book reading report, Artemis did not seem to take the assignment

seriously in her first draft. The first draft consisted of one paragraph of 8 sentences where she

vaguely addressed some of the questions. Artemis was upset with being told to "redo" the

assignment. It was because I was unsuccessful in convincing her to think about the comic book

as if it were a political cartoon that was full of underlying information.

When she finally turned in a revised draft, Artemis demonstrated that she had worked

through the questions but only to report the surface information presented from reading panel to

panel. When I asked her what cultural or political propaganda she discovered in the comic book,

Artemis coldly opened to the last page of the Comic Book Report and placed her finger at the

beginning of one sentence: "There was nothing that I saw was related to the politic cartoons"

(Artemis' Comic Book Report, October 25, 2010, p. 3). Artemis then said, "It's a comic book.

Comics don't have hidden ideas."

Unlike other reluctant readers in my class, I was not able to "rehabilitate" or motivate

her. At the beginning of the semester, she stated in her Novel Report (September 30, 2010) and

in her Introduction Letter (August 29, 2010), that she loathed reading and that in general, her

130

attitude is "horrible." If anything, she despised reading more at the end of the semester. Artemis may have been taught this attitude by her family as she stated:

> Reading is not something I like to do or a class I enjoy going to. Reading started at my home before school but it was never enforced. There was always something better I could be doing besides sitting and reading with my parents. . . . Reading was just boring and my folks and I like to have fun. (Artemis' Literacy Autobiography, September 20, 2010, p. 1)

When I tried talking with Artemis more about what kind of attitude her family shared toward reading, she confirmed that they were always too busy to "read." Many of her family members had not liked reading in school and had not liked the teachers who taught reading. Even though Artemis felt poorly toward reading, she acknowledged its importance in her literacy autobiography. She stated, "Literacy will be the only way to make it through life for many reasons" (September 20, 2010, p. 3). She continued later on stating:

> Literacy, I feel, can be taught in many different ways. With a text book or by hands-on work or even by yourself just picking up on what people say, do and how they act can teach you. . . . For me I feel a lot of my learnt literacy was picking up on things on my own. (pp. 3-4)

Near the end of the semester, Artemis revised her literacy autobiography with an added paragraph that reflected on the turmoil she found herself facing in my class. Artemis concluded her Literacy Autobiography essay with this statement:

> Now that I'm in college, I realize that I should have cared sooner about reading and writing and all my other school work but it was never a huge deal at my house. Work and fun usually came first with my family. That way if you were to die the next day

131

everyone know you died happy and were not stressed out by the little things in life, like

school! (September 20, 2010, p. 4)

I responded with one word written as feedback, "Why?" Artemis wrote under my comment,

"Cuz school was stressful for me. It was not easy. It makes my life crazy. My family would

rather have a good than to see a member upset and stressed out. So we would go out and have a

good time" (p. 4).

Participant #3 - May Reilly Parker-Jameson

May Reilly Parker-Jameson was the oldest of my students at age 59. She was a returning

adult student who was trying to earn another degree that would make her more marketable. The

community college for her was the cheapest option and the more logical since she had been laid

off two months prior to her enrollment at the college.

May was a unique student to have in the Intermediate Reading class. In her Literacy

Autobiography, she characterized herself as "having a quirky personality" (p. 1). She continued,

"Also,I take exception that I am the proverbial cat lady. I have three cats and that's my limit.

This is the way I have been for years and I don't apologize for it. My quirky personality makes

up who and what I am" (p. 1).

May was not a child of the digital age. In her reflective journal, she stated: "the

computers (at least some of them) are messed up. I kept having to figure out whether I want

Word 2003 or 2007? Which program is the better one?" (February 21, 2010, p. 3). In short,

technology confused her. Visuals and iconography were hard for her to understand and the

written word was king. May read novels like a child devoured chocolate sweets.

May was unsure of my teaching methods. When she went to school originally, a

different and more traditional method of lecture and the pragmatics were implemented in the

classroom. At the beginning of the semester, May wrote, "I think that we are receiving a well rounded education with the reading, writing, and vocabulary, not to mention developing our book reports," (May's Reflective Journal, February 2, 2010, p. 2). She also wrote about the Novel Report:

> I have decided that I really enjoy my reading book. That is the *College Reading Series* book. There is so much reading text in [it] that is extremely interesting. And such a vast variety of topics. I'm not too enthusiastic about my writing book. I did like reading *Seabiscuit*, however, I had to read it fast because our report was coming due and had to make progress through some 400 pages. (May's Reflective Journal, April 11, 2010, p. 5)

I conducted a Focus Group (February 21, 2010) where I introduced the theoretical concept of how to read comics. As I was explaining the comic book terminology of panel and gutter, May raised her hand. I asked, "Yes, May. Question?" May asked in a very blunt fashion, "Is this part of the curriculum? Why are we learning this? What does this have to do with reading?" I responded, "Everything, but hold that thought." I said it with a smile of confidence. By the end of class, I had explained McCloud's (1993) idea of "closure" and how it related to what we were studying in the *College Reading Series* text.

Later that semester (Spring 2010), May wrote another entry in her Reflective Journal on April 4, 2010:

> This is all coming together. With the reading and writing, I am learning so much. And now we are discussing comic books and graphic novels. I didn't know what graphic novels were until I took this class. The comics today aren't anything that I grew up with. (p. 6)

A few days later, May wrote, "I'm not too thrilled about our comic book assignment. They are not like the comics that I grew up with. Of course, they have to be about 'Super heroes'" (May's Reflective Journal, April 7, 2010, p. 8).

In the Exit Interview, I asked May if she could elaborate more about the last part of this entry. The comic book she chose was *Steeltown Rockers* Vol.1, #6. This comic was about a rocker band of seven teens who were trying to become famous playing songs about mutants in the Marvel Universe. The book was less about super heroes and more a dramatization of overcoming personal conflicts and playing music. When I gave the Graphic Novel Report assignment, I asked the students to find or buy a comic book that they would be interested in and would like to read. I never specified a preferred genre that I wanted the students to read, nor did I mandate a specific genre.

I asked May why she thought I wanted her to read a superhero comic. May replied, "Aren't all comics today superhero comics?" (May's Exit Interview, August 18, 2010). May misunderstood comics simply because she could not find what she grew up reading at the store – Archie Comics. She preferred Archie Comics and comics like that title for "wholesome humor" and interpersonal "drama." Instead, as May assumed all comics at the store were superhero comics, she found the one superhero comic that was more about drama than superheroism. This is what interested her and motivated her to want to read this particular comic book.

For May's Graphic Novel Report, she wrote, "The reason I chose this novel was that there was not a lot of graphic novels from which to choose from (April 20, 2010, p. 1)." During the Exit Interview, May clarified this more. She bought her graphic novel from Wal-Mart. There was not a huge selection as she said, "There were only three graphic novels to chose from – *Batman*, *Iron Man*, and *Twilight*. I didn't care for any of them. But I know I needed one for

class. I chose the cheapest, which was *Iron Man*. It was seven dollars," (May's Exit Interview, August 18, 2010). For May, she did not want to spend a lot of money on something she had little interest in reading. I asked her if she saw the *Archie Comics* digests at Wal-Mart. Her reply was a simple surprise as she did not know *Archie Comics* were still being published. It was at that point that I showed her some Archie comic books and an *Archie Comics* graphic novel that was a collection of one of the story lines. "If I would have known where to find these, I would have enjoyed doing these reading reports more" (May's Exit Interview, August 18, 2010). Of all of the reading reports, May preferred the novel because it was something she was accustomed to.

May also enjoyed reading the *College Reading Series* textbook. Unlike most students in the class, May stated:

> The most enjoyable book to read is the reading textbook which we are reading in class. I am learning so much from all of the information in the paragraphs and passages. Also, I am learning so much about words that are in bold type, their meanings and applications. I never knew there was so much to be considered in reading and I will never take such things for granted again. Needless to say, the reading textbook is allowing me to retain the most knowledge. (May's Graphic Novel Report, April 20, 2010, p. 7).

She clarified later in the graphic novel report that the textbook was more understandable since it was an instructional text. The graphic novel was difficult for her because she was unfamiliar with the visual format. "I cannot relate to them. What I grew up with and what was available at the newsstand or the bookstore today are totally different. The comic books (like the *Archie Comics*) when I was growing up were a lot more colorful, simpler and more funny" (May's Graphic Novel Report, April 20, 2010, p. 8).

May's attitude toward reading is a very positive one. "And at times, it can be a voracious habit" (May's Introduction Letter, January 11, 2010, p. 1). Her appetite for reading encompassed newspapers, magazines, and books (novels). She reads the daily newspapers to keep herself informed on current events and advertised specials in the flier supplements, as well as local news such as birth announcements, wedding announcements, death notices and obituaries, etc. She used to be a member of a book club where she would receive a new book each week. The only reason she was no longer a member of the club is because she got carried away with ordering books. She went from reading one novel a week to reading three and the increased costs of the books were a strain on her finances (May's Exit Interview, August, 18, 2010).

Teacher's Reflective Journal - February 24, 2010. Today we covered "what exactly comics are" and "how to read them." Most of the class received it well. We started with defining the terminology associated with comic books. I wrote the terms on the board as the students hurriedly and faithfully copied what I wrote into their notebooks. I asked, "How many people have read comics?" Most of the class raised their hands. I then asked, "How many people like reading comic books?" About half of the class raised their hands. I asked another question, "How many people do not like reading comics because you find them confusing to read, meaning you aren't sure how to read a comic?" The other half of the class that abstained from raising their hands before for the last question now raised their hands.

"Okay, so what if the comics weren't confusing to read and were something that you wanted to read about?

"How much different is it than reading a book? It is reading, isn't it?" Connor asked impatiently. For him, he had been reading comics for as long as he can remember. He was not a

"fan boy" of comics as I was. He simply followed in the footsteps of his brothers' habit of reading comics. Connor read his brother's comics.

"Almost, Yes, and No," were how I answered his question. "Let me explain." I took a deep breath and began, "'Literacy, as it was traditionally viewed in academia was the ability to read the written symbols organized into familiar patterns such as words that were then arranged in a prescribed syntactic structure such as sentences. Sentences, or clusters of them are paragraphs, and a series of paragraphs is a paper or a story. In other words, the traditional idea of reading was that reading only occurred when a person tried to interpret meaning from the written word." So far, the class seemed able to follow my dialogue.

"And so this was the attitude for the longest time toward teaching reading. Then, in the mid 1980s, a theorist by the name of Scholes published a book on reading. He coined this concept called 'textuality.' This concept contradicted the established thought of what reading was. Scholes asserted that reading occurs not just with words, but also with anything that a person can interpret meaning from." I was being animated, waving my arms around and using the tone of my voice to emphasize and overemphasize what I was saying. I was trying to keep the students entertained as well as not confuse them.

"So can anyone guess what I mean by this?" I paused. "The idea of making meaning or interpreting meaning from something," I prompted to see how much the students understood thus far.

Connor raised his hand. So did Lex and Diana. I motioned to Connor first. "Well, it's like looking at something and getting a sense of what it might mean. Sort of like looking at a piece of art."

"Yes," I smiled contentedly.

I pointed to Lex. Lex contributed, "I was going to say making meaning of a drawing or a painting."

"That's what I was going to say, too," added Diana.

"Exactly," I confirmed. "And what are these things?" I paused long enough to realize that the question was too vague for the students to answer. "Visuals. They are visual constructs. And Scholes said that if we can make sense of visual constructs, we are reading them." I reached into this big box I had brought to class. I pulled out my teaching copy of *Superman* #75 and waved it in the air to the students. "Comic books were condemned during the 1950s because they were considered juvenile and unreadable, because by the academy's idea of what reading was, comics had few words and lots of odd and 'poorly drawn' illustrations."

I opened the issue of Superman #75 to the gatefold final page where Lois Lane wept while holding the broken and battered body of Superman. The illustration of this was very explicit and climatic. At the time of its publication, this was perceived as the death of an icon who represented truth, justice, the American way of life and invincibility. Superman was never supposed to die. But in the only text bubble of this three page spread, it ominously said, "The day that Superman died." And it represented the idea that not everything lasts forever. Even the most powerful pillars of a society can wither away and end.

"So, comics were not seen as good reading material. And this attitude has been a predominant one for decades in classrooms. This is why most schools do not allow comic books in their curriculum . . . because reading comics and comic books did not fit into their idea of reading. I used comic books to help teach Shakespeare when I did my student teaching. I almost got kicked out of student teaching for doing that. But that's another story." I wanted to try and stay on topic.

May raised her hand. I nodded at her. "I remember getting into trouble for reading *Archie* and *Little Dottie* when I was in school. My teacher said it was not reading. She said that I should be reading books. And she called it "smut" back then."

"Wow," I responded. This was a very sharp observation from a student.

And then the million dollar question was asked by a female student who sat in the front corner. In a sarcastic tone, she asked, "Are you allowed to be teaching us this stuff." *Ouch!* I thought. "Fair question," I responded. "The dean supports what I am doing. I'm not sure if the curriculum committee is all for what I am doing," I said with a devilish grin.

"But that is a very valid question." I looked at this student and her two sidekicks with an even bigger devilish grin. "Why in the hell am I distracting you from your boring texts to discuss comics?"

"Because you are a comic book geek," replied one of the girls. This was not the first time that a student from this class called me a "comic book geek." In fact, the general attitude about those who want to teach comics is that they are fanatics with an unrealistic expectation of being able to discuss Superman and Batman under the cloud of academic legitimacy.

"Is that a bad thing?" I playfully asked.

May raised her left hand with her right hand holding her dictionary open. "Whatcha got, May".

"I wanted to share this," May paused for my approval.

"Go ahead."

"My dictionary says that a 'Geek' is defined as someone who has an uncanny knowledge about something."

"Thank you, May," I commended. "I think that was a compliment." I smiled at May for the support.

"Okay. So, comic book geekiness aside… Why am I using comics in this class?" I rephrased the question.

Connor answered "Because that theory guy…"

"You mean Scholes?" I interrupted.

"Yeah, the textuality guy. If the idea of reading is expanded from reading only words to being able to read words AND pictures, then that would mean comics could be used in school," Connor took a correct guess that hit right on the head of the nail.

"Yes, exactly. But not just pictures. The concept of textuality implies that anything visual that could be interpreted in fact can be read. And that idea itself also is so explosive. It means that anything, as long as meaning is being applied or taken from it, is being read. So reading itself is expanded from knowing how to read just the words to reading anything that can be perceived. And with this idea, it opens the way to overcoming the argument that comics cannot be read."

I had brought in a huge box of comics to the class that day. In the box were 22 copies of each individual comic book issue. I passed out the comics so that each of the students had the same 4 comic book issues – *Iron Man*, *Morning Glories*, *The Simpsons*, and *The Punisher*. It was almost five hundred dollars worth of comics that I had ordered and paid for out of my own pocket, so I could use them just for this class. As I passed the comics out to the students, most of them thumbed through the books. Some paused on certain comic books and began reading as if something interesting and worthy of their time had been put in front of them.

"So, with this idea of textuality revolutionizing the idea of what is reading, Comics and the traditional texts of short stories and novels are now level with each other, and yet they are different in how we process them cognitively. When we read the "standard", "traditional" text of a novel or a text book, we subconsciously make sense of why one sentence follows the other. We automatically 'comprehend' what we are reading and therefore it needs little explanation as to why this sentence follows the previous sentence."

I continued as my students were starting to focus on me more. "In this course, the curriculum calls for teaching reading comprehension through teaching the types of relationships of main idea and its supporting details. But in comics, to teach the relationship of the main idea and its supporting details is much, much more explicit." I pointed to the illustration of a typical comic book page that I made on the board prior to class. I had arrows drawn to it from the comic book terminology. Two words at the bottom of the list – *Gutter* and *Closure* had not been defined yet.

"How does one read comics?" I posed. "Can anyone tell me?"

Lex blurted out, "You read each individual panel and add them all together to understand the story."

"Like a math problem," I played back at him.

"Not… No. I'm not sure how to say it," Lex tried to correct himself.

"Can anyone explain what Lex is referring to?" I could see the students thinking to themselves, playing with how best to explain it in their heads. Ten seconds had passed and the students were still trying to grasp how to say it.

"Okay," I verbally reprieved them from the difficult question. I reached inside the box and pulled out a stack of ten-page handouts and began counting them out for the rows. The best

way to explain the process of how a person makes sense of reading a comic is with the terminology of Scott McCloud. This hand out is an excerpt from McCloud's third chapter in his graphic novel, *How to Read Comics*."

"What is a Gutter?" I asked.

Tommy Monaghan jested, "It's where my mind is most of the time."

"Touché, Tommy. But no. EERRR! Please play again," I jested back imitating a game show host.

"The 'gutter' is the space in between the panels," Diana answered.

"Ding! Ding! We have a winner!" I chimed with enthusiasm. "Yes, Diana. That is most correct. The 'gutter' is the space in between where the act of closure occurs. I reached inside my brown leather side bag for a Butterfinger mini candy bar. I occasionally used these as added incentive for the students to be more proactive in the participation aspect of the class. "Looking through the packet I just gave you, how does Scott McCloud define the act of closure when reading comics?"

Selena Kyle raised her hand. "Go ahead Selena."

"Closure is the act of perceiving the whole through parts."

Waving the candy bar at Selena, I asked her to clarify more. She said, "Closure is where the reading subconsciously puts the series of panels together to create a story."

"Well said!" I tossed her the candy bar. She immediately began to open her prize.

"So, how do we read comics?" I restated the question as the beginning of my recap. "We read the panels from left-to-right, top-to-bottom. We observe the gap in between the panels, called the 'gutter,' where we add all the parts or 'panels' together to create a 'whole' story. Does this make sense, so far?"

142

Most of the heads bobbed up and down. These students were sharp. "Now, McCloud continues from here saying that in the closure, we also make a judgment on how the panels relate to each other. If you look on the last three pages of your handout, it shows the types of panel-to-panel transitions."

After a few seconds of letting the students soak up the information, I asked the question again, "Why are we learning about comics? How does it help us understand how we read and break down information?"

Connor raised his hand and answered, "This is one way to explain how we comprehend our information. We perform closure whether we are reading a comic book or a novel."

"Exactly. Whether it is the space in between the panels that we call the 'gutter,' or the space after the period before the beginning of the next sentence, we are still observing the bits of the puzzle and adding them together to see the whole idea."

"Wow!" May calmly remarked. "That's a neat way to look at how we read."

"Exactly."

At the end of the semester, I asked the students to write Exit Letters talking about what they liked and did not like about the class, in addition to noting about what they had learned. May's Exit Letter presented her perspective:

> In considering the value of the comic book and the graphic novel, I just can't appreciate
>
> this genre in all sincerity, reading material that is of a futuristic, science fiction and high-
>
> tech nature just doesn't appeal to me. I was born into an era that had such comics as
>
> *Little Lota*, *Richie Rich*, *Archie*, *Jughead and Veronica*, *Casper The Friendly Ghost*,
>
> *Little Dot*, *Little Audrey* and others. (May 1, 2010, pp. 1-2)

In the Exit Interview, May confessed that the comics were not what she had in mind when she enrolled in the class. She felt that my teaching methods were "unorthodox." She just wanted to learn how to read more effectively. May felt the *College Reading Series* text did this fine on its own. May states, "The comics just muddied up things and made what should be simple, complicated" (August 18, 2010). For May, she did not want to have to decipher the visual icons to come up with a definite main idea. Reading the lexicon text of a traditional novel was what May preferred because she felt the only words were needed to comprehend the author's idea. Visuals confused her.

Participant #4 - Elisa Cameron

Elisa Cameron was one of the quietest students I had. I associated her more with the two other girls who sat in the far front left of the classroom. And they were always trite in how they would interact with me in the class. They acted like they were too cool for the classroom, although Elisa was the quietest of the three. When I called on Elisa, she always spoke softly as if she were unsure of the answer for which I was asking. If anything, Elisa was one of the few students who were reticent in the class. She acted as if she disliked or did not care for comics. This is why I was very surprised that Elisa was one of the first to volunteer for the study.

Elisa had a semi-positive attitude toward reading in the general sense, and it remained the same throughout the semester according to her Introduction Letter (January 13, 2010) and her Novel Report (February 8, 2010). Her only problem was that it was hard for her to concentrate when she was reading and this "agitates" her. This agitation made her reluctant to read. "I think sometimes I get frustrated when reading and grasping some things because I have to read it over and over again and it gets annoying" (Elisa's Introduction Letter, January 13, 2010, p. 1). Her inability to comprehend what she was reading was one of the main reasons why she was deterred

from reading more often because she did not like the feeling of not understanding what she was reading. It was evident to see her frustrated feelings when reading: "It makes me feel stupid," (Elisa's Exit interview, September 19, 2010); "I don't enjoy not being able to comprehend at times" (Elisa's Introduction Letter, January 13, 2010, p. 1); and "I have a hard time focusing if the first few sentences or paragraphs don't interest me, let alone the subject in general. It is not that I am anti-reading or anything. I just don't tend to do it often" (Elisa's Introduction Letter, p. 1).

In the Exit Interview, Elisa confessed that despite her troubles with reading, what she enjoyed reading the most were novels, particularly classical romance stories, although the process of reading one novel is lengthy. The last novel she read took almost a year for her to read. When asked why, "I had to reread a lot to figure out what was happening," (Elisa's Exit Interview, September 19, 2010). But overall, if she was reading something she enjoyed, she could finish it quickly, and she understood it more.

Elisa Cameron and the Reading Reports. Elisa was one of the students who struggled with locating main ideas in passages, especially in the *College Reading Series* text. She did not understand the concept of the controlling idea or the writer's opinion, (Teaching Journal, January 27, 2010). The Novel Report was the break-through that she needed. The Novel Report allowed her to apply the strategy of locating the main idea to the broader texts of the individual chapters of the novel. "This assignment REALLY helps me understand how to find the main idea" (Elisa's Novel Report, February 8, 2010, p. 3).

Elisa explained why she chose the novel *Speak* because "it just overall caught my attention. I chose this novel because my friend recommended it to me. I trusted my friend's judgment" (Elisa's Novel Report, February 8, 2010, p. 3). During the exit interview, I asked

Elisa, "How is a friend picking out a novel to do a report on any different from the teacher assigning a novel?" In her Novel Report, she responded, "There are few times that I enjoy a book that has been picked out for me, especially from a teacher" (p. 4). However, this statement contradicts the first statement she made.

Elisa explained in the Exit Interview (September 19, 2010), "If a friend recommends a book for me to read, I know that it is going to be good."

"How so?" I asked.

"Well, for starters, my friends and I have the same tastes. We like the same things. The teacher is usually a lot older and has no clue what I like."

"Ah! But what about the graphic novel *Jane Eyre*? I told you about that graphic novel and where to buy it," I said.

"You're different from other teachers. You seem to relate to us better."

That was one point in favor of my teaching pedagogy. I wanted to relate to my students-to create a rapport with them and to better teach them. There was truth in Elisa's claims about teachers being disconnected from students. How can a teacher teach to a target audience he/she knows little about in the first place? This was the question Elisa was raising. She trusted her peers who knew who she was more than the teacher.

Elisa was surprised that she enjoyed the graphic novel report. She was even more surprised to find that *Pride and Prejudice* existed in graphic novel form. "I thought all comics were about superheroes and dumb stuff like" (Elisa's Graphic Novel Report, April 21, 2010, p. 4). "I enjoyed the graphic novel report. I chose this graphic novel because I enjoy this type of stuff [drama] rather than [superhero] action like Iron Man. It is not that I don't like [superhero]

action ones, because I do enjoy Batman, or Spiderman. It is just easier understanding ones like this" (p. 5).

In her exit interview, Elisa explained this point further, "You taught us about the 'closure' thing with reading. I think the best way to explain why I have troubles with most comics is because I have a hard time understanding what happens from panel to panel" (Elisa's Exit Interview, September 19, 2010). The process of closure in an action-to-action sequence is difficult for her to comprehend. In a drama, there is very little action-to-action fighting scenes. Elisa did not have to rely heavily on the act of closure to comprehend the progression of the story, "I also picked it because I wanted to always see the movie [*Pride and Prejudice*], but never got around to it" (Elisa's Exit interview, September 19, 2010). It was for this reason she chose to read this graphic novel for the assignment. "The graphic novel did exceed my expectations. I liked reading it because I was not bored with it. It kept me reading" (Elisa's Graphic Novel Report, April 21, 2010, p. 1).

At the end of the semester, Elisa's attitude had changed because she admitted that "my attitude toward reading is much better now. I don't feel dumb when I read anymore. I like what I learned in this class. I feel more confident to read" (Elisa's Exit Interview, September 19, 2010). Pertaining to the course in general, Elisa had this to say, "In overall reading assignments, my attitude could be a little bit more positive" (Elisa's Graphic Novel Report, April 21, 2010, p. 2).

In the Graphic Novel Report, Elisa had to answer a question that asked her to reflect on which reading report she preferred. She wrote that "the graphic novel was a positive experience. I think that the most enjoyable to read was the regular novel that I read. On the other hand, I think I retained the most knowledge from the graphic novel. The one that was the easiest for me

147

to read was the regular novel. The fastest read was the regular novel once again because it had

me reading more text. The novel was more of something I took an interest in," (April 21, 2010,

p. 4). In the follow up Exit Interview (Elisa's, September 19, 2010), she further explained the

graphic novel had less text, she was able to remember it more because she remembered the

visuals more than anything.

       Elisa Cameron's View on Teaching Style. At the end of the semester, Elisa's attitude

toward reading did not change, but she had become more aware of her reading process: "The

reason's that my reading method did not really change is because when I would try and pick up

the *College Reading Series* book, it did not strike my attention. Nobody wants to read the book

with long passages and go through all the exercises." (Elisa's Exit Letter, May 3, 2010). Elisa

seemed to understand the connection between motivation and reader reluctance.

       During Elisa's exit interview, she elaborated more on this idea. She commented that the

only thing that made the *College Reading Series* text bearable was the style in how it was taught.

"The teacher assigned one chapter a week to cover in class. We had to read the text and do the

exercises in the chapter. In class, he would cover the exercises and explain how things worked"

(September 19, 2010). Elisa also acknowledged this in her Exit Letter (May 1, 2010), "When the

teacher explains it [the homework], the process tends to go much quicker. That is, if the teacher

can explain it correctly" (p 1). In her interview, she clarified that in past classes, other teachers

were unable to explain the course material in a way that the student could understand. For Elisa,

she had difficulty relating to the material with the exception of my class.

      Elisa said she thought the Intermediate Reading course was fun because of how the

teacher engaged the students. She noted that "the teacher encouraged us to anticipate what

information from the text he will make into questions for the text" (Elisa's Exit interview,

September 19, 2010). As the teacher, I used this proactive approach to make the course a bit like

a competition between the student and the teacher. This approach would promote interaction

between the students and the teacher. At the beginning of the semester, I explained to the

students what I generally looked for in a chapter to make a test question. Students were

instructed to not ignore the "Learning Objectives" of the reading text, but instead to use these

learning objectives as a guide to guessing what I was going to test the students on in their

midterm and final.

When we would begin a new chapter in class, I would ask the students what they would

think I would hold them accountable for on the midterm. The students would make assertions on

what concepts or terminologies I would include in the test. In doing so, they would state the

rationale of why I would put this question on the test and cover any definitions or explanations

linked to the question. I would write what the students said on the board and add my instruction

as a method of clarifying obscure contributions or answering questions the students might have.

It was a class where I was not lecturing ninety percent of the time. Instead, the students were

talking to each other and telling me what was important to write on the board so others could

copy the notes that they created.

Participant #5 – Connor Kent

Connor Kent lived for comics. In fact, he spent most of his free time at the local comic

book shop reading and collecting comics. Connor was a student from the second semester of

data collection, Spring 2010.

On the first day of class, the first thing Connor asked me was, "Are we going to read

comics in this class?" I had not yet even passed out the course syllabus to the students. "I took

your Reading class because I heard you taught comics in here."

I simply smiled, "So what if I do?"

"That would be awesome!" exclaimed Connor.

"Wait, we read comics in this class?" asked Roy Harper.

"I like Batman!" Hughie Campbell shouted out without raising his hand.

"This class is going to rock," added Jaime Reyes.

"Aw, do we have to really read comics?" complained Terra Markov. Not everyone liked comics.

One the other hand, if I had a participant who loved comics with every inch of his being, it was Connor. As Connor said, "I was raised to be an avid reader from my mother and my father, especially," Connor said he loved to read (Connor's Introduction Letter, January 20, 2010, p. 1).

Through his primary education years, reading was something joyous for Connor to do. But during his secondary education years, he began to notice that he was having troubles with understanding what he was reading. He noted that, "at that point I noticed reading to be not as rewarding as doing something hands on. Granted, reading is my favorite mental exercise. It doesn't seem to wear you out and give you the feeling of self-satisfaction. I like the feeling of physical hands-on work," (Connor's Introduction Letter, January 20, 2010, p. 1). This was an attitude he learned directly from his father who was a mechanic and a wood worker. Although reading was important for Connor, building things with his hands was more worthwhile.

During the second Focus Group (February 10, 2010) where I taught the class the theoretical background of how to read comics, I asked Connor why he liked comics so much. He said he liked how quickly he could read it. His Introduction Letter explained more why he liked reading comics:

150

I love comic books and graphic novels. I find myself mostly only reading magazines and

the occasional comic book. I mostly consider myself a 'bathroom reader' where I can

read something in fifteen minutes. If I can't read something in that amount of time, I

don't bother to read it" (Connor's Introduction Letter, January 20, 2010, p. 1)

Comics were something that he read on a daily basis more than anything. Connor loved the

stories presented in comic books. During every other class meeting, Connor was introducing me

(the teacher) to a new comic book title, such as *Chew* or *Sweet Tooth*.

Connor also shared the same negative attitude as other students in the Reading course did

by saying "I must be stupid if I had to take this class." As he explained in his Literacy

Autobiography, Connor excelled in the math and sciences during his high school years. He was

one of the few selected who could participate in the accelerated science program that took place

in the summer. He also excelled in the arts and humanities courses as well. He was a straight A

student. Connor scored below the passing score for admission to College Writing on the Accu

Placer entrance exam. As explained in Chapter Three, the Accu Placer is a placement exam for

that all newly admitted students of WPC have to take. For Connor, being placed in Intermediate

Reading course and not the College Writing course was a blow to his confidence (Connor's

Literacy Autobiography, February 28, 2010, pp. 1-2; Connor's Exit Interview, November 12,

2011).

Connor and the Reading Reports. Connor began overcoming his low self-esteem

created from being placed in the intermediate reading class through the course of the semester.

He felt that the *College Reading Series* text did an "okay job" explaining the concepts, but the

reading reports cemented them in his mind. More importantly, he said the use of comic books

and graphic novels played a key part in helping him learn the reading concepts as he explained,

"I was using a form of media that naturally made sense to me . . . I was able to apply the strategies we studied and digested these bodies of texts with ease" (Connor's Exit Interview, November 12, 2011).

Connor liked comics and reading them a lot. In his Exit Interview (November 12, 2011), this was addressed. Connor said "It's not like I can't read or didn't understand the test questions on the placement exam. I just didn't think it mattered. I was hung-over and there was this really cute girl sitting across from me. My mind was on her, not doing my best on the placement exam."

In regards to the individual reading reports, Connor noted that the Novel report was also very helpful. Connor explained:

> It was an ingenious way to teach me what a main idea was. As we read about [main ideas] from the book, I learned it, but I was very unsure of what I learned. Even when you explained it class, it was a huge help, but it still felt unclear on how to apply the strategy for locating main ideas. (Connor's Exit Interview, November 12, 2012)

The abstract, hands on approach of practice to locate the main ideas worked very well for Connor. Connor was a kinesthetic learner. The only challenge for him was reading a novel of his choice. As he explained in his Novel Report, he was unaccustomed to reading such a large body of text. Comic books and graphic novels were what Connor read the most often during his free time. The students had to pick a novel and read it within a time frame of ten days. Connor admitted that he was not used to reading for long periods of time. He often read in fifteen minute segments because of his lifestyle (Connor's Novel Report, March 11, 2010, p. 4).

The Comic Book Report and the Graphic Novel Report were the most fun for Connor. In his Exit Interview, Connor said, "I never thought that the reading in this class would be this fun.

Tell me a class where a student can read about a cannibalistic detective and a super hero team of vigilantes?" As he explained further, he always saw comics as a forbidden pleasure that was not allowed in the class room. Even though he did well in his high school subjects, the teachers never really allowed the students to pick what they wanted to read. He added, "It's the main reason why I took this class. I wanted to take a class that was fun and untraditional" (Connor's Comic Book Report, March 27, 2010, p. 5). The thing that Connor valued the most from the class instruction was the freedom of choice to read what the students wanted and how the teacher would explain the concepts about reading.

In the Graphic Novel Report specifically, Connor noted the potentials of graphic novels in the classroom:

> Obviously the graphic novel and the comic book assignments were similar. This graphic novel assignment definitely was harder to complete between the two because there was so much information. In my opinion graphic novels are actually better because they show the reader the entire story line and characters which leaves you with a better understanding overall. As for future classes for myself and generations to come, I hope that graphic novels and comics are used more often . . . The biggest problem is a lot students and teachers tend to laugh at the idea of comics and think they are for children or it is something stupid and nerdy. They aren't. Graphic novels are rapidly becoming the works that are shaping the world. The stories provided in graphic novel form are of the same caliber, if not better than the stories we see in literature class" (Connor's Graphic Novel Report, April 14, 2010, pp. 18-19).

The kind of implementation that Connor was suggesting is a course where comics are the primary text of the course. I was using the novels, comic books, and the graphic novels as

153

secondary sources or secondary texts. In Chapter 5, I will assert that comics could be used as primary source texts and that we should cast aside outdated attitudes toward them.

At the end of the semester, Connor wrote an Exit Letter (May 1, 2010) where he described the transition that he experienced:

At the beginning of the semester, I had a rather lackluster attitude towards reading . . . Now at the end of the semester, I'm extremely satisfied with how everything played out in this course. I have rekindled my love more for reading and comics. How Mr. Burke used these creative teaching methods with comics has jump-started my imagination and has had an overall positive effect on my reading experiences. (pp. 1-2)

Connor had his choice of two sections of the Intermediate Reading class. He said that two different teachers taught the course, each with their own section. As mentioned before, Connor was not excited to take Intermediate Reading. He did not think he belonged in this class and assumed the class would be "like other reading classes with the same old instruction from the same old boring teacher and the same old assignments" (Connor's Exit Letter, p. 2). He asked other students which instructor might suit him. The students whom he asked were students from the first semester of data collection – Fall 2009. Each of these students spoke highly of the section I taught, that my class was a lot of fun for them, and they learned so much from it. But the selling point for Connor from his Exit Interview on November 12, 2011 was the fact that I used comics to teach reading. Connor concluded that "graphic novels and comic books have made it easier for me to visualize anything that I read" (Connor's Graphic Novel Report, April 14, 2010, p. 18).

Participant #6 – Dinah Lance

Dinah Lance had a unique view of reading. She said, "reading is the process of life," (Dinah's Introduction Letter, February, 1, 2010). For Dinah, reading was more than something she had to do at school. It was her escape. Her room had three book cases with novels littering the shelves, with towering stacks along the front of the shelving. She needed to escape at least once a day into the world of fiction. This daily appointment had become part of the routine of her life. Ironically, Dinah was placed in the Intermediate Reading course. She scored below the accepted passing level for College Writing.

Dinah's attitude was very positive in nature. "I enjoyed reading books from Nicholas Sparks and I enjoyed such themes as science fiction and books based on true events in history like *World War II*" (Dinah's Introduction Letter, February, 1, 2010). She had been exposed to reading at an early age. Her mother and brother would take turns reading *Dr. Suess* classics to her before bedtime. As she recalled, she was reading by the age of four. This was solely because her mother and brother highly encouraged reading. If she did struggle with reading, there was a strong family support system in place (Dinah's Literacy Autobiography, March 2, 2010, pp. 1-2). Dinah's family ultimately felt that "literacy begins at the home" (p. 4).

Dinah enjoyed school and mostly excelled in her subjects. In her literacy autobiography, she recounted a few times in which she did have struggles. The first was when she was eight years old. She had difficulty articulating the initial consonant sounds "S" and "W." With this articulation problem, reading aloud in class was embarrassing. Her classmates would make fun of her, but the "unsympathetic" teacher still "forced" her to read aloud. She said that to this day she still flinches away from reading aloud (pp. 2-3).

155

The second experience Dinah noted in her Literacy Autobiography was when she was thirteen years old in seventh grade. Dinah admitted that she had always read slower than most of her peers. And until seventh grade, Dinah thought this was okay. Then one day she was taking a reading test where she had to read passages and answer questions. The passages were long and she had difficulty understanding what the main idea was. The teacher was noticing how long Dinah was taking to finish the test. That teacher took Dinah's original test, stating she was taking too long, and exchanged it with a simpler test that had shorter, simpler passages. This was done in front of the class. Dinah wrote, "I felt so small. I felt like I just died" (March 2, 2010, p. 3) and "My teacher assumed that I was dumb or a retard based upon the fact that I read slower" (p. 4).

She concluded her Literacy Autobiography by stating: "I believe that even though I had struggles with reading and writing, I do not think that it has affected my attitude as a reader and a writer" (p. 4). Dinah demonstrated enthusiasm toward the assignments given in class and always participated in a productive manner.

Dinah's Plato Experience. In her Reading Journal, Dinah offered this account of her experience with working on PLATO: "I was working on PLATO and while I was taking the tutorial, I was abruptly thrown out. It said that I had a courseware error" (Dinah's Reading Journal, March 8, 2010, p. 4). In the following journal entry, Dinah stated, "While working on PLATO, I was thrown out. AGAIN. This is getting frustrating." During both the Final Focus Group and the Exit Interview, Dinah discussed why working on PLATO was a frustrating experience. Dinah only had two nights a week to work on PLATO at the branch campus computer lab. She worked during the evenings. When PLATO would crash, especially in the WPCC computer lab, it would keep crashing. In the end, Dinah would not make progress on

PLATO; therefore it wasted her evening. "I could not see the value of using PLATO. I learned nothing from it. What we did with the comics worked so much better for teaching the [*College Reading Series*] book" (Dinah's Exit Interview, August 10, 2010).

Dinah and the Reading Reports. In her Exit Letter, Dinah addressed the issue of using comics in the classroom as part of the instruction. She began by posing the question: Did comic books and graphic novels change my attitude toward reading? Her response was as follows:

> After doing the comic book project, it made me feel frustrated, and confused with reading because even though I enjoy reading, reading the comic just made me upset. But, I also believe that is due to the fact that I did not pick a comic book that I believed interested me. The comic book I chose was Indiana Jones. Even though I do enjoy Indy's adventures, I did not enjoy those comics. Yet with the graphic novel project, I really loved doing that. It made reading much more entertaining and fun…because you had visual aids to help you understand something that you did not get. (Dinah's Exit Letter, February 1, 2010, pp. 1-2)

During the Exit Interview (August 10, 2010), I asked Dinah to clarify why she found herself frustrated with reading the comic book. First of all, she said she had difficulty "locating the main idea of each page," (Dinah's Reading Journal, March, 23, 2010, p. 7). The reason she had trouble, as she explained, was because she did not quite understand what the main idea was. More specifically, if the main idea was made of three parts – Topic, Controlling Idea and the Pattern of Thought, she said she did not have a firm grasp on what the Controlling Idea was. "The Comic Book Report made me realize how much I really didn't understand what the main idea was," (Dinah's Exit Interview, August 10, 2010). Dinah had to revise the Comic Book Report because she did not locate the main ideas correctly. Dinah was not alone in this. When I

returned the Comic Book Report back to the students, I answered questions and provided more examples about how to locate the main idea. "When you went over the main idea again in class, it made more sense to where I thought, 'duh'," (Dinah's Exit Interview, August 10, 2010).

Secondly, as she further explained, the comic book was part four of a four part story, and she only had part four. This made it made it difficult for her to understand what was happening in the story and thus affected her understanding of who the characters were and what the plot was. She did not understand what was transpiring in the story or what actions were being referenced, too. Because of this, she could not relate to the comic book. "I was not used to that feeling. With novels, the entire story is there from page one to the final page. I don't read a book mid way or mid series. It's too nerve racking" (Dinah's Exit Interview, August 10, 2010). Dinah did not like how comic books were only chunks of a bigger story. Her desire for knowing the entire story bothered her because she did not know what happened before and after the story presented in the comic book she chose.

Dinah offered more feedback about the reading reports. In her Novel Report, Dinah reflected on the nature of the report, stating, "Wow, I can't believe the teacher who likes *Twilight* is allowing me to do my report on the *Eclipse* book," (Dinah's Novel Report, February 3, 2010, p. 12). Freedom of choice in the selection of the book for the assignment was a huge motivating factor for Dinah. Dinah had stated before, "I hate the novel reports that my old reading teachers gave me because we could never do a report on what we like" (Dinah's Literacy Autobiography, March 2, 2010, p. 4). Dinah received as a gift the Twilight saga for Christmas before the semester began. She quickly found herself engrossed in the first and second novels. By the time the Novel Report was assigned, she was just about to start the third book – *Eclipse*. It was a natural choice for Dinah and she was ecstatic about it.

When the Graphic Novel Report was assigned, Dinah was glad to be allowed to pick *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith.* She expressed her excitement about this choice, saying, "I have always loved the Star Wars saga. I chose this graphic novel, even though I watched the movie, because it had all of the scenes uncut. I wanted to read what I missed in the movie" (Dinah's Graphic Novel Report, April 15, 2010, p. 8). She said she and her brothers were disappointed by the film version, but she liked the graphic novel better, noting, "I have always wanted to take time to read the Star Wars comics. This assignment gave me the incentive to read this graphic novel and also to want to do the report assignment" (pp. 8-9).

Dinah added more about the Graphic Novel Report, "The only thing I did not like was that I wish we had a bit more time to do work on this project. It was a lot of work and there was so much information to process" (p. 9). In the Exit Interview, Dinah elaborated more on her previous comment:

> I understood the purpose of the assignment. We were supposed to process the graphic novel into an outline. We were told to break the graphic novel down by its chapters and scenes. My graphic novel only had 4 chapters, but where I ran out of time was the taking note of all the different scenes. I just did not have enough time with the end of the semester. On the other hand, with this assignment I was able to visualize everything that we had learned from the [College Reading Series] book and put it to use in one assignment.

Dinah also stated at the end of the semester how reading graphic novels helped her:

> Having this class and having the graphic novels helped me better understand the techniques shown in the C*ollege Reading Series* book. I firmly believe that without doing both the graphic novel report and the comic book report, the techniques taught in

the book would have just went in one ear and out the other. " (Dinah's Exit Letter, May

5, 2010, p. 2)

Dinah was one of the many students who thought being placed in an Intermediate Reading class

meant that they were "intermediate readers." This assumption in itself made these students, like

Dinah, feel that they were dumb or not of the proper caliber. Within the first two weeks, we

discussed this attitude and tried to deconstruct it. Intermediate Reading simply means that this is

the middle tier developmental course that all WPCC students have to take before moving on into

the freshmen credit courses, such as College Writing. I told my students that they should

consider themselves fortunate to be in this class, because in this class they would be taught the

tools of effective reading. These tools would help them in all of their future academic endeavors.

As Dinah acknowledged in her final interview, she felt she was now prepared for her future

classes.

Participant #7 – Billy Butcher

Billy Butcher enrolled in the Intermediate Reading class during the Fall 2010 semester.

He smelled of scorched steel, the kind of smell that follows a welder around like his own brand

of cologne. His hands were rough and stained with soot and grease from hours of work during

his "day job". He worked during the day at a metal shop as a welder and fabrication specialist.

Billy also had classes during the day, such as the Intermediate Reading course, where he would

be granted leave time to attend class. Afterwards, he had to return to work and finish out his

shift. His major of study was Welding Engineering Technology and he was only taking

Intermediate Reading because he tested into it.

Billy came from a working class family. He was the first to attend college and this was

his very first semester. As he states in his Literacy Autobiography (9-27-10), and Exit Interview

160

(10-13-11), he had "reservations about attending college". He did not think he was of the "proper caliber to attend." Being placed in the Intermediate Reading class made him feel that he "was too dumb for college". He also dreaded having to take the Intermediate Reading course because he "feared how strict and boring the teacher was going to be". What he feared the most was not being able to relate to what was being taught and therefore finding himself unable to comprehend the course instruction.

The Defective Reading Teacher from the Bargain Basement Depot. On the third class meeting, a Focus Group was conducted in class. Food was provided in the fashion of pot luck. Students brought Doritos, buffalo chicken dip, apple crumb cake, gummie worms, "dirt", various flavors of drink such as root beer, Mountain Dew, and wings from Gallagher's which was this old Irish themed pub a couple miles outside the opposite end of town. The class focus group began with students shuffling in line, scooping portions of delicious snacks and filling their cups with caffeinated drinks. As they munched away on their food, I began asking questions regarding their attitudes toward reading and Reading classes.

Artemis blurted out with a mouthful of corn chip, "Reading is a waste of time!" Billy sat behind her and just shook his head in agreement. He and I made eye contact.

"Why do you agree," I directed the question in Billy's direction.

Billy paused, then answered, "Well, I think it's because it makes me feel like crap when I read." Other students nodded along with this statement as they chowed down on their individual snack portions.

I prompted for more, "Tell me more."

Billy replied more specifically, "I have a hard time understanding what I am reading and I am always losing my place."

161

"Anyone else have this problem, too," I inquired. No one was raising their hand so I raised my hand. "I have troubles, too. Reading is a bitch for me." A lot of ears perked up with that admission.

Bart Allen contested, "How can you have trouble with reading when you are the reading teacher? Aren't you supposed to be an expert?"

Kara Kent interjected also, "You are just saying that. You don't really have troubles with reading."

"Actually, I do. I have a learning disability that deals with reading. In short, besides being ADHD, I'm dyslexic." At the admission the class came alive. *Oh boy!*

"Wow. You're a defective reading teacher. No wonder tuition here is so cheap," Artemis blasted. "I'm getting a bargain basement education. Wonderful."

"Welcome to the island of misfit toys," I cracked sarcastically back at Artemis.

"Why are you our teacher?" Barbara Gordon asked. "That's not right?"

"Why not?" I asked innocently taking in the frantic atmosphere.

"Because if you can't read, how can you teach us?"

"Whoa, wait, I said nothing about not being able to read." I clarified, "I simply said that I had troubles with learning to read."

"But you aren't supposed to have troubles with reading," said Billy Butcher.

"Says who?" I playfully inquired with a smile. I had them now.

"Well…"

"Uh…"

"It just is that way," answered Bart Allen.

"Says who?" I paused for a second daring them more time, but they were not sure what answer I wanted them to say. "My boss, the dean?"

"Well, yeah," said Artemis

"He knows," I said. "Okay. Something to consider… I know what it is like to struggle with reading because I have struggled with it all my life. Does it mean I'm 'stupid'?" I pointed at the students and made a "frowny" face and said. "If you struggle with reading, does that mean you are stupid? Hell no! Absolutely NO! It just means you have difficulty with reading or you read differently from others. It could be because, maybe, we have trouble understanding how to process the information. Your mind is still beautiful."

I paused as I took a seat in my cushy chair and scooted it out from behind the podium. I then leaned forward and made eye contact with each of the students in the class. I wanted them to know and understand that we were on the same level. "I know what it's like to struggle with reading. But, I have overcome many of the issues by learning how to utilize certain reading strategies, as well as understanding the conceptual relationships behind reading comprehension. I'm getting my doctorate over at the university. And throughout my entire academic career, I have struggled with reading and I NEVER gave up. I kept at it. And here I am."

I reached over and stole a chip from Jade Nguyen's plate. She gave a playful disapproving look and pulled her plate away from my direction in an attempt to horde her chips.

"Besides," I continued as I casually ate the chip in a nonchalant way. "If your teacher understands what it means to struggle, wouldn't he have a better understanding of the students he is teaching?" The class was silent. I had their complete attention. "If you stick with this class and work hard while trying to maintain a positive attitude, I can teach each of you how to not just

163

read better, but also understand more of what you read so you don't have that feeling…," I

paused and pointed toward Billy. "What do you call it?"

"You mean that 'feeling stupid' feeling," Billy answered.

"Yes. That's it." I stood back up and walked over to the board, picked up a black dry

erase marker and wrote on the board the word "stupid" and the word community directly below

the first word. "In this class, nothing is too stupid or too dumb to ask. There is no shame in this

class." I scribbled out the word "stupid" with the marker. I circled the word community. "We

are a community in this classroom. I want you to think of this class and your peers as a

community. And, I am your guide on this journey. We learn from each other's successes and

mistakes. Okay?"

"I'm seeing that I am going to really like this," commented Billy Butcher. Other students

were shaking their heads with grins on their faces.

"Really cool" added Bart Allen.

"Why do you say that," I asked with a big smile on my face. I knew that he was making

this comment based on his understanding of what a reading teacher should be like.

"You aren't like other reading teachers that I have had," replied Billy.

"Is that a good thing?"

"Fuck, yeah," added Hegra who had remained quiet the entire time. The students giggled

at her blunt and off-color answer. She was a fifty-six year old, returning student with very rough

edges and a total character. "You care and you ain't boring. In the past couple times we have

met, I have had more fun in this class than any of my other classes."

"And, as you said, you know what it's like to be in our shoes. None of the reading

teachers I ever had really knew how to teach to us. There always seems to be this gap," said

Billy. "They never seem to understand why we struggle and assume this should all just come to us.

Billy Butcher's Boring Reading Teachers. Billy's attitude toward reading was "indifferent at best" (Introduction Letter, August 27, 2010, p. 1). In his Exit Interview (October 13, 2011), Billy explained that this attitude was attributed to how his family regarded reading. "They weren't readers. They worked and always had something that needed done. The most [reading] that gets done is the newspaper ...and that's even pushing it." Billy also commented more in his Literacy Autobiography (September 27, 2010, p 1), "I was never encouraged to read at home, my parents never read books, just the newspaper when we had a newspaper. And you know what they say, 'parents are the young one's role model'."

Also, at stated before, in the first focus group, Billy was never satisfied by the teachers he had in school, especially for reading. "Throughout my elementary education, I hated the fact that I had to read in class. The teachers would yell at me when I made mistakes or stuttered," (Literacy Autobiography, September 27, 2010, p 1).

In seventh and eighth grade, Billy ignored reading, even in class. "I just would not read, mostly because the book was not something that I wanted to read or found interest in. I did not like the teachers, too" (Literacy Autobiography, September 27, 2010, p 2). In the Focus Group (September 7, 2010), Billy elaborated more about the teachers he had. "The teachers were boring and had no personality for starters. I could never understand what we were doing in class. I would ask the teacher to explain something, but he could never explain in a way that I got it." In his Exit Interview, he went on further, "In high school the classes were always so dry, which made them boring. When I heard the teacher [Mr. Burke] say '…tell yourself that reading is fun

before you start to read….' at the beginning of the semester, I sort of chuckled and silently said to myself 'here we go again' (October 13, 2011)."

Billy assumed the Intermediate Reading class was going to be the same as all his previous reading classes. This in itself was affecting his attitude toward reading and he did not recognize it yet. It was not until he began drafting his Literacy Autobiography that Billy started to understand that it was not so much the reading that affected his attitude, but the teachers who taught him before that had created negative associations with reading. "I realize that it is not reading or reading classes that gave me such a negative attitude toward reading class, it was the boring teachers that I had" (Billy Butcher's Exit Interview, October 13, 2011).

In class on several occasions, Billy Butcher made several positive statements regarding my teaching style. During the Exit Interview (October 13, 2011), Billy was asked to explain why he enjoyed my instruction over others. Billy Butcher stated:

> At the beginning of your class, I really did not know what to expect from it. On the first day of the class you came in the room clanking coconuts together while galloping into the room. This definitely lightened the mood of the whole class. Most of the reading teachers are very stern. Their attitude is "sit down and read or you get no credit for the class". It wasn't just the coconuts or even your gallop into the classroom that made me realize that your reading class was going to be fun; it was your personality and your different style of teaching.

Billy Butcher really like this style of teaching developmental reading, as did many others in his class did. Billy felt empowered by it, as if he could accomplish a passing grade in any class as long as he took what he learned from the Intermediate Reading course and was able to apply it there.

166

Billy Butcher and the Reading Reports. Billy completed the reading reports as they were assigned. The Novel Report was the first to be assigned to him. He had difficulty motivated himself to want to read a novel. "I'm not accustomed to reading books. This is my first novel," (Billy's Novel Report, October 1, 2011, p 3). Billy was less intimidated by this feat when he learned that he could choose any novel that he wanted to read. This was the motivation he needed. "I read my novel in two nights. I could not put it down," (p 3).

The Comic Book Report was a problem as Billy stated:

> I struggled to complete this [Comic Book Report] assignment. The reason being, I had
> never really read comic books, maybe a few here and there (which were mostly Calvin
> and Hobbes), but I never found great interest in them. For the comic book assignments
> you [the teacher] told us to choose comics we would enjoy, but even though the comic
> was based off of something I found interest in, I could not get myself to sit down and
> read the comic book. So I told myself that "reading is fun" and it worked. I just had to
> shift my attitude." (Billy's Exit Interview, October 13, 2011)

At first, Billy was missing the point of the reading reports from the Intermediate Reading class. He was associating them to the other book reports of his reading classes of yesterday; the one he found boring and did not want to read. But when he realized what I wanted him to do with the comic book he was reading, to apply the concepts I was teaching and not give an actual traditional account of the plot, he then understood and was able to be motivated to complete the reading report. Billy then had this to say:

> Wow, I get why we are doing a comics report. It makes sense with what we are talking
> about in the [*College Reading Series*] book. Each of the panels [of the comic book]
> wouldn't make sense without the first panel on page. The first [panel] sets the mood for

the comic since it represents the topic and the controlling idea of the comic. Each of the

following panels act as support for what happens in the first panel. As you turn to page

two the story starts to develop, and by page three you have an understanding of what the

story is going to be about. The story is told through the comic and it is sequential. What

happens on page one gives meaning for what happens on page two. What happens on

page two gives meaning for what happens on page three, and so forth. This is just like

how sentences of supporting details support the topic sentence of a paragraph. I get it

now." (Comic Book Report, October 25, 2010, p 4)

I had timed the Comic Book Report to coincide with the classes just before the midterm. I

wanted this assignment to act as an abstract reinforcement for what they were about to be tested

on at midterm.

The Graphic Novel Report was a more positive experience for Billy. By this point in the

semester, he recognized that all of the multimodal assignments had the purpose of reinforcing the

College Reading Series text. Of all of the reading reports, Billy had this to say:

The Graphic Novel Report was my favorite book to read in the class. When I finished the

report (novel and paper,) everything that I read from the reading text book finally sunk

into my brain. It all made sense. I believe it was the teacher's way of approaching and

explaining the topics covered in the book that let it all make sense. (Graphic Novel

Report, November 29, 2010, p. 15)

Billy also disclosed in the reflection part of the Graphic Novel Report his love for Batman. He

picked the *Batman: the Killing Joke* graphic novel because he loved watching the Batman

movies. It was a topic he could relate with. In the Exit Interview, Billy had more to say about

the Graphic Novel Report: "I will have to say, even though the text book [*College Reading*

Series] was dry, some of the techniques and strategies that we learned about came into use when I was working on the graphic novel report. I even use what I learned in this Intermediate Reading class my business communications coarse that I am taking now.

At the end of the course, Billy stated in his Exit Letter (December 3, 2010), "Upon the completion of your class, I have walked away with a positive attitude toward reading." Billy was one of the students that I was able to rehabilitate from having a poor attitude toward reading. He was able to move past his negative experiences from "boring" reading teachers. The visual narratives and the freedom of choice selection empowered him to take a chance at improving his reading, thus allowing to see reading as a form of personal investment. He stated in his Exit Interview (October 13, 2011):

> I have started reading articles that pertain to my major, which is welding engineering. The skills that I acquired in your class have helped me understand how important it is to read, and most importantly, how to understand what I am reading. I walked away from your class knowing that it solved some of my reading weaknesses and for that I thank you.

After my course, Billy had a newfound faith in his ability to survive college. The semester after he took Intermediate Reading, he changed his major to Business because he was no longer afraid of the reading that he would have to endure to earn that degree.

Participant #8 – Cassie Sandsmark

The most notable thing about Cassie Sandsmark is that she was very brave. She was not afraid to speak her mind, especially when she felt I was being "eccentric" as a teacher. Cassie was the wise-cracking clown of the class during the very first semester of data collection. Her reactions to what she called "insaneness" made the class more exciting (Cassie's Exit Interview,

September 3, 2010). Many of her classmates would react more when Cassie would say things like, "Mr. Burke is insane, but in a good way. He's the only teacher that can make reading class worth taking" (Focus Group, December 7, 2009). Her positive and playful attitude seemed to be contagious to the rest of the class. Many of the students from that semester were exhibiting characteristics of reluctant readers. Each of them was struggling with the lessons from the *College Reading Series* text. Most of the students in the class were too timid to vocalize about their difficulties with understanding the reading comprehension concepts and their past traumas of other reading classes, so Cassie became their spokesperson. According to many of these students, to verbally speak these things in class would be admitting some sense of shame because many of these students still shared the same attitude: if a person could not grasp the basics of reading, then he/she was considered as stupid, illiterate, and deficient in intelligence.

Cassie had the confidence to accept the reality that she struggled with reading and on every occasion she vocalized her problems with reading currently as well as what she had struggled with in the past. I took a therapeutic approach to teaching reading; that in order to learn reading, students had to first understand and accept why they had certain attitudes that might inhibit their progress to reading better. This therapeutic approach worked very well with Cassie. It empowered her. Other students saw this and from seeing her they appeared to feel it was okay to admit their concerns and fears without shame.

In her literacy autobiography (October 14, 2009) and Introduction Letter (September 1, 2009), Cassie stated that her attitude toward reading was that "I like reading, but not all the time" (p. 1) or "I read when I have to" (p. 1). In the exit interview, she explained that pleasure reading was enjoyable to her, but the texts that teachers assigned were not desirable and were difficult to read. Cassie elaborated more on experiences from her primary years:

When I was younger, I was one of those people that were taken out of class to go with

another teacher for reading. I just couldn't keep up with the original teacher for my

grade. I thought I was stupid and dumb because everyone else was still in the class and I

wasn't. I was in a closet of a classroom at the far wing of the school where learning

disabled students were kept. Out of sight and out of mind. (Cassie' Literacy

Autobiography, October 14, 2009, p. 1)

Cassie said her classmates would make fun of her when she would have to leave the main class

to attend her own private tutoring sessions in reading. Cassie would not let the cruelty of

classmates bother her. Instead she "acted as if nothing was wrong" because she felt that if she

demonstrated the attitude "that there is nothing wrong with having to leave class," then what

would there be to ridicule her about? "Besides, I was not stupid. I just learned slower than most

kids in my class" (Cassie's Literacy Autobiography, October 14, 2009, p. 1).

Cassie talked more about her struggles with reading. Her stepfather helped her "cope."

He would encourage not only reading but also writing letters. Her stepfather would write letters

to her, and Cassie would write letters in return. Their letters became a collection of stories, some

fiction, and some nonfiction. Writing became a passion for Cassie. Through that passion, she

was able to improve in reading enough that by her junior year in high school, she did not need

academic support for her classes. This did not mean that she completely understood how to read

effectively. She still struggled with reading comprehension. She just didn't need the academic

assistance anymore. Cassie's placement into the Intermediate Reading course was solely

contingent upon her Accu Placer test scores. She scored low in the verbal and reading sections.

Cassie's Plato Experience. Cassie excelled very well in the course. She served as a role

model for other students to help them see it was okay to struggle with reading. She expressed in

the Focus Group (November 11, 2009) interview that "everyone struggles in their own way, but the more you practice with reading, the smarter you get with it." At the end of the semester, Cassie wrote an Exit Letter (December 7, 2009). In it she stated her reflection of the following:

> This class showed me a lot about reading and I am not just saying that because I have to for this paper. I really mean it. Mr. Burke [the researcher and teacher] has taught us more about reading then a computer could do with PLATO. He introduced us to other new forms of text. He interacted with us and showed us what a good time with reading. I believe that after being in his class I realized what it is like to read a book and know what it is about and also about how to comprehend what I am reading because I had trouble with that. His way of teaching is a great way to have fun but learn something at the same time. (pp. 1-2)

Cassie had experienced PLATO once before in a lower level reading class at WPCC. The teacher in that course relied heavily on using PLATO to teach the students how to process information. Cassie didn't like this because PLATO was difficult to understand and not fun to operate.   She found the way I taught course to be refreshing. Without having to use PLATO, the students gained a better understanding of reading comprehension using comics and personal interest.

Cassie and the Reading Reports. Cassie felt that the Novel Report was beneficial because it cemented in her mind how to determine the main idea:

> I understood what [the teacher] meant by what the main idea was; a topic and the writer's opinion in one sentence. But I was unsure how to locate it in a passage. The novel report made that clear for me. Unfortunately, I had to pick the novel with one-hundred twenty

two chapters. That was a lot of practice for me. Afterwards, I understood what a main

idea was one hundred percent" (Cassie's Novel Report, September 19, 2009, p. 6)

The Novel Report was designed to achieve this result. I aimed to create another situation where

the students would find ample opportunity to practice determining main ideas. The fact that I

allowed them to do this with a novel of their choice reflects that personal interest in a reading

text is enough motivation to grasp an idea or exercise that is being applied to the text of interest.

The day that I introduced comics to the class was a day of surprise because the students

were not expecting it. Cassie was one of those students who said she hated comics because she

felt comics exemplified "male chauvinism and muscle bound jerks beating each other up"

(Cassie's Exit Interview, September 3, 2010). She was not excited about being assigned to

dissect a comic book into a thesis and supporting details. Even though I said the students could

pick their own comic book to use for the report, she was still not excited.

It was not until after the following class that her attitude changed in regards to the comic

books. "I went to the comic book shop in town. I found so many comics that had female heroes

who were women kicking butt. I like reading stuff about that" (Cassie's Exit Interview,

September 3, 2010). "The comic book I chose [Supergirl] is about a woman doing something

great for the world." (Cassie' Comic Book Report, November 6, 2009, p. 1). Cassie had found

something she enjoyed reading about. At the onset of the Comic Book Report assignment, she

had complained about doing reading reports; she did not like them, especially if she had little

control over the reading selection choice. But as soon as she found something "worthwhile to

read," she felt motivated to read out of a sense of personal interest. Her rational was expressed

as she said, "I wanted to read the comic and do the report because I wanted to read about

Supergirl saving people and promoting women's rights" (Cassie's Exit Interview, September 3, 2010).

"I still sometimes have a problem reading and understanding what I read, but in the Intermediate Reading class I am having an easier time understanding how to read and comprehend, " (Cassie's Literacy Autobiography, October 14, 2009, p. 4). Cassie clarified this more: "Comics are not something I would have thought as being educational and helpful to understanding reading comprehension. Because [the teacher] used comics and allowed us to read what we wanted to read, I enjoyed the class and I learned how to read [more] effectively" (Cassie's Exit Interview, September 3, 2010).

Cassie was very excited to do the Graphic Novel Report. "I picked this [graphic novel] because it looked more action-packed about a girl and the cover was interesting as well and I really wanted to find out if this girl kicks butt" (Cassie's Graphic Novel Report, November 29, 2009, p. 9). She picked a graphic novel that she felt empowered to read because it was about a heroine who represented the strong woman. She felt that the Witchblade character of the graphic novel she chose was something she could relate to. This empowered her to want to read the graphic novel and complete the Graphic Novel Report. As she wrote, "Reading this graphic novel was one of the most enjoyable things I have done with my time" (Cassie's Graphic Novel Report, November 29, 2009, p. 9).

Cassie reflected on her experience of reading the graphic novel as she wrote, "I noticed just by reading this [graphic novel] that my [reading] skills are becoming better and I can read faster and not have to reread what I [have] read again to understand what's going on in the book" (Cassie's Graphic Novel Report, November 29, 2009, p. 10). In the Exit Interview, Cassie was asked to elaborate on this comment. She explained:

174

We were told to take what we were reading and learning about in the [*College Reading*

Series] book and consciously apply those terms to something abstract. I never thought of

the cover of the comic book as its thesis. The Comic Book Report helped me see that.

With the Graphic Novel Report, I was able to explicitly understand the relationships

between main ideas and supporting details because we had to put [the information from

the graphic novel] into an outline. I remember having to do outlines before and having a

hard time understanding how they worked. From reading a graphic novel, I was able to

break [the graphic novel] down in easy [to digest] information segments. Very cool.

(Cassie's Exit Interview, September 3, 2010)

Moreover, Cassie acknowledged the validity of using the graphic novels. She asserted that the

reading course "would be tougher without this assignment." She explained further that

"tougher" did not necessarily mean that the class needed to be easier in her Exit Interview. She

meant in that the understanding the ideas being taught would have been much more difficult to

grasp without the comic book reading and reporting

Of all the reading reports, Cassie said she valued the Graphic Novel Report most. She

felt that the Graphic Novel Report summed up the first eight chapters of the *College Reading*

Series text better than anything else. She liked how the report was assigned near the end of the

semester, a couple weeks before the final as she said, "Everything became crystal clear at that

point" (Cassie's Exit Interview, September 3, 2010).

Participant #9 – Sue Dibney

Sue Dibney is the final participant that will be discussed in this chapter. Sue's case presents a

unique view of how a reader's identity can be constructed socially.

The Price of an Education. "My family thinks reading is for nerds," Sue Dibney answered about her attitude towards reading (Sue Dibney's Introduction Letter, May 8, 2011). "Please don't give me a lot of homework."

"Why?" I asked.

"My husband makes fun of me because I have to wear glasses when I read," Sue explained. I chuckled, but Sue was not laughing. She felt bad that her husband teased her about trying to improve herself.

Sue Dibney was an Army wife and a mother of two rambunctious young boys. She had been married for eleven years, but spent a total of 5 years alone with the children as her husband was overseas serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Two of the boys had been born while her husband had been deployed.

Sue met her husband in the ninth grade and as they dated throughout high school, and she was his tutor. They married the summer after senior year before he left for boot camp. While her husband was away at boot camp, she discovered that she was pregnant with the first boy. This "killed" her dreams for college.

Sue commented on many occasions in class that the root of her negative attitude towards reading came from her experiences in elementary school:

> I remember reading short stories in second and third grades, then having to answer questions on them. I absolutely hated them. I always seemed to be the last one finished answering all of the questions. I could read and reread them and still have to go back and look for all of the questions. While I was sitting there finishing up my work, all of the other kids got to talk quietly or do whatever. There I was, still stuck working on them.

176

Made me feel pretty dumb and slow. (Sue Dibney's Literacy Autobiography, July 17, 2011).

Her husband had had similar experiences to Sue's that also dissuaded him from reading later on in his life. "That was the one of the things we had in common. We didn't like reading" (Sue Dibney's Exit Interview, August 12, 2011). "I haven't read much since high school. As the semester started, I realized that I had trouble reading the [class] book. I got my eyes checked and I was prescribed reading glasses for the first time ever" (Sue Dibney's Literacy Autobiography, July 16, 2011, p. 1) She was not happy about having to use reading glasses.

Since college, Sue had worked for nursing homes in the western Pennsylvania area, "It's tough work. And, you don't get paid enough for the shit you have to deal with. That's why I am finally going to school," (Sue Dibney's Exit Interview, August 12, 2011).

High school was not something Sue's husband enjoyed. He struggled with English class and anything that involved reading. "In high school, my husband and I used to laugh at the nerds in our classes. They wore glasses. My husband wasn't a bully. He never directly made fun of anyone. We would mostly laugh at the awkwardness of the nerds. But now as I think about it, I guess he felt threatened by those people because he felt they were better than him because it all came easier to them and he struggled" (Sue Dibney's Exit Interview, August 12, 2011).

"My husband joined the military because he couldn't see himself doing too much of anything else. He didn't think he was smart enough for college since he barely passed high school and the military was the only way he could get a good job, (Sue Dibney's Exit Interview, August 12, 2011). Sue wanted to go to college. She was an A - B student, but after "missing out" on college, she began to assume her husband's attitude toward school beyond high school – "it wasn't necessary" (Sue Dibney's Literacy Autobiography, July 16, 2011, p. 3).

In the months prior to her enrollment at WPCC, Sue was not considered for promotion and had been given a reduction in work hours per week that changed her work status from full time with benefits to part time with no benefits. She acknowledged that this was a strategy that the nursing home where she worked was utilizing to save money. Sue did not have a nursing degree of any kind, and this made it difficult to go elsewhere for work. "My husband is away for months at a time and his check is not quite enough when you have car payments, mortgage and this stupid economy," (Focus Group, June 14, 2011).

Sue Dibney and the Book Report. Sue Dibney cringed as she read the syllabus. She had doubts and her doubts had doubts. Her mind began to wander to the dark corners of apprehension. She thought she might not be tough enough for this class. "The first day of class when we were told we needed to pick a novel to read, my first thought was, 'OH SHIT.' I have to read a whole book. This is never going to happen, especially in this short amount of time" (Sue Dibney's Book Report, June 9, 2011, p. 9).

 Sue had never read more than twenty pages of a novel, especially in school. She always used the literary reading companions that summarized the novel. At the time of the Novel Book Report, Sue reflected, "I chose this novel because I needed one to read and it was sitting there on my friend's table. She let me borrow it" (Sue Dibney's Novel Book Report, June 9, 2011, p. 10).

Sue had the novel for a little over a week when she finally read the last page. To her surprise, reading a three hundred page novel was much more pleasant than she thought. "After reading the novel, I must tell you that I definitely have a different overall attitude towards reading after only being in your class for three weeks. My husband was surprised to see me with my book in my hand every chance I had. He even referred to me as a book nerd and that surprised me" (Sue Dibney's Book Report, June 9, 2011, p. 9). "This was by far the longest

book I've ever read and I actually remember everything about it" (Sue Dibney's Literacy Autobiography, July 16, 2011, p. 3). This shocked Sue. She never thought of herself as "reader" and she was enamored with the apparent role reversal; that she was now the nerd. "Reading the novel, in an unexpected way was appealing for me. It definitely exceeded my expectations. The thrill and suspense kept me reading it and not wanting to put it down. I would get mad if I was interrupted and had to stop reading" (Sue Dibney's Book Report, June 9, 2011, p. 8). This was Sue's first time to finish book from cover to cover. The next day, Sue went to the book store and bought another book that was the first part of a quadrilogy series.

The one thing Sue did not like about reading the novel was that it made her a target for her husband's own inadequacies about people with education. In high school, Sue and her husband laughed at the studious students, but at the same time felt that they could never achieve good grades. They had been lumped into the remedial classes during their entire elementary and secondary years. College was never an option for either of them until Sue Dibney had the revelation forced upon her: if she wanted some sense of job security, she had to obtain a post secondary education. This did not sit well with her husband. "He felt uncomfortable that I was going back to school and that I was changing. At first it was a joke, but then it wasn't" (Sue Dibney's Exit Interview, August 12, 2011).

As Sue explained, she was stepping outside the perceived expectations of her family by being studious and developing a love for reading books. "Even my sons were joining in on the teasing. They didn't understand that I was trying to better myself so I could be a better provider for my family" (Sue Dibney's Exit Interview, August 12, 2011).

Sue's Comic Book Report and Graphic Novel Report. After the Novel Report was completed, the students were introduced to comics. Sue, along with her peers, had a lukewarm

179

reaction to them. "Comics are a geek thing, Mr. Burke. I think your inner geek is showing," Sue

jested as the rest of the class laughed with her. That night, Sue was assigned to read Scott

McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993). "I did not understand how to read a comic until after

I had read the chapter from the McCloud book" (Sue Dibney's Comic Book Report, July 5,

2011, p. 3).

Sue explained in class that she did not like comics because they were always about

superheroes. Many of her classmates shared this sentiment. This was the main belief that

repelled Sue and her peers from comic books. In class, I had samples of comic books. I broke

the students into groups and had each group look at the same stack of comic books. The students

were tasked with sorting the comic books into genres – super hero, pulp fiction, science fiction,

comedy, etc. This was when Sue and her classmates began to change their opinions that comic

books were only about super heroes. The comic book report Sue chose was The *Simpsons*

Summer Shindig Special (June, 2011). "I love the Simpsons, and I really enjoyed doing the

assignment" Sue professed. "I had no idea there was a Simpsons comic book. I would have been

reading comics way before having to read them for this class" (Sue Dibney's Comic Book

Report, July 5, 2011, p. 1).

Sue explained that the Comic Book Report did not help her situation at home. "I was

wearing reading glasses at this point and then add the comic books. . . . It was like my husband

was back in high school and I was one of the nerds. For a few weeks there had been a lot of

tension in the house because I was being studious" (Sue Dibney's Interview, September 20,

2011). Her sons poked fun at her in the same fashion that their father had done, calling her

"comic geek," "book nerd" and "four eyes" until she showed the sons her Simpsons comic. The

two boys loved *The Simpsons* television show and at first, they fought over who could read the

comic book first. When their father, Sue's husband returned home, to his surprise, his boys were sitting on the living room floor sharing the comic book and reading from it to each other. "You are turning my kids into nerds," he proclaimed (Sue Dibney's Interview, September 20, 2011).

When the Graphic Novel Report was assigned, Sue had never read a graphic novel before. She was unsure what one was. She chose *Maus*. "In high school, history was one of my worst subjects. I remember being in history class with my husband and not understanding the whole holocaust thing (Sue Dibney's Graphic Novel Report, July 26, 2011, p. 4). As Sue entered the used book store at the end of town, she asked the owner, "What's a good graphic novel to read?" Being in a used book store, the selection on graphic novels was sparse at best. A Garfield book and *Maus* were her only two choices. For five dollars, Sue left happy to find a graphic novel she could afford. "I had a mixed attitude about reading it. I wasn't sure whether I would like it or not since I had never read a graphic novel before. For some reason, reading this graphic novel made everything click for me" (Sue Dibney's Graphic Novel Report, July 26, 2011, p. 4).

In high school, Sue explained that she could not grasp the racial prejudice that was demonstrated in Europe during that time. *Maus* was able to make that distinction clear for her and it moved her. Once she had started reading the graphic novel, she kept reading. "At night, I actually had my husband reading parts of the graphic novel with me . . . and last weekend, we went to the Holocaust museum in Pittsburgh. I brought the whole family" (Sue Dibney's Exit Interview, August 12, 2011). Sue also used *Maus* to teach her sons about bullying in school and how it was wrong. "Who would have thought that reading a graphic novel in reading class would do so much for me" (Sue Dibney's Exit Interview, August 12, 2011).

181

Empowering Sue Dibney and her Family. On the first day of class, Sue felt overwhelmed by the Intermediate Reading course, "I was thinking this guy is nuts. Comics?" Sue was echoing what most of her classmates felt. What do comics have to do with reading? And, why was the teacher having the students do so much work for an intermediate reading class? "My attitude has changed for the better since completing this class. I'm so glad it was required. I learned so much with reading and the comics. I'm a different person with different values now" (Sue Dibney's Exit Letter, July 26, 2011, p. 1)

Sue was no longer calling her teacher a "geek". She was reading more than she ever did before, and she was demonstrating a positive attitude in relation to it. The only thing Sue was not partial to was the class text – *The College Reading Series*. She commented, "The text book readings were pretty boring, but they got the point across on all things we needed to learn. I mean, nothing in life that usually involves learning is going to be fun or exciting, with the exception of how the teacher used comics to teach the book. That was fun." (Sue Dibney's Exit Letter, July 26, 2011, p. 1). The catalyst for her was the comics. Sue had always though comics were a "nerd thing", but after seeing how they work, she felt they were more powerful than plain text-only books. "They are an awesome way to teach so many different things, including reading, in ways that are so easily understandable" (Sue Dibney's Exit Letter, July 26, 2011, p. 1).

The conclusion of Sue's Exit Letter summarizes the effect the Intermediate Reading class has had on not just her, but her entire household:

> The attitude towards reading in my family has slowly changed over the past four months.
> I have a whole new outlook on reading now. My kids now use their weekly allowances to
> get *The Simpsons* comic books and they are reading *Goosebumps* books. I now personally

read myself to sleep, whereas before I simply would fall asleep watching Jay Leno. And

last week, my husband was fitted for reading glasses. Yesterday, he fell asleep with me

reading a novel of his own choosing, *Rainbow Six*."

In short, Sue Dibney and her family were empowered to read. Occasionally, I still see Sue at the

school. She wears reading glasses all the time now. She graduates in the spring of 2013. Her

husband is planning on enrolling next fall. He hopes that I will be teaching his reading class.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, nine participants were selected from the sixty volunteers were chosen.

Data from nine sources were presented in narrative form. Each participant possessed distinctive

experiences and perspectives on previous reading habits, classroom instruction and comics.

Even though the nine participants are unique, they do possess overlapping characteristics that

will be discussed in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Thematic Discussions

In an attempt to answer the third research question, "What impact does reading comics have on developmental students' attitudes toward reading?" I chose nine participants who strongly embodied how comics impacted not only their attitudes toward reading but also their growth as readers. The three most reoccurring themes were the marginalization of developmental readers, social construction of the reader's identity, and empowerment.

Marginalization of Developmental Readers.

The purpose of the developmental reading classes at WPCC is to arm students with the necessary skills to excel academically in regular credit-bearing college courses. In reality, it is very easy for a student to fall through the cracks with the established curriculum. The curriculum is divided three-fold: Reading comprehension as taught with one textbook, vocabulary from a separate textbook, and an online tutorial guide. One of the many comments students make in class, "Why do we have to do this? What does this have to do with reading?" (Focus Group March 2, 2010). Students do not always see the rationale behind why these courses are in place. They do not easily relate to the material in the text and the online reading software. Most students felt that having to take this course was a measurement of their reading abilities and that they are "intermediate" in their reading skills (Focus Group September 29, 2009; Focus Group January 11, 2010; Focus Group August 29, 2010).

In the very first Focus Group (September 29, 2009), Cassie was vocal in the discussion about the online tutorial program called Plato. She states, "How can we utilize a program that

barely works on our computer and takes so long to use. I work and I have enough trouble trying to keep up with the other homework in this class." Donna shared a similar comment in her Exit Letter, "Plato was a waste of time. It taught the exact same stuff as the textbook" (December 9, 2009, p. 2).   This overlap created a negative feeling towards the class; that it was not designed well and it was a waste of time. "I can't see how this class can help me," said Bart Allen (Focus Group January 11, 2010). Plato was being utilized in an effort to help the students. It didn't. It frustrated them immensely, "We hate Plato" (Focus Group October 22, 2012).

The frustration did not entirely originate from the online tutorial program. It was more of a mix of the student's perception of the Intermediate Reading course, the individual attitude towards reading, and the curriculum of the course that made reading in the course more complicated and unobtainable. Some of my participants wanted to withdraw from the course in the early weeks of the semester. Tora Olafsdotter states, "I thought that being in this class meant I was stupid. Does this mean I shouldn't be going to college?" (Focus Group September 19, 2009). She withdrew from the course a week later. Another participant wrote in his introduction letter, "I hate reading. I am only in this course because I tested into it. I see no purpose in it" (Sigrid Nansen Introduction Letter September 4, 2009).

Every class of the Intermediate Reading I taught had students who have a lower attitude than they should have toward reading. More to the point, these students often fail to see that being placed in the reading class is a good thing. Instead, these students see placement in this class as a reaffirmation of the negative reading experiences of their previous reading classes. Before the students even begin the course, they often have already surrendered mentally and are at risk of prematurely withdrawing from the course or, worse, failing the course.

Social Construction of Reader's Identity

Literacy practice at home and school is critical to the development of reading comprehension, Gee (2008), Lankshear (1999), Stree (1995), and Fairclough (1989). For many of my participants, their reader identities were adversely affected by the attitudes of peers and family members. Many are readers that have been sculpted by the reading practice instruction available in their environment. Some of the participants have become more active and autonomous in reading, while others have progressed in the opposite manner. It is essential that the sociocultural background of the participant be considered.

Positive attitudes toward reading and learning are facilitated through home literacy practice. This contributes to children becoming successful readers. However, negative attitudes from influential figures are likely to produce poor readers with feelings of insecurity, and negative attitudes toward learning and reading. Artemis and Sue Dibney were prime examples of this.

Artemis had no time for reading. She grew up on a farm where her family stressed work over recreational things such as reading. Artemis's attitude towards reading was a practical one. In her Exit Interview (March 2, 2011), Artemis stated, "What's the point to reading when it does not help you get the chores done any quicker." In the Exit Interview (March 2, 2011), I asked Artemis where this attitude towards reading originates. "My whole family feels this way about reading." I asked for more clarification. Artemis continued, "On the farm we have so much to do and only so much daylight. My Dad told me that reading is something that you do when you have nothing else to do. Fortunately on the farm, there is always something to do."

Sue Dibney's attitude towards reading was also impacted by her family's perspective on reading. In her Exit Interview (Exit Interview, August 12, 2011), Sue explains that reading was

something her parents encouraged at first by reading to her at night and enrolling her into book clubs. This stopped when her parents separated and her mother, whom she lived with after the separation, worked second shift as a nurse. "She simply did not have the time to check if I read or did my homework. She was content with seeing my C's and B's on the report card."

Sue's husband grew up on a farm where they had a very practical approach to reading similar to Artemis and her family. "When I said I was going back to school, he laughed at me. And, when I had to do all the reading for your class, it didn't make things any better" (Sue Dibney's Exit Interview, August 12, 2011). Sue's boys also began to adopt to attitude of their father. The sons would tease their mother when she wore her reading glass. "They called me 'nerd' and 'book worm'. I knew that my husband thought it was funny, but I also knew deep down he felt very insecure about me going back to school."

Sue explained more clearly that no one from her husband's family ever went to a post-secondary school. "Most of his family barely passed high school and, for their lifestyle, academics were not necessary" (Sue Dibney's Literacy Autobiography, July 16, 2011 p. 1). It was this continuing attitude that made Sue doubt whether going back to school was the best decision, because her family did not support her.

Cassie Sandsmark, Billy Butcher, Connor Kent, Elisa Cameron and Donna Troy all shared similar experiences that contributed to the attitudes they possessed at the beginning of the class. Donna, Elisa and Cassie's attitudes originated in grade school where being slow readers labeled them as "dumb" by peers. "Who wants to do something that makes you look and feel bad" (Donna's Exit Interview, August 10, 2010).

Billy and Connor's attitudes were attributed to an understanding of what Intermediate Reading was perceived to be. "I thought I was in the Intermediate Reading class because I was

187

dumb" (Billy Butcher Exit Interview October 13, 2011). Connor shared this sentiment, also, and it affected his self esteem in a negative way. "I must be stupid if I had to take this class" (Connor's Exit Interview, November 12, 2011). Billy had a comedic response to his placement into the course. "I guess I should have been paying more attention to the test rather that the pretty blonde sitting next to me." He smirked, "She smelt so nice," (Focus Group September 13, 2010). The misperception was in the name of the course – Intermediate Reading. What does this mean "Intermediate" Reading? What is an Intermediate Reader? Is it something like a "poor" reader or is it something a little better. It can't mean that the students placed in this course are "advanced", so what does the title imply about the abilities of the students placed in the course. This was how the students struggled to rationalize the name of the course as it affected their attitude.

Billy, along with Cassie and Donna, felt that past reading teachers had affected the overall reading attitude that each of them possessed. "I realize that it is not reading or reading classes that gave me such a negative attitude toward reading class, it was the boring teachers that I had" (Billy Butcher's Exit Interview, October 13, 2011). Billy described his past teachers who were unable to relate to the students. These teachers were only valued points from assignments rather than valuing the needs and the well-being of the students. Cassie and Donna both shared this same idea. During Cassie's Exit Interview, she reflected, "I think the reason why I liked your class so much was because I knew that you cared about our reading abilities. When I saw this, I began to trust you and, in a way, trust my reading abilities" (September 3, 2010). In Donna's Exit Interview, she stated, "We trusted you as our teacher. Therefore we respected your opinions. When you said we needed to do something or appreciate something, we did. So I now appreciate reading more" (August 10, 2010).

Elisa's attitude towards reading was affected more by her peers. Elisa tried to hide the fact that she struggle with reading. She struggled with many of the reading comprehension aspects. When called on in class, she was reluctant to answer my questions and or ask questions about what she did not understand. She sat with two other girls who possessed the attitude that reading was drool and the class taught by a dork. If Elisa wanted to fit in socially, it just wasn't cool for her to publicly view it otherwise. During her Exit Interview, I asked Elisa if her current attitude had anything to do the people she sat with in class. "Sort of. I just want to fit in. But, I get what you are teaching. I think the comics are an interesting way to teach, but my friends think that you are a geek" (September 19, 2010). Socially, Elisa felt it was more important to conform to the expectations of her friends

Mary Reilly Parker-Jameson's attitude towards reading is reflective of the era she went to school. Unlike any of the other participants, she was not a member of the digital age and she grew up in a time when social media was nonexistent and "the only thing to do was to read a book" (Literacy Autobiography, February 12, 2010).

As it had been inflected upon them through social interactions, each of the participants had been exposed to a positive and constructive atmosphere in the Intermediate Reading course. This experience was a valuable one that nurtured the participants and allowed them to grow into independent learners.

Empowering Developmental Readers. My mission in this class is also reflected in this study. It has been to empower students who find themselves marginalized by the system or disillusioned with reading and academia. Students who have a poor attitude toward reading often have suffered from some kind of difficult or even traumatic experience or experiences in reading and school. First, most of the students shared stories of being taught by bad or

189

insensitive teachers who lacked the ability to engage the students in class or made derogatory comments toward student abilities in class. Second, other students talked about familial negative values in regards to reading. The branch campus of WPCC is located in the rural countryside and has a large agricultural community. Many of these students came from families that do not see the value of reading or its connection to obtaining a "good" job. Artemis, Billy Butcher, and Sue Dibney were students who had poor attitudes toward reading which had developed at and were affected by the home environment.

The purpose of Intermediate Reading, as I see it, was to reverse negative attitudes and correct the wrongs of previous reading classes, thus instilling more positive attitudes in the students. I tried to empower the poor attitudes of students in many ways. This was accomplished in many ways.

At the beginning of the class, I worked toward establishing a community where students did not fear making mistakes. "There is no such thing as a dumb question or a dumb answer in this class. We learn from each other's mistakes and successes," I told the students on the first day of class. But, students did not start to believe me until the second or third week of the course whenI taught the Literacy Autobiography assignment, and students learned about the troubles I had had with reading. Establishing community was not instantaneous. It grew over the period of the semester through continuous interaction and group work.

The Introduction Letter and the Literacy Autobiography served as reflective tools for students to acknowledge their attitudes toward reading and why they had those attitudes. This was the first major step to regain a positive attitude toward reading. In these assignments, I ask students to reflect on past experiences and to examine how this was relative to their reading process. The goal was to have the students realize and accept the things that had shaped their

190

literacy in an attempt to put away angst and embrace joys so that they could progress forward in their literacy development.

The reading reports were another way that I attempted to rehabilitate the attitudes of students. Each reading report had a reflection part where students were prompted to discuss the reading they had done for the class. Students were to explain what they learned from the assignment or what they struggled with in the assignment. Students either said they liked or disliked reading the novel/comic book/graphic novel, and they explained in detail the rationale for this assertion.

Students were encouraged to select texts they wanted to read. Even when a student asked me, "is this a good choice for the reading report," I replied by asking that student if this text was what he or she wanted to read. I wanted the students to read what they wanted to read. I felt this was a major component to these reading reports. I was trying to coerce the students into reading out of personal interest. If I could get the students to read enough and complete the tasks I was assigning to go along with the reading, then the student would begin to relate what and why they were learning to their academic goals, thus creating a sense of personal investment. This was what I wanted to accomplish. Personal interest could only get the students so far, but it was not enough of an intrinsic motivation to extend past Intermediate Reading.

Lastly, the use of comics was one of the more important ways that I tried to rehabilitate reluctant readers. Comics can be easier to read if the student understands the reading process involved. At first, some students were resistant to reading comics because of the stigma such reading carries. But after considerable time spent teaching the process of closure and discussing why comics have this stigma, students began to warm up to the idea of reading comics. Most of my students assumed that there was only one genre of comic books – superhero, which was not

appealing to some of them. Students quickly learned that there was more than one genre of

comic books, and interest in reading them increased significantly. Students who were apathetic

toward reading novels often found themselves wanting to read more of the comics of their

choice.

Implications for Reading Teachers

The first research question asked, "How can a developmental reading course make use of

comics as a learning tool?" In the Intermediate Reading course, comics had many functions.

They functioned as multi modal instructional tools. Secondly, they had a role as extrinsic and

intrinsic motivators.   Comics also introduced a new mode of reading to students.

Teaching Reading Comprehension Using "Closure." In the Intermediate reading

course, comics were used to re-explain the concepts of the *College Reading Series* text. This text

teaches the fundamental skills of reading comprehension in steps. The first step deals with

understanding the characteristics of a main idea and how to locate it. The second step discusses

the types of supporting details such as major supporting details and minor supporting details.

After this step, the text has a chapter dedicated to understanding and locating Implied Main

Ideas. We began using comics at step three. Specifically, we used political cartoons. Students

were asked to read political cartoons, state the implied main idea and write and explain what

details in the cartoon led them to their conclusion.

The fourth step of the *College Reading Series* text explains the concept of Pattern of

Thought and provides examples. I found that students seemed bored and struggled to relate to

this topic as we covered this chapter. The result was that the students missed the purpose of this

chapter – illustrating logical thought or cognitive understanding of supporting details in a

paragraph. The quickest and simplest way I found to teach this step was applying McCloud's

(1993) "Closure" to explain why one sentence should precede or succeed other sentences. This is what students had misunderstood from the textbook chapter about patterns of thought. I used Chapter 3 of McCloud's *Understanding Comics* to explain how to determine organization and supporting detail in a paragraph. At the end of this lesson, I assigned the second reading report – the Comic Book Report. This assignment asked the students to locate the thesis of the comic book, and identify the implied main ideas of the individual pages of the comic as well as explain the supporting details that led them to this conclusion. The Comic Book Report was a very hands-on and visual approach to teaching the first 6 chapters of the *College Reading Series* text.

Toward the end of the semester, I had covered the second half of the *College Reading Series* text. At this point, students had received instruction on Tone, Bias, Inferences, and Outlines. I used the Graphic Novel Report to provide another hands-on, visual approach to apply not only what students had learned about tone, bias, and inferences, but also what they understood about implied main ideas, supporting details and patterns of thought. The Graphic Novel Report asked the students to place the graphic novel of their own choice into an outline. This strategy is how I introduced them to making outlines. From this assignment, students were learning how to break down large chunks of information into outlines. This was a very useful skill that could benefit the student long after the course was over.

Implications for Pedagogy

In this study, I argue for the value of comics and graphic novels in improving reading skills and encouraging active reading in students' literacy practices. Here I present narratives that imply several concerns that we face when integrating comics in the curriculum due to a lack of acceptance of comics, as not part of canon in the academy.

193

Availability of Comics

Any comics worth reading in the eyes of the student are not easily found in the public access. After being observed by the dean of WPCC, he noted that my implementation of graphic novels in the course was a "unique feature." He then asked, "are there any titles sort of in the public domain, perhaps in web versions, that the whole class could look at and discuss together so that when they go off to do their own report on a piece of sequential art that they have chosen they might be armed with a common point of reference for future discussions. As it is, when you have people discussing page two of the novel they have chosen, the rest of the class doesn't really know what they are talking about." This is one of the issues with using comics. They aren't easily obtainable for many reasons.

First and foremost is the issue of copyright. Copyright, especially today, has become stricter in light of legislation regarding "sharing" and "fair use." One of the difficulties experienced in this course was acquiring comics. Comics today generally have a cover price of $2.99 to $4.99. This was a major problem when I wanted to find 25 copies of one comic book to use on the day I taught the lesson of How to Read Comics. Photocopies of the comic book could be made (illegally), but much is lost in black and white duplication, such as color shading that implies tone that adds to the readers' act of closure. One comic book could be scanned into a .pdf file format or some other digital format (again illegally), but then there is the issue of having technology and software easily accessible for the students to access the comic book. At the branch campus of WPCC, technology access was a major issue for both the teacher and the student.

Second, comics are often expensive for the students. Most of my students were only able to attend college at WPCC, which is two thirds cheaper than the university in the same town, on

the grace of state grants, with very little extra for living costs. My students could not afford many comics at full price. To remedy this, I made a deal with the local comic book shop where I traded ten hours a week of work for the shop to manage comics for creating "economical" comic book sets and discounted comic book sections.   As an "unofficial" employee, I was able to influence the owner to order and stock certain comics that the students would want to read. I was also able to organize and sort comics into one dollar boxes and three for a dollar boxes. This was helpful for the students to afford the comics, but the students found these comics less desirable because they were old, and they sometimes had a difficulty relating to the story and art work.

Third, comics can be difficult to locate. Finding them in a variety other than the mainstream superhero issues was a challenge. There is a comic book store in the town where WPCC is, but it did not have a vast selection of comics. Some students had to either make due with what issues they could find at the local comic book store, or they had to travel an hour away to the nearest major city where bigger comic book stores are located. There were other comic book stores in two nearby towns, but these stores did not have a quantity of issues on the shelf. At the time of the study, the comic books stores in the area had cut back on their orders. This was mainly because of the poor economy and the fact that comics had jumped from a cover price of $2.50 to $3.99. This price jump deterred many customers from buying comics. The owners could not afford extra comics just for them to sit on the wall because customers were not buying. Instead, the owners would only order one or two extra issues beyond what was needed to fill regular customer subscriptions. But this applied to only the smaller comic book shops in the small towns. Some students were able to find a wider selection of comics at the bigger shops in the city. Unfortunately, the nearest city was sixty miles away.

Rethinking the Canon Toward the Academic Use of Comics

One of the purposes of this study has been to reverse the negative reputations of comics bestowed upon them by Wertham (1954, 2004) many decades ago. Wertham felt that comics were juvenile scribbling that lack literary value. This study tries to counter this viewpoint.

I had finished teaching the Intermediate Course at WPCC for the day, and I was walking to meet with a colleague at the university library. As I followed two graduate students on the sidewalk to the library, I could not help but overhear them complain about the problems with the Canonical Texts that are taught to students today. "Is it me, or am I the only one that feels the canon is dated and obsolete for this generation of students that are making their way into school?" said the first graduate student in a gruff voice. "How does the department expect us to teach this mandatory curriculum and maintain enrollment and student enthusiasm?"

"The students show no interest in something they cannot relate to or apply to their everyday life," the second graduate student added.

On a whim, I interrupted their gripe session from behind, "But what about graphic novels? You have the same literary devices and themes, but the stories are told in a fashion that today's generation can comprehend. If anything, use them [graphic novels] as a supplement to the canonical texts." Both of the graduate students displayed this look of stunned enlightenment as if to say, '*Yeah, he's right*'.

One of them said, *"*But what about what the department mandates that we teach? Graphic Novels? They won't approve these because comics aren't seen as scholarly pieces of work." He had a point. We are mandated to teach the proscribed curriculum which represents an established academic entity called the "Canon."

Our discussion raised the question of whether comics could ever be accepted into the academic canon. To answer this question, first one must understand the idea of the canon as it exists in academia. Lauter (1998) defines the canon as "the list of works and authors believed to be sufficiently important to read, study, write about, teach – and thus transmit to the next generation of readers" (Vol 1, p. xxxiii.). Also, one should understand that it is in the power of the editorial boards and publishers to determine which texts make the cut (Seaman, 2001, p. 7). Lauter fleshes out the characteristics of canonical literature as conveying:

> a sense of the diversity that has marked this nation's culture together with certain themes and issues that have preoccupied most Americans; the need to understand the ways in which texts and contexts interact and condition one another; the importance of organizational frameworks in shaping how we experience the works of art encountered within structures like anthologies, museums, and curricula; and the reality that what readers esteem changes somewhat over time – the time marked out by eras. (Vol 2, p. xlvi)

When we think of an example of the canon, we often think of the anthologies representing American, British and World literature that are incorporated into high school English and university classrooms. One famous set of anthologies was the Post World War II 32,000 page, multi-volume anthology called *Great Books of the Western World* that emphasized tradition and the "classics," and this set was marketed to conservative American families. It contained literary masterpieces, such as Christian Huygens's *Treatise on Light,* Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, and Shakespeare, but it was criticized for lacking what Beam (2008) calls notable contemporary works of that era: "Only two nominal twentieth-century writers, William James

and Sigmund Freud, made the cut (p. 4). The "cut" was the general understanding of what was considered canonical.

The canon is sometimes referred to as "the classics" or the "literary heritage of the West" that is taught and scrutinized to gain an understanding of that time in which it was written (Ford, 1994, p. 5). "The canon favors the status quo," (Stearns, 1993, p. 94) and displays a certain cultural significance of the time they originated. Homer, Plato, the Bible, Shakespeare, and Dante are examples of the "great texts" one would find in the canon that deal with contemporary social issues, such as sexual harassment, homophobia, rape, abortion, the right to die, and the capital punishment (Ford, 1994, pp. 14-15). Overall, the text that is canon-worthy allows for the following: "There is no need to go outside the work for any facts because such facts, about the author's intention. . . a work of literature is autonomous and has, so to speak, a life of its own" (Thorp, 1965, p. 5).

More importantly, for the purpose of this section, the term "canon" is being used in the most basic sense to categorize and refer to literary texts that are considered classics in which they have withstood the scrutiny of scholars by demonstrating social and aesthetic values and thus are academically accepted to be included in school and university curricula.

There is an issue with the canon as it is perceived by critics. Beam (2008) critiques the canon as typically having "no concession to contemporary taste, or even pleasure in reading." There is an underlying attitude toward what is considered canon worthy and what is not. Martin (2001) states, "Popular culture and high culture are two different animals – descended from a common ancestor, perhaps, but accustomed to different environments and unable to mate; all the great works belong in high culture, and everything else, the trash, belongs in popular culture" (p. 98). Popular culture is that part of culture which is widely enjoyed, and high culture is that part

which is enjoyed only by the elite. Therefore, the less something is liked, the more likely it is to be valued as great. And the more something is liked, the more likely it is to be trash (Martin, 2001, p. 98). This attitude depicts the reader as the one who is at fault. If the reader finds fault with Shakespeare, he is demonstrating his ignorance, while at the same time, if the reader enjoys reading *The Amazing Spiderman* (an example of popular culture), then he is again, demonstrating his ignorance and his incivility. There is this attitude that popular culture is the culture of the uneducated masses; therefore, the products of it are lacking in intellectual value. Martin (2001) states:

> Finding fault with Jane Austen may be more of a negative reflection on the reader than the novel. Such a polarized definition of culture also precludes turning serious critical attention to literature, music and in popular culture. Any time someone dares to look below the most superficial level of a popular work, he or she is likely to be greeted with, 'You are reading too much into that," or "don't think about it so much, you'll spoil it.' (p. 98)

It is believed the works within popular culture are not capable of possessing literary value or the facet in which critical theory could be applied. Only texts of high culture possess the depth and characteristics to be analyzed.

From the results of this study and the surrounding research, one implication can be suggested: comics should be viewed as scholarly work. McCloud (2000) discusses that comics are an art form that contains the same literary functions as do the traditional canonical texts such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Ceasar*, *Agamemnon*, *The Iliad*, and *The Odyssey*. Furthermore, comics could transcend the purpose of being used as a secondary source or a theme set

(Richison, Hernandez, & Carter, 2006). Ultimately, literature classes could focus on comics as the primary text.

Universities such as Indiana University of Pennsylvania and University of Maryland have been asking the same question – how far can comics be used in an academic class room? Pagnucci (2006) taught a Special Topics English course that delved into the phenomenon of comics. His course focused on not just how to read comics and a sampling of the comics as a form of literature, but also on how to script comics. Grzanka (2010) was teaching "Graphic Novels and Graphic Cultures" to Honors Humanities students. The focus of his class is the art form and delivery of graphic novels in a given culture or the understanding of cultural significance of a particular graphic novel. Other professors have designed courses to teach graphic novels as a form of literature (Clemente, 2011). In these courses, instructors are typically focusing Alan Moore's *Watchmen*, Art Spiegleman's *Maus*, Will Eisner's *Contract with God*, and Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. Other courses are dedicated to incorporating graphic novels as supplemental texts for writing (Crilley 2009; Rapp, 2011)or learning English (Lucas 2005; Ranker 2007), but at the time of this study, no work has really shown comics being taught as a mythology in and of itself; one that focuses on the modern mythology created in the media of visual narratives.

Thinking Forward

Comics are sometimes being used as primary texts in classrooms, but only as texts that explain the art and function of comics. Departments should be creating courses on the actual genre and mythology of comics. Moreover, comics present a unique genre called superhero mythology. A course such as this could be rooted in mythology criticism such as the works of Joseph Campbell (1991, 2008) or other theoretical frameworks. Archetypes, character, and plot

development could be analyzed using this pre-established theoretical frame work as well as looking at the cultural significance of the story.

But there is one crippling problem with creating a course such as this – Copyright. One of the main reasons that only certain graphic novels are being used in classrooms now is because they are in print and commonly accessible. But if a graphic novel should go out of print, and a new print is never made, accessing this particular graphic novel in quantity will be extremely difficult. More importantly, most graphic novels are collected reprints of original stories printed periodically in comic books. Some of the worthwhile stories have not been reprinted in trade form. In addition, some more problematic comic books and graphic novels are considered collector's items and have increased greatly in value. How does the teacher provide such reading material for an entire class of students?

There is a misunderstanding about the idea of Fair Use (U.S. Copyight Office 2009). There is a belief that if a copyrighted text is reproduced in part for educational use, it is allowed. But what Fair Use presents is that using a text under its protection is a balancing act. Is the instructor not giving away the essence of the work? Is the instructor preventing profit gain for the publisher by reproducing the text? Deciding on how to fairly share rare comics is difficult to determine under the law.

More troubling is how technology today is affecting how the instructor can provide copyrighted material for his/her class. Today, articles and text excerpts can be distributed electronically as digital copies to students to increase accessibility and cut back on supply costs. But according to the DMC – Digital Millennium Copyright Act (1999) – digitally reproducing a copyrighted text is prohibited. The DMC Act allows for a very limited educational use of copyrighted materials. The TEACH Act (2002), on the other hand, is a provision to the DMC

Act that provides some leeway in reproduction of copyrighted material for educational use. In order for an institution to qualify to publish within the TEACH Act provision, that institution has to have a policy for reproduction in place. Each institution has to have a copyright officer who will facilitate copyright awareness and faculty training on teaching within the confines of the TEACH Act. Unfortunately, reproducing copies of entire print runs of comics is still prohibited (Wohler, 2011). If an instructor wants to teach a class that focuses on comics and mythology, he or she would need to find a way to navigate these copyright laws. This is one of the main reasons why an authentic comic book mythology class is difficult to offer.

Recommendations for Future Research and Reflective Implications

Based on the strengths and weaknesses of my research, I would recommend several ideas for future research in order to further explore the value of comics and graphic novels for educational purposes.

First, the most noticeable weakness in my study could be potential bias because the data was collected by myself from my own reading classes. As both teacher and researcher, my presence could influence students' attitudes. In order to increase credibility, I had collected data from four different Intermediate Reading courses throughout four different semesters (Fall 2009-Summer 2011). Thus, I collected interview data from about fifty volunteer students and found several recurring themes in the data them. In order to avoid threats to credibility and bias, a future study could be conducted by a researcher with a more detached position. Because the collection of data was done by me as an instructor in the classes and researcher, it would be worth having a similar study conducted by an outside researcher third person.

Also, because my personal interest and knowledge of comics was high, this could have affected the instruction and the students in the course. It might be helpful to see how other

instructors who may not hold a strong knowledge and background about comic books and graphic novels could adopt multimodal materials in a course.

Third, the demographic background and the reading level of the participants in this study were homogeneous as they were enrolled in the Developmental Reading Courses in a community college located in a rural area. It would be very useful to look at how different groups of students respond to the use of comics and graphic novels in learning reading skills in academic settings. Not only struggling and developmental readers, but also gifted and proficient readers should participate in future studies. Some studies in regards to the effectiveness of comic and graphic novels in reading have been conducted with children and young adolescents (Avi, 2010; Buffy, 2008; Connors, 2010; Hammond, 2009; Poerschke, 2005); however, there is more opportunity to determine the gap to recognizing the value of comic books and graphic novels used in higher education. In addition, few studies (Glutek, 1986; Robin, 2008), including my study, have discovered that some female participants showed their resistance and preconception toward reading comic books because they believed that comics are male-centered and "boy books," while male participants found that comics and graphic novels are rewarding. It would be interesting to explore gender preference and the impact of gender roles in comics with different gender and age groups.

Currently, studies of outside of literacy practice with graphic novels by particular groups (adults: Romanelli, 2009; high school students: Connors, 2010; Garcia, 2009) have been emerging. Future studies might ask how the particular groups of people make use of reading graphic novels beyond classroom and explore the values of reading multimodal texts. These studies may find various advantages of reading practices with comics and graphic novels by various groups: people with dyslexia, reluctant readers, children, adolescents, and adults.

Fourth, it would be useful to understand how various courses could adopt multimodal texts to enhance the content knowledge in teaching. Brooks (2009) argues that using and knowing how to analyze visual and verbal texts could be beneficial in the field of composition studies as modern societies have become visually oriented. Therefore, it would be helpful to see whether multimodal texts can be a useful education tool or material in many other content areas, such as science, history, mathematics, sociology and language and culture. This future research could show the effectiveness of the visual-based instructions by comparing with the use of traditional text in various courses.

Recently, Stephens (2011) studied whether American comic books could be an effective educational tool in teaching lifesaving measures and humanitarian/peacekeeping operations to foreign-target teenaged students in the third world countries, such as Bosnia, Nicaragua, and Kosovo. Even though the intention of the use of comic books did not appear applicable, it was worth studying the potential of the use of comic books with the target students and finding concerns for future instruction. Therefore, there are many possibilities to examine the effectiveness of multimodal texts or the potentials as educational tools to various target participants in the future studies.

As this was a qualitative research study, my hopes were to investigate the values of the use of multimodal materials (comic books and graphic novels) in my own Developmental Reading Courses, but also to share the findings to educate reading instructors, so we could better serve students with more innovative and alternative reading instructions for them to construct stronger interest in their, own reading strategies and self-esteem as readers. In this section, I will discuss strengths and weaknesses that I reflect on in terms of theoretical, methodological, and

ethical aspects from my study and recommend several ideas for future research related to reading instructions, using of comics and graphic novels, and various groups of students.

Theoretical Implications. The findings in this study relate to the theories of the interactive reading model and identity construction. I will explain how the use of comics and graphic novels promotes active learning and interactive reading skills. I will also argue how various reading experiences could develop multiple identities as readers and the reader identities are contextually situated. In addition, I will discuss the contribution that this study has made to theory of reader identity construction

First, reading is an important tool to learning. People need to learn to read in order to read to learn. Various reading theories and strategies have been developed to help people to be more competent and active readers. Nevertheless, there are an increasing number of developmental students who have difficulties to developing their skills and interest in reading. One of the goals in my study was to promote the use of multimodal texts, particularly with comics and graphic novels, in teaching reading skills to assist students to learn to read with a flexible and non-traditional reading approach. From the findings, the majority of the participants have increased their interest in reading, developed reading strategies, and achieved the goals in Developmental Reading Courses by learning how to read comics and graphic novels. Here I would like to discuss how using comics and graphic novels supports interactive reading model and helps the readers to become active readers.

The interactive reading model theory recognizes the interaction of bottom-up and top-down processes simultaneously throughout the reading process. The most significant aspect is that readers construct meaning by using cues from text and interacting with the text as Kenneth S. Goodman (1981) emphasized top-down approach: "the goal of reading is constructing

meaning in response to text. . . . It requires interactive use of graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic cues to construct meaning." In this reading process, readers utilize all their previous knowledge and information to draw meanings. Comics provide various opportunities to practice these skills. Students need to master a certain level of letters, sounds, and words knowledge, but their primary objective is to comprehend meaning. This can be an easier task for some students who do not have much vocabulary, but they can guess meanings with the help of visuals, or they are intrinsically encouraged to learn new words in order to comprehend meaning.

In comics, closures, panels, and gutters all work for readers to construct meaning as they provide additional levels of semiotic clues, such as linguistics and visuals. Readers need to think and interact among clues and their background knowledge in order to construct/reconstruct meaning. Using comic books and graphic novels promote active reading in which readers can pay more attention to the reading, draw conclusions, make predictions, fill in the gaps, and imagine themselves as the character. Also, this reading process promotes active learning in which readers think, plan, monitor, infer, predict, question their comprehension, and revise their strategies. "I now understand how to read a passage and break it down into a thesis, a main idea, and the supporting details. I can answer those questions about specific details" (Donna's Exit Letter, December 9, 2009, p. 1). Another student stated, "The Comic Book Report made me realize how much I really didn't understand what the main idea was," (Dinah's Exit Interview, August 10, 2010). "It was an ingenious way to teach me what a main idea was" (Connor's Exit Interview, November 12, 2012).

Second, my findings also support the theory of socially constructed identities. According to Weedon (1997), individuals are depicted as diverse, contradictory, and changing over time and space as they interact with one another in different social and political settings. This means that

206

individuals' identities are continually changed and reconstructed; in other words, their beliefs

and perspectives on various subjects, such as identity or self-esteem are variously situated based

on their experiences. Importantly, this concept applies to my participants who have constantly

changed their beliefs on their self-esteem and their attitudes toward reading habits. Some

participants reflected on this. "I am not afraid to raise my hand in class or be chosen to answer

the teacher's questions anymore." (Donna's Exit Letter, December 9, 2009, P. 1). Another

student wrote, "The skills that I acquired in your class have helped me understand how important

it is to read, and most importantly, how to understand what I am reading" (Billy Butcher Exit

Interview October 13, 2011).

One important contributing idea that this study has for developmental readers is that

teaching how to read various multimodal texts could help them to reconstruct their identities

from less competent to more competent readers. Related to this view of social construction of

identity in this study, I could judiciously claim that students can construct various identities as

readers in different reading contexts because reader identity is multiple, reader identity is socially

situated, and reader identity is fluid and changing over time (S. Burke, 2010. p. 32). The

contexts can be physical places, types of reading materials, level of difficulty in reading, and

reading tasks. As shown in my study, many participants had shared unpleasant experiences with

reading in their Literacy Autobiography. However, learning how to read comics and apply

reading skills (e.g. finding a main idea and inferring) in textbooks have succeeded among many

students in my reading courses, as shown in their Reflective Journals and Interviews. One

student reflected:

> Having this class and having the graphic novels helped me better understand the
>
> techniques shown in the *College Reading Reries* book. I firmly believe that without

doing both the graphic novel report and the comic book report, the techniques taught in

the book would have just went in one ear and out the other. " (Dinah's Exit Letter, May

5, 2010, p. 2)

It is predictable that one semester-long reading course may not completely change their attitudes

toward reading positively. Possession of good habits of reading and reading skills is very

important to one's life. A lack of reading skills or the interest does not benefit anyone's life. I

strongly believe that alternative reading materials and methodologies in teaching reading can

open developmental readers' eyes and provide more chances to develop their reading habits and

reconstruct their identities as positive and successful readers.

As this study provides new insight that multimodal reading materials are encouraged to

be used for reading courses, there should be more studies to find out more information for better

reading instruction: what multimodal texts could better work than others? what reading activities

are more effective for different groups of students? what reading contexts play a significant role

in shaping meaningful and positive reader identity for students?

Methodological Implications. First, one of the weaknesses in qualitative research is

generalization with a small number of cases or participants. To justify the findings for my

qualitative study, I collected interview data from about fifty volunteer students. I also had

collected data from four different Intermediate Reading courses throughout four different

semesters (Fall 2009-Summer 2011). The amount of data helped me to find several recurring

themes. As the same time, one of the strengths in a qualitative study is to provide in-depth

descriptions of individuals' experiences. Among fifty-one volunteers, I chose nine students and

presented each one's story about his or her reading habits, comic book reading experiences, and

reconstruction of his or her identities as readers through narrative inquiry, as " voice was

208

regarded as a necessary component" in my study (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004, p. 5). Despite the weakness in generalization, the lengthy descriptions of the narratives clearly portray developmental readers' feelings, experiences, situated actions in detail and reveal several recurring themes: the marginalization of developmental readers, social construction of the reader's identity, and empowerment where these themes are generated from the empirical data.

Second, the demographic background and the reading level of the participants in this study were homogeneous as they were enrolled in the Developmental Reading Courses in a community college located in a rural area. It would be very valuable to look at how different groups of students respond to the use of comics and graphic novels in learning reading skills in (non) academic settings. Not only struggling and reluctant readers, but also gifted and proficient readers should participate in future studies. Some studies in regards to the effectiveness of comic and graphic novels in reading have been conducted with children and young adolescents (Avi, 2010; Buffy, 2008; Connors, 2010; Hammond, 2009; Poerschke, 2005).

Currently, studies of literacy practice outside school with graphic novels by particular groups (adults: Romanelli, 2009; high school students: Connors, 2010; Garcia, 2009) has been emerging. I would like to suggest that future research is in needed to understand how different groups of people (gender, age, reading level, demographic background, and dyslexia) make use of reading graphic novels and explore the values of reading multimodal texts. In addition, few studies (Glutek, 1986; Robin, 2008) including my study have found out that some of female participants showed their resistance and preconception toward reading comic books because they believed that comics are male-centered and "boy books," while male participants found comics and graphic novels are rewarding. It would be interesting to discover how gender roles represented in comic books influence different gender and age groups of students when used in

209

reading materials in academic settings. These studies may find various advantages of reading the texts and effective reading instructions in academic settings for various groups of students.

Third, it would be useful to understand how various courses could adopt multimodal texts to enhance the content knowledge in teaching. Brooks (2009) argues that using and knowing how to analyze visual and verbal texts could be beneficial in the field of composition studies as the modern societies have become visually oriented. Recently, Stephens (2011) has studied whether American comic books could be an effective educational tool in teaching lifesaving measures and humanitarian/peacekeeping operations to foreign target teenaged students in the third countries, such as Bosnia, Nicaragua, and Kosovo. Even though the intention of the use of comic books did not appear, it was worth studying the potential of the use of comic books to the target students and finding concerns for future instruction. Therefore, it would be helpful to see whether multimodal texts can be useful material in many other content areas, such as science, history, mathematics, sociology and language and culture. This future research could show the effectiveness of the visual-based instructions by comparing with the use of traditional text in various courses.

Ethical Implications. Ethical and credibility issues should be noted when the study is conducted by the researcher who is the insider in a qualitative study. In this study, there might be potential bias because the data was collected by myself from my own reading classes. Beyond the titles of researcher and instructor, I personally hold a strong belief that comic books are useful reading materials and they deserve the honor to be called "canon" due to my personal experiences in reading and knowledge on graphic novels and comic books. I admit that I could influence my students more or less when introducing the materials and instructing the values in class. However, this concern can be a strength in my study as I could relate myself to the

210

research strongly due to my personal experience and interests with comic book reading. This study provides a unique opportunity to interpret various meanings of being developmental readers and comic book reading experience by understanding the actions and thoughts from the participants and myself.

A virtue ethics of skills means that the "[r]esearcher's ethical intuitions, feelings, and reflective skills are emphasized, including their sensibilities in undertaking dialogue and negotiation with the various parties involved in the research" (Mauthner, Jessop, Miller, & Birch, 2002, p. 20). Ethics issues in qualitative research involve several concerns, including protection of participants from harm, prevention of deception, protection of privacy and informed consent. In order to protect my participants' privacy, I did not share these tapes and transcripts with anyone. I also immediately listened to their tapes and noted their lived, unique experience and made some follow-up questions for Focus Group Interview and Exit Interview. This had helped me to perceive what they have gone through and how they felt about some experiences related to reading in their lives.

For research suggestions, in order to avoid threats to credibility and bias, a future study could be conducted by a researcher in a more detached position. Because the collection of data was done by me as an instructor in the classes and researcher, it would be interesting to see a similar study by an outside researcher, third person. Also because my personal interest and knowledge of comics was high, this could have affected the instruction and the students in the course. It might be helpful to see how other instructors who may hold different background and knowledge about comic books and how they adopt graphic novels as multimodal materials in reading course.

211

Concluding Reflections

From my perspective, the quality of instruction was not consistent over the semesters I collected data. The quality of teaching did gradually improve as I perfected the instructional design over those three semesters. During the Fall 2009 semester, I was not teaching McCloud's concept of "Closure" to the students. At the end of that semester, it seemed that the students were still struggling with understanding the logical patterns of thought and logical fallacies. This was very evident in the Midterm, Final and the Nelson Denny for this semester, and it was the sole motivator to find a better way to teach the concepts from the *College Reading Series*. For the Spring 2010 and Fall 2010 semesters, I had the students read about "closure" in chapter three of McCloud's (1993) *Understanding Comics* as a way of introducing the patterns of thought and the Comic Book Report. After the Fall 2009 semester, I had to acknowledge that not all students knew how to read comics. According to the student reflections, having the students read about closure was unique to explain the "underlying magic of what reading comprehension was" (Focus Group, March 29, 2010), and this was something that the *College Reading Series* text could not accomplish.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the data I collected was from the Fall 2009, Spring 2010, Fall 2010, Spring 2011, and Fall 2011 semesters. This created a population of 244 students in which I was able to create a department average to compare my scores. I averaged my three sections together and compared the means. My classes had a higher average in the Nelson Denny scores. More importantly, my classes had a higher passing average. I feel that the success of my students is related my pedagogy of teaching reading using comics.

In the final focus groups of each class, the students made comments regarding how comics helped them understand the chapters from the course text book and thus made it easier to

understand the comprehension questions of the Nelson Denny. As stated from one focus group: "The words I had to look-up in dictionary for the Graphic Novel Report were on the Nelson Denny" (Focus Group, December 2, 2009). Another student from this particular focus group also said, "I learned more vocabulary from reading the comic books and graphic novels than I did from the [course] vocabulary work book." "I took this class before. I could not understand what the teacher was teaching, but the way you used comics made sense. I was able to picture how reading worked" (Focus Group, December 2, 2010). In another focus group, one said, "The comic books made the explanation of how the ideas come together stick more in my head." Another student from the same focus group also said, "Mr, Burke, you not only taught us one way, when you used the comics, you had us learn the book from a totally different way and that worked for me" (Focus Group, May 5, 2010).

References

Alvermann, D. E., Moon, J. S., & Hagood, M. C. (1999). *Popular culture in the classroom: Teaching and researching critical media literacy*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Alvermann, D. E., & Hagood, M. C. (2000). Fandom and critical media literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *43*, 436–446.

Alvine, L. (2001). Shaping the teaching of self through autobiographical narrative. *The High School Journal*, *February/March*, 5-12.

Anderson, R. C., & Pearson, P. D. (1984). A schema- theoretic view of basic processes in reading comprehension. In P. D. Pearson (Ed.), *Handbook of reading research* (pp. 255-291). New York, NY: Longman.

Anneliese, K. (2000). Collective literacy biographies: Exploring issues of authority, positioning and discourse. *Teaching Education, 11*(1), 99-117.

Appleman, D. (2010). *Adolescent literacy and the teaching of reading: Lessons for teachers of literature*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Atkinson, P. , Delamont, S. (2006). *Narrative methods* (Vol. 4). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Attwell, P., Lavin, D., Domina, T., & Levey, T. (2006). New evidence on college remediation. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *77*, 886-924.

Barksdale-Ladd, M. A., & Rose, M. C. (1997). Qualitative assessment in developmental reading. *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, *28*, 34-55.

Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (2000). Literacy practices. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton, & R. Ivanič (Eds.), *Situated literacies* (pp. 7-15). London, England: Routledge.

Beam, A. (2008). *A great idea at the time: The rise, fall, and curious afterlife of the great book*. New York, NY: Public Affairs.

Bell, J. S. (2002). Narrative inquiry: More than trust telling stories. *TESOL Quarterly*, *36* (2), 207-213.

Bell, J. (n. d.). Using graphic novels. [PowerPoint presentation]. Retrieved from http://www.searchanyfile.info/Using-Graphic-Novels#

Bennett, L., Guthrie, J. T., McGouth, K., & Rice, M. E. (1996). *Developing engaged readers in school and home communities*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Blachowicz, C., & Ogle, D. (2008). *Reading comprehension: Strategies for independent learners* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford.

Blair, A. J. (1996). The possibility and actuality of visual arguments. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, *33*, 23-39.

Blaunstein, P., & Lyon, R. (Eds.). (2006). *Why kids can't read: Challenging to status quo in education.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Blaylock, J. (2001, September). *G.I.-Joe 2*(1). New York, NY: Image.

Blaylock, J. (2002, March) *G.I.-Joe 2*(6). New York, NY: Image.

Blitz, M. (2004). The comic book project: Forging alternative pathways to literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *47*(7), 574–587.

Boegeman, M., B. (1980). Lives and literacy: Autobiography in freshman composition. *College English*, *41*(6), 662-669. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/375914

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (2003). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bond, G. L., Tinker, M. A., Wasson, B. B., & Wasson, J. B. (1994). *Reading difficulties: Their diagnosis and correction* (7th ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Bongco, M. (2000). *Reading comics: Language, culture, and the concept of the superhero in comic books*. New York, NY: Garland.

Bowers-Campbell, J. (2008). Cyber "pokers" motivational antidote for developmental college readers. *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, *39*(1), 74-87.

Brooks, K. (2009). More "Seriously visible" Reading: McCloud, McLuhan, and the visual language of *The Medium Is the Massage*. *College Composition and Communication*, *61*(1): W217-W237.

Brown, E. H. (1982). *Wholistic reading comprehension through comic book art production* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 8223110).

Brown, J. I., Fishco, V. V., & Hanna, G. (1993a). *Nelson-Denny Reading Test*: *Directions for administration forms*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Brown, J. I., Fishco, V. V., & Hanna, G. (1993b). *Nelson-Denny Reading Test: Manual for Scoring and Interpretation, Forms G & H*. Rolling Meadows, IL: Riverside.

Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bucher, K. T., & Manning, M. L. (2004). Bringing graphic novels into a school's curriculum. *The Clearing House*, *78*, 67-72.

Buffy, E. (2008). *Motivation and middle school readers: Graphic novels, comic books, and free voluntary reading time* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI N3304228)

Burdge, A. S. (2006). Graphic novels. In J. Zipes (Ed.). *The Oxford encyclopedia of children's Literature*, *2*, (pp. 166-167). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Burke, B. (2002). *Batman, Joker: Unified self*. Unpublished master's thesis. Clarion University of Pennsylvania, Clarion, PA.

Burke, S. (2010). *The construction of writer identity in the academic writing of Korean ESL students: A qualitative study of six Korean students in the U.S*. (Doctoral dissertation)*.* Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3433435).

Bursuck, W. D., & Damer, M. (2011). *Teaching reading to students who are at risk or have disabilities* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Cain, K., & Oakhill, J. (2007). Reading comprehension difficulties: Correlates, causes, and consequences. In K. Cain & J. Oakhill (Eds.), *Children's comprehension problems in oral and written language: A cognitive perspective* (pp. 41-76). New York: Guilford Press.

Cain, K., Oakhill, J. V., Barners, M. A., & Bryant, P. E. (2001). Comprehension skill, inference making ability and their relation to knowledge. *Memory and Cognition*, *29*, 850-859.

Campbell, J. (2008). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (3rd ed.). Princeton, NJ: New World Library.

Carnine, D. W., Silbert, J., Kame'enui, E., Tarver, S. G., & Jungjohanna, K. J. (2006). *Teaching struggling and at-risk readers: A direct instruction approach*. Columbus, OH: Pearson.

Carrington, V. (2004). Texts and literacies of the Shi Jinrui. *British Journal of Sociology Education*, *25*(2), 215-228.

Carter, J. B. (2009). Going graphic: Understanding what graphic novels are — and aren't — can

help teachers make the best use of this literary form. *Educational Leadership*, *66*(6), *68-73.* Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-

leadership/mar09/vol66/num06/Going-Graphic.aspx

Cary, S. (2004). *Going graphic: Comics at work in the multilingual classroom.* Portsmouth, NH:

Heinemann.

Catts, H. W. (2009). The narrow view of reading promotes a broad view of comprehension.

Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, *40*, 178-183.

Caverly, D. C., Nicholson, S. A., & Radcliffe, R. (2004). The effectiveness of strategic reading

instruction for college developmental readers. *Journal of College Reading and Learning*,

35(1), 25-49.

Chase, S. E. (2008). Narrative inquiry: Multiple lenses, approaches, voices. In N. K. Denzin &

Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*. (3rd ed.), (pp. 57-

94). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chazan, D. (2000). *Beyond formulas in teaching mathematics and teaching dynamics of the high

school*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Chimera, R. (2007). *Learning disabilities association of America*. Retrieved from

http://www.ldanatl.org/

Chun, C. W. (2009). Critical literacies and graphic novels for English language learners:

Teaching Maus. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *53*(2), 144–153.

doi: 10.1598/JAAL.53.2.5

Clandinin, D. J. (1992). Narrative and story in teacher education. In T. Russell & H. Munby

(Eds.), *Teachers and teaching: From classroom to reflection* (pp. 124-137). London,

England: Falmer Press.

Clandinin, D. J. (1995). Learning to live new stories of teacher education. In S. Majhanovitch (Ed.), *Re-forming teacher education: Problems and prospects* (pp. 175-185). London, England: Althouse Press.

Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry: A methodology for studying lived experience. *Research Studies in Music Education*, *27*(1), 44-54. Retrieved from http://rsm.sagepub.com/content/27/1/44

Clandinin, J., & Connelly, F. M. (1996). Teachers' professional knowledge landscapes: Teacher stories - stories of teachers - school stories - stories of schools. *Educational Researcher, 25*(3), 24 -30.

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience in story in qualitative research.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Clandinin, D. J., Huber, J., Huber, M., Murphy, S., Murray Orr, A., Pearce, M., & Steeves, P. (2006). *Composing diverse identities: Narrative inquiries into the interwoven lives of children and teachers*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Clemente, Bill. (2011). Comics as literature: The graphic novel, English 360. Peru State College. Peru, Nebraska. Retrieved from http://www.hpcnet.org/peru/schoolartsandsciences /language/clemente/fallclass2007/graphic/syllabus#x

Cohn, N. (2007). A visual lexicon. *The Public Journal of Semiotics, 1*(1):53-84.

Collins, J. L., & Gunning, T. G. (Eds.) (2009). *Building struggling students' higher level literacy: Practical ideas, powerful solutions*. Newark, NJ: International Reading Association.

Colonna, D. M. (2003). College developmental readers' early literacy experiences. *The Journal of College Literacy and Learning*, *32*, 62-79.

Conlon, E., Sanders, M., & Zapart, S. (2004). Temporal processing in poor adult readers. *Neuropsychologia*, *42*, 142-157.

Connors, S. (2010). *Multimodal reading: A case study of high school students in an after-school graphic novel reading group*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3476036)

Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (Eds.). (2000). *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures*. London, England: Routledge.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crilley, M. (2009). Getting Students to Write Using Comics. *Teacher Librarian*, *37*(1), 28-31.

Davies, M. B. (2007). *Doing a successful research project: Using qualitative or quantitative methods*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

DeCandido, K. (1991). Picture this: Graphic novels in libraries. *Library Journal*, *3*(15), 550-155.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2003). *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dewey, J. (1997). *DMCA Overview: Experience and education*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

The digital millennium copyright act of 1998 (1998). U.S. Copyright Office Summary. December 1998. Retrieved from http://www.copyright.gov/legislation/dmca.pdf

Duke, N. K. (2005). Comprehension of what for what: Comprehension as a nonunitary construct. In S. G. Paris. & S. A. Stahl (Eds.), *Children's reading comprehension and assessment* (pp. 93-106). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Edwards, B. (2008). *Motivation and middle school readers: Graphic novels, comic books, and free voluntary reading time*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3304228)

Edwards, D. (2009). Tracing literacy journeys: The use of the literacy autobiography in preservice teacher education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *34*(4). Retrieved from http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol34/iss4/6/

Eisner, W. (1996). *Graphic storytelling and visual narrative*. Tamarac, FL: Poorhouse.

Ennis, G. (1996-2002). *Hitman.* New York, NY: DC Comics.

Falk-Ross, F (2010). Lenses for considering research in new literacies. Panel presentation for the annual conference of the international reading association, Chicago, IL.

Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. London, England: Longman.

Fillingham, L. A. (1993) *Foucault for beginners*. New York, NY: Writers and Readers.

Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (1994). Interviewing: The Art of Science. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 361–376). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (2008). The Interview: From neutral stance to political involvement. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (3ed.). (pp.458-498). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ford, L. C. (1994). *Liberal education and the canon: Five great texts to speak to contemporary social issues*. Columbia, SC: Camden House.

Fox, S. L. (1999). Inviting students to join the literacy conversation: Toward a collaborative

pedagogy for academic literacy. In K. Weese, S. L. Fox., & S. Green (Eds.), *Teaching

academic literacy: The uses of teacher-research in developing a writing program* (pp.

21-44). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Franzak, J. K. (2006). Zoom: A review of the literature on marginalized adolescent readers,

literacy theory, and policy implications. *Review of Educational Research*, *76*(2), 209-248.

Frey, N., & Fisher, D. (2004). Using graphic novels, anime, and the Internet in an urban high

school. *The English Journal*, *93*(3), 19-25.

Fukunaga, N. (2006). Those anime students: Foreign language literacy development through

Japanese popular culture. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy 50*(3), 206- 222.

Gallagher, K. (2009). *Readicide: How schools are killing reading and what you can do about it*.

Portland, OR: Stenhouse.

Galley, M. (2004) Going graphic: Educators tiptoe into realm of comics. *Education Week*,

23(23), 6.

Garcia, P. A. (2009). *Comic books and the experience of self-fulfillment: A study with high

school students*. (Doctoral dissertation)*.* Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses

database. (UMI No. 3348569)

Gee, J. P. (1991). A linguistic approach to narrative. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, *1*(1),

15-39.

Gee, J. P. (2004). *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy*. New York,

NY: Palgrave MacMillan.

Gee, J. P. (2008). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourse*. (3rd ed.). New York,

NY: Routledge.

Genat, B. (2009). Building emergent situated knowledge in participatory action research. *Action research*, *7*(1), 101-115.

George, J. D., & Mitchell, J. P. (1996). What do Superman, Captain America, and Spiderman have in common? The case for comic books. *Gifted Education International*, *11*(2), 91-94.

Gere, A. R. (2001). Introduction. In A. Ruggles Gere & P.Shaheen (Eds.), *Making American literatures in high school and college: Classroom practices in teaching English*, (Vol. 31, pp. ix-xiv). Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.

Gibson, M. (2009). The war of the worlds? Classics, comics and the ways of thinking about adaptations. *NATE Classroom*, *9*, 10-13.

Gibson, M. (2010). Dr Peter Venkman: 'Scuse me Egon? You said crossing the streams was bad!...' Dr Ray Stanz: 'Cross the streams...' Comics, manga, graphic novels and the challenge and excitement of cross-curricular work (with apologies to Ghostbusters [1984]) *NATE Classroom*, *10*, 10-12.

Giorgis, C., Johnson, N. J., Bonomo, A., Colbert, C., Conner, A., Kauffman, G., & Kulesza, D. (1999). Visual literacy. *The Reading Teacher*, *53*, 146–153.

Glutek, T. (1986). *Differences in children's perception of gender roles in comic books and parents.* Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. ML32011)

Goodman, K. (1981). Letter to the editors. *Reading Research Quarterly. 16*: 477-478.

Gonzalez, V. (2001). The role of socioeconomic and sociocultural factors in language-minority children's development: An ecological research view. *Bilingual Research Journal*, *2*, 1-30. Retrieved from www.collegeboard.com/about/association/.../virginiagonzalez.pdf

Gorman, M. (2003). *Getting graphic! Using graphic novels to promote literacy with preteens and teens*. Worthington, OH: Linworth.

Guthrie, J. T. (2004). Differentiating instruction for struggling readers within the CORI classroom. In J. T. Guthrie, A. Wigfield, & K. C. Perencevich (Eds.), *Motivating reading comprehension: Concept-oriented reading instruction* (pp. 173-194). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Gunning, T. G. (2009). Struggling readers and higher level literacy. In J. L. Collins & T. G. Gunning (Eds.), *Building struggling students' higher level literacy: Practical ideas, powerful solutions* (pp. 1-12). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Grzanka, P. (2010) ARHU106: Practical Application in the Arts "Graphic Novels and Graphic Cultures." The Honors Humanities Program at the University of Maryland. Retrieved from http://www.honorshumanities.umd.edu/Graphic%20Novel%20Course%20Syllabus%20Spring%202010.pdf

Hadgood, M. (2003). New media and online literacies: No age left behind. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *38*(3), 387-391.

Harris, W. J., & King, D. R. (1982). Achievement, sociometric status, and personality characteristics of children selected by their teachers as having learning and /or behavior problems. *Psychology in the Schools*, *19*, 452-457.

Hallenbeck, P. (1976). Remediating with comic strips. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *9*, 11-15.

Hammond, H. K. (2009). *Graphic novels and multimodal literacy: A reader response study*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3344687)

Harvard University. (n.d.). *DMCA Overview*. Retrieved 2012, from Digital Millennium Copyright Act: http://www.dmca.harvard.edu/dmca_overview.php

Hedin, L. R., & Conderman, G. (2010). Teaching students to comprehend informational text through rereading. *The Reading Teacher*, *63*(7), 556–565. doi:10.1598/RT.63.7.3

Helman, A. (2010). *A Cognitive-Behavioral Anger Management Comic Book for Adolescents*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3436967)

Henry, J. (1995). *If not now: Developmental readers in the college classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Hinchley, J., & Levy, B. A. (1988). Developmental and individual differences in reading comprehension. *Cognition and instruction*, *5*(1), 3-47.

Jackson, J., & Allen, G. (2007). Using narrative informational book circles, connection charts, and notebooks to showcase science as a human endeavor. *Science Scope*, *31*(2), 26-30.

Jacobs, G. E. (2004). Complicating contexts: Issues of methodology in researching the language and literacies of instant messaging. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *39*, 394–406.

Jakubowski, T. G., & Dembo, M. H. (2004). The relationship of self-efficacy, identity style, and stage of change with academic self-regulation. *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, *35*(10), 7- 24.

Jones, J., & Pooré, E. (2008). Motivating readers: What inspiring teachers want to know. *The Virginia English Bulletin*, *57*(2), 41-49.

Jung, C. G. (1926). *Psychological types* (H.G. Bayne, Trans.). New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace.

Kamhi, A. G. (2005). Finding beauty in the ugly facts about reading comprehension. In H. W.

    Catts, & A. G. Kamhi (Eds.), *The connections between language and reading disabilities*

    (pp. 201-212). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Kimmel, A. J. (1988). *Ethics and values in applied social research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Kintsch, W., & Kintsch, E. (2005). Comprehension. In S. G. Paris., & S. A. Stahl (Eds.),

    Children's reading comprehension and assessment (pp. 71-92). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence

    Erlbaum.

Krashen, S. D. (2004). *The power of reading: Insights from the research* (2nd ed.). Westport, CT:

    Libraries Unlimited.

Krueger, R. A. (1988). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Beverly Hills, CA:

    Sage.

Kucer, S. B. (2001). *Dimensions of literacy: A conceptual base for teaching reading and writing*

    in school settings. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Labov, W. (1982). Speech actions and reactions in personal narrative. In D. Tannen (Ed.),

    Analyzing discourse: Text and talk (pp. 219-247). Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Press.

Lacan, J. (1998). The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud. In D. Richter

    (Ed.), *The critical tradition: Classic texts and contemporary trends (*A. Sheridan, Trans),

    (pp. 1045-1063). Boston, MA: Bedford.

Lankshear, C. (1999). Literacy studies in education: Disciplined developments in post-

    disciplinary age. In M. Peters (1999). *After the disciplines* (pp. 199-228). Westport, CT:

    Greenwood Press. Retrieved from www.everydayliteracies.net/literacystudies.html

Lauter, P. (Ed.). (1998). Introduction. *Heath anthology of American literature* (Vol. 3) (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Houghton.

Lawler, S. (2002). Narrative in social action. In T. May (Ed.). *Qualitative research in action*, (pp. 242-258). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Leckbee, J. (2005). I got graphic! *Young Adult Library Services*, *3*, 30-31.

Leu, D. J. (2002). The new literacies: Research on reading instruction with the Internet. In A. E. Farstrup & S. J. Samuels (Eds.), *What research has to say about reading instruction* (3rd ed). (pp. 310–336). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Leu, D. J., & Kinzer, C. K. (2000). The convergence of literacy instruction with networked technologies for information and communication. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *35*, 108–127.

Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R., & Zilber, T. (1998). *Narrative research: Reading, analysis, and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Liederholm, T., Everson, M. G., van den Broek, P., Crittenden, A., Mischinski, M., & Samuels, J. (2000). Effects of causal text revisions on more- and less-skilled readers' comprehension of easy and difficult texts. *Cognition and Instruction*, *18*(4), 525-556.

Linda, S. (2007). Literacy autobiographies in a university ESL class. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, *63*(4), 563- 573.

Long, D. L., Oppy, B. J., & Seely, M. R. (1994). Individual differences in the time course of inferential process. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, *20*, 1456-1470.

Lucas, T. (2005). Language awareness and comprehension through puns among ESL learners. *Language Awareness*, *14*(4), 221-238.

Lyon, G. R., & Moats, L. C. (1997). Critical conceptual and methodological considerations in reading intervention research. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *30*, 578-588.

Maderazo, C., Martens, P., Croce, K., Martens, R., Doyle, M., Aghalarov, S., & Noble, R. (2010). Beyond picture walks: Revaluing picture books as written and pictorial texts. *Language Arts*, *87*(6), 437–446.

Mallia, G. (2007). Learning from sequence: The use of comics in instruction. *ImageText T: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, *3*(3). Retrieved from h*ttp://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v3_3/mallia/*

Malnarich, G., Dusenberry, P., Sloan, B., Swinton, J., & van Slyck, P. (2003). *The pedagogy of possibilities: Developmental education college-level studies and learning communities*. Olympia, WA: The Evergreen State College.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1999). *Designing qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Martin, E. (2001). Popular culture in the American literature class. In A. R. Gere, & P. Shaheen (Eds.), *Making American literatures in high school and college: Classroom practices in teaching English*, (Vol. 31, pp. 97-103). Urbana, Il: National Council of Teachers of English.

Mauthner, M., Jessop, J., Miller, T., & Birch, M. (2002). *Ethics in qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Maxwell, M. (1997). The dismal state of required developmental reading programs: Roots, causes and solutions. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 415501)

McCloud, S. (1993). *Understanding comics: The invisible art*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.

McCloud, S. (2000). *Reinventing Comics*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.

McTaggart, J. (2005). Using comics and graphic novels to encourage reluctant readers. *Reading Today*, *23*(2), 46.

McVee, M, B. (2004). Narrative and the exploration of culture in teachers' discussions of literacy, identity, self, and other. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *20*, 881-899.

Moats, L. C. (2005). *Language essentials for teachers of reading and spelling. Module 6: Digging for meaning: Teaching text comprehension.* Boston, MA: Sopris West.

Monnin, K. (2008). *Perceptions of new literacies with the graphic novel "Bone."* (Doctoral dissertation)*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3319049)

Moore, A. (1987). *Batman: Killing joke.* New York, NY: DC Comics.

Morgan, B. (2005). Second language literacies: Trying out the "Tools" of the trade. *New Horizons for Learning*, *11(2)*. n. pag. Retrieved from http://www.marthalakecov.org/~building/strategi es/literacy/morgan.htm

Morrison, T., Bryan, G., & Chilcoat, G. (2002). Using student generated comic books in the classroom. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *45*, 758–767.

Mortimore, S. (2009). *From picture to word to the world: A multimodal, cultural studies approach to teaching graphic novels in the English classroom.* (Doctoral dissertation)*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3376937)

Muth, E. D. (Ed.) (1989). *Children's comprehension of text: Research into practice*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Nash, S. S. (2008). *A fresh look at college developmental reading*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3319522)

National Center for Education Statistics. (2004). *National Assessment of Educational Progress*[online]. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/

National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). T*he Reading Literacy of U.S. Fourth-Grade Students*. Retrieved from nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008017.pdf

National Institute of Health. (1979). *The Belmont report regulations and ethical guidelines office of human subject research*. Retrieved from http://ohsr.od.nih.gov/guidelines/belmont.html#goc3

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction* (NIH Publication No. 00-4769). Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

New Roles, Rules and Responsibilities for Academic Institutions (2002). *The TEACH Act. Copyright Clearance Center*. Retrieved from http://www.copyright.com/media/pdfs/CR-Teach-Act.pdf (enacted).

North, S. (1940, May 8). Editorial. *Chicago Daily News*. p. 4b.

Northcutt, N., & McCoy, D. (2004). *Interactive Qualitative Analysis: A Systems Method for Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Oakhill, J., & Cain, K. (2007). Introduction to comprehension development. In K. Cain & J. Oakhill (Eds.), *Children's comprehension problems in oral and written language: A cognitive perspective* (pp. 3-41). New York, NY: Guilford.

Pabis, D., & Hamer. A. (2008). *Building college vocabulary* strategies (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Pearson Prentice-Hall.

Pagnucci, G. (2004). *Living the narrative life: Stories as a tool for making meaning*.

>Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Pagnucci, G. (2007). Special topic- The Literature of comic books, graphic novels, and

>superheroes, English 481. Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Retrieved from

>http://www.english.iup.edu/pagnucci/courses/481-Superheroes/default.htm

Paris, S. G., & Stahl, S. A. (2005). *Children's reading comprehension and assessment*. Mahwah,

>NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Park, G. (2008). *Unsilencing the Silenced: The Journeys of five East Asian Women with*

>*implications for TESOL teacher education*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from

>ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3222642)

Park, G. (2009). *"*I listened to Korean society. I always heard that women should be this way…":

>The Negotiation and Construction of Gendered Identities in Claiming a Dominant

>Language and Race in the U.S. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education, 8(2), 174-*

>*190.*

Park, G. (2010). Providing Meaningful Writing Opportunities in the Community College: The

>Cultural and Linguistic Autobiographical Writing Project. In S. Kasten's (Ed.), *TESOL*

>*Classroom Practice: Writing*. (pp. 61-68). Alexandria, VA.: TESOL.

Park, G. (2011). Adult English Language Learners Constructing and Sharing their Stories and

>Experiences: The Cultural and Linguistic Autobiography (CLA) Writing Project. *TESOL*

>*Journal, 2*(2), 156-172. doi:10.5054/tj.2011.250378

Perin, D., Kselman, A., & Monopoli, M. (2003). The academic writing of community college

>remedial students: Text and learner variables. *Higher Education*, *45*(1), 19-42. Retrieved

>from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3447512

Peters, T. (2009). The future of reading. *Library Journal*, *134*(18), 18-22.

Peterson, S. (2004). Defining developmental college readers and learners (Editorial Comments). *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, *35*(1), 6-8.

Poerschke, V. (2005). *The reading interests of high school students described by their print and non-print reading choices*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3195962)

Pikulski, J. J., & Chard, D.J. (2005). Fluency: Bridge Between Decoding and Reading Comprehension. *The Reading Teacher*, *58*(6), 510–519. doi: 10.1598/RT.58.6.2

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

Rapp, D. N. (2011). Comic books' latest plot twist: Enhancing literacy instruction. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *93*(4), 64-67.

Reibman, R. (2004). Forward. In F. Wertham, *Seduction of the innocent*. Laurel, NY: Main Road Books.

Richek, M. A., List, L. K., & Lerner, J. W. (1989). *Reading problems: Assessment and teaching strategies*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Risko, V. J., Walker-Dalhouse, D., Bridges, E. S., & Wilson, A. (2011). Drawing on text features for reading comprehension and composing. *Reading Teacher*, *64*(5), 376-378. doi:10.1598

Robin, M. (2009). "No thanks, those are boy books": A feminist cultural analysis of graphic novels as curricular materials. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3331264)

Romanelli, M. H. (2009). *Exploring the culture and cognition of outsider literacy practices in adult readers of graphic novels*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No.3372600)

Rose, G. (2007). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to the interpretation of visual materials* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ruddell, R. B., & Ruddell, M. R. (1995). *Teaching children to read and write: Becoming an influential teacher*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Ruppel, K. (2006). Getting graphic: Connecting with students using graphic novels. Retrieved from http://www.mcelmeel.com/curriculum/yalit/ruppel_graphicnovels.pdf

Saracino, G. M. (Ed.). (2004). *Writing for scholarly publication in English. Issues for nonnative speakers.* Retrieved from books.google.com/books?isbn=8881765691

Sarbin, T. R. (1986). The narrative as a root metaphor in psychology. In T. R. Sarbin (Ed.), *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct*. New York, NY: Praeger.

Scarborough, H. S. (2005). Developmental relationships between language and reading: Reconciling a beautiful hypothesis with some ugly facts. In H. W. Catts, & A. G. Kamhi (Eds.), *The connections between language and reading disabilities* (pp. 3-24). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Schartz, A., & Rubinstien- Ãvila, E. (2006). Understanding the Manga Hype: Uncovering the multimodality of comic-book literacies. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *50*(1), 40-49.

Schmar-Dobler, E. (2003). Reading on the Internet: The link between literacy and technology. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *47*, 80–85.

Scholes, R. (1985). *Textual power: Literacy theory and the teaching of English*. New Haven, CT: Yale University.

Schwarz, G. E. (2002). Graphic novels for multiple literacies. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *46*(3). 262-265. Retrieved from http://www.readingonline.org/newliteracies/lit_index.asp?HREF=/newliteracies/jaal/11-02_column/index.html

Seaman, G. (2001). What students need to know about the canon? In A. R. Gere & P. Shaheen (Eds.), *Making American literatures in high school and college: Classroom practices in teaching English*, (Vol. 31, pp. 5-9). Urbana, Il: National Council of Teachers of English.

Seelow, D. (2010). Voices from the field: The graphic novel as advanced literacy tool. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, *2*(1), 57-64.

Scholes, R. (1985). *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English*. New Haven: Yale University.

Shaywitz, S. E., & Shaywitz, B. A. (2006). Armed with the facts: The science of reading and its implications for teaching. In P. Blaunsten. & R., Lyon (Eds.), *Why kids can't read: Challenging to status quo in education* (pp. 9-30). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Simon, L. (2008). I wouldn't choose it, but I don't regret reading it: Scaffolding students engagement with complex texts. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, *52*(2), 134-143. doi: 10.1598/JAAL.52.2.4

Simpson, M. L., & Rush, L. (2003). College students' beliefs, strategy employment, transfer, and academic performance: An examination across three academic disciplines. *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, *33*, 146-156.

Smith, M. W., & Wilhelm, J. D. (2002). *Reading don't fix no Chevys.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Snow, C. E., & Sweet, A. P. (2003). Reading for comprehension. In A. P. Sweet & C. E. Snow (Eds.), *Rethinking reading comprehension* (pp. 1-11). New York, NY: Guilford.

Snowball, C. (2005). Teenage reluctant reader and graphic novels. *Young Adult Literary Service*, *3*(4), 43-45.

Spack, R. (1997). The acquisition of academic literacy in a second language: A longitudinal case study. *Written Communication*, *14*, 3-62.

Stahl, K. D., & McKenna, M. C. (Eds.) (2006). *Reading research at work: Foundations of effective practice*. New York, NY: Guilford.

Stainbrook, E. J. (2003). *Reading comics: A theoretical analysis of textuality and discourse in the comics medium*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. AAT 3108870).

Stearns, P. N. (1993). *Meaning over memory: Recasting the teaching of culture and history*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina.

Sterling North, T. (1940, May 8). Editorial. *Chicago Daily News*.

Sweet, A. (2005). Assessment of reading comprehension: The RAND reading study group vision. In S. G. Paris & S. A. Stahl (Eds.), *Children's reading comprehension and assessment* (pp. 3-12). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Thompson, T. (2007). Embracing reluctance when classroom teachers shy away from graphic books. *Library Media Connection*, *25*(4), 29.

Tobin, L. (1993). *Writing relationships: What really happens in the composition class*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann.

Trelease, J. (2006). *The read-aloud handbook.* New York, NY: Penguin.

Trimmer, J. F. (Ed.). (1997). *Narrative as Knowledge: Tales of the Teaching Life*. Portsmouth,

NH:Boynton/Cook.

Turner, G. Y. (1992). Motivating reluctant readers: What can educators do? *Reading*

Improvement, *29*, 50-55.

Ujiie, J. K. (2005). *Read junk. It's good for you: Dispelling the myths surrounding quality*

literature, comic books, series books and bestsellers. (Doctoral dissertation). Available

from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3180341)

Valeri-Gold, M., & Errico, M. (1998). The use of memoirs with college developmental readers.

Journal of College Literacy and Learning, *29*, 25-40.

Valeri-Gold, M., & Commander, N. E. (2005). Family influence on college developmental

reading. *Journal of College Literacy and Learning*, *33*, 24-35.

Ward, B. A., & Young, T. A. (2011). Reading graphically: Comics and graphic Novels for

readers from kindergarten through high school. *Reading Horizons*, *50*(4), 283-296.

Webster, L., & Mertova, P. (2007). *Using narrative inquiry as a research method: An*

introduction to using critical event narrative analysis in research on learning and

teaching. New York, NY: Routledge.

Wertham, F. (2004). *Seduction of the innocent*. Laurel, NY: Main Road Books.

Westmoreland County Community College. (2009). *Westmoreland county community college*

2009-10 college catalog & student handbook. Youngwood, PA: Author.

White, B. (2011). The world in words and pictures: How graphic novels can help to increase

reading comprehension for students with hearing loss. *Journal of the American*

Association of School Librarians, *39* (3), 18-25.

Wigfield, A., & Guthrie, J. (1997). Motivation for reading: An overview. *Educational Psychologist*, *52*(2), 57-58.

Willard, T. (1965). The teacher and new approaches to American literature. In L. Leary (Ed.), *The teacher and the American literature* (pp. 3-10). Chicago, IL: National Council of Teachers of English Champaign.

Willingham, D., & Price, D. (2009). Theory to practice vocabulary instruction in community college developmental education reading classes: What research tells us (Report). *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, *40*(1), 91-106.

Wittrock, J. J. (2003). *Read all about it: Finding ways to boost content comprehension and reading interest in an eighth-grade science classroom.* Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 1416356)

Wohler, K. (2011). Copyright Guidelines for Online Faculty at Washburn University. Retrieved from http://www.washburn.edu/copyright/faculty/copyrightprimer.html

Wolpert, M. A. (2010). Superheroes in the primary classroom. *English 4-11*, *40*, 11-16.

Zimmerman, B. J., Bandura, A., & Martinez-Pons, M. (1992). Self-motivation for academic attainment: The role of self-efficacy beliefs and personal goal setting. *American Educational Research Journal*, *29*(3), 663-676.

Zimmerman, B. J., & Kitsantas, A. (1997). Developmental phases in self-regulation: Shifting from process goals to outcome goals. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *89*, 29-36.

Informed Consent Form

Using Comic Books and Graphic Novels to Improve and Facilitate Community College

Students' Literacy

You are invited to participate in this research study conducted by Brian P. Burke, a doctoral candidate attending Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate in this study. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask the researcher. You are eligible to participate because you are an adult over the age of 18, and have selected to enroll in RDG 080 Intermediate Reading.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how comic books and graphic novels can improve a reader's comprehension and challenge the established curriculum idea that comic books and graphic novels have no educational value as a primary literary genre in the college level academic courses. Participation in this study will require approximately 75 minutes of your time twice a week (plus outside preparation) during which the focus group sessions and individual interviews will be tape-recorded.

First you will take the Nelson Denny Reading Pre Test to obtain the first half of the quantifiable data. Then you will spend the first 4 weeks of the semester writing your literacy biography talking about your experiences of your own literacy development. Next, you will participate in the class with assignments and keep a reading journal where you will write according to specific prompts. Every other week, one "Happy Hour" focus group will take the place of a class and give you a chance to voice concerns or questions about the readings. It will also be the goal of the researcher to guide and prompt the subjects to address the larger issues from the readings and their overall comprehension of the traditional class text

books and the visual narratives, i.e., comic books and graphic novels. At different points of this study, follow up questions for clarifications on your work in the class will be addressed in the form of individual interviews that will be audio taped. Finally, you will take the Nelson Denny Reading Post Test measure if there was an improvement in your scores. After the data has been transcribed, the researcher (Mr. Burke) may need to contact you at a later date for further data and interview clarification.

There are no known or foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this research. However, you may find this kind of curriculum interesting and the information you self-report during the process may add to your general understanding of your own literacy. The information gained from this research may ultimately be useful in that it should help the researcher and educators better understand the sophisticated nature of literacy skill sets and cultural concepts needed to navigate and interpret multi-modal, multi-media visually-constructed texts.

Your participation in this study is <u>voluntary</u>. You are free to decide not to participate in this study, or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your grade or relationship (if any) with the researcher or the researcher's institution (IUP.) Your decision to withdraw will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence by the researcher. Your protocol data and interview responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms so that your personal information will remain protected. Please be advised that the information obtained through the study may be published in scholarly journals or presented at scholarly conferences, but your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement on the final page of this packet, and return it to the researcher. You will be given an additional unsigned version of these forms to take with you for your records. If you decide to withdraw confidentially from this research study, you may contact the branch campus faculty coordinator, Grace Thachik. In addition, if you choose not to participate and wish to directly notify the researcher of your withdrawal at the address below:

Researcher: Brian P. Burke

Graduate Student and Doctoral Candidate

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

English Department: Composition / TESOL

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Gian Pagnucci

Contact information for Brian Burke:

1071 School Street.

Indiana, PA 15701

(724) 467-2962

doc55smiley@gmail.com

Contact information for Dr. Pagnucci:

English Department

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Indiana, PA 15705

(724) 357 – 2261

pagnucci@iup.edu

Contact information for Grace Thachik:

Coordinator, Indiana County Community

College Center of WCCC

Indiana, PA 15701

(724) 357-1404

thachikg@wccc.edu

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

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed consent form to keep in my possession.

Name (PLEASE PRINT):

Signature:

Date:

Phone number, email or location where you can be reached:

Best days and times to reach you:

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

Date:

Researcher's signature:

Introduction and Exit Letters: Student's Attitude Towards Reading

RDG 080 Intermediate Reading
Mr. Burke

Introduction Letter on Attitude Toward Reading:

Please write a letter of narrative (your own story) that shows your attitude towards reading. Please consider the following questions:

Describe your feelings about reading.

Write your reading activity you have had recently.

Write some of reading activities that you remember. Explain why you think you

remember these activities and what made them fun/boring.

Exit Letter on Attitude Toward Reading:

Please write a letter of narrative (your own story) that shows your attitude towards reading. Please consider the following questions:

Describe your current feelings/attitude towards reading.

Write your reading activity that has changed your attitude. Did comic books and graphic

novels change my attitude toward reading?

Explain why you have changed your attitudes toward reading if you have. Do you see

your attitude towards reading has been changed during the semester in this course? Why

or why not?

APPENDIX C

Literacy Autobiography

RDG 080 Intermediate Reading
Mr. Burke

What are your earliest memories about reading? Do any of them take place before your formal education at school? How did you learn to read? Was it a positive experience? Was it a negative experience? Please be specific. Lastly, how do you use reading in your life?

On a specific note, what have you learned about literacy (reading), and where have you learned it? Have the lessons been valuable? What have your experiences been (good and bad) with literacy (defined for now as reading and writing) over the years, and how have they shaped your attitude toward yourself as a writer? Do you have a definition of literacy other than the one I pose above? You should use your autobiography as a way to address this question: What is the meaning and importance of "literacy" at the dawn of the third millennium?)

Here are some further questions to help you get started. What *is* literacy (reading)? Is it possible to become literate outside of schools? What, if any, is the relationship between school-based and non school-based literacy instruction? How has literacy (reading) been taught to you? Indeed, what counts as "instruction?" Double-space this essay throughout.

A successful paper will show that you've taken the questions above and made them your own. That is, you will think not only *about* them, but *through* them as well, exploring the issues they raise for you. Further, a successful paper will establish a context for your story from the beginning and will integrate plot (telling your literacy stories) with analysis (explaining your stories and why they are important).

A less successful paper will focus on plot (as defined above) at the expense of analysis. Such a paper will show your willingness to think about literacy in your life but not necessarily your willingness to think through issues of literacy.

An unsuccessful paper will simply answer the questions, probably in the order I pose them. It will suggest your (perhaps unconscious) unwillingness to engage questions of literacy critically.

Prepare a workshop-ready draft for _____. Submit a draft for my review no later than _____.

Reading Report #1: Novel (Book) Report

RDG 080 Intermediate Reading
Mr. Burke

For the first reading report assignment, we will apply the reading theories from Chapters 1-3 of the *College Reading Series* text to a novel of your choosing. What is a "Novel"? A novel is a book containing a story of fiction that has a plot and a rising action.

PART ONE: When you acquire your novel, read the novel first. As you do this, look at this novel by chapter to chapter and ask yourself, "What is the main idea of this chapter? How does the action of this chapter support the main idea of the chapter?"

Part Two: Write a brief synopsis of the novel without giving away the ending or plot twists. This should be no longer than 4 sentences. As you do this, think of yourself as the publicist of the novel. You want people to read this text, so you have to write a creative synopsis that will hook the potential reader's interest.

Part Three: Write a critique of this novel. What was appealing about this novel? Explain the reasons why you chose this novel for this assignment. Did the novel exceed your expectations? If so, then you liked reading it. Why did you like reading the novel? If you did not like reading the novel, then why was the novel unpleasant? Please explain.

Also, what did you learn from the reading the novel?

Part Four: What is your attitude towards reading a book novel? Lastly, what role does your attitude play over all in reading?

Any other comments?

Reading Report #2: Comic Book Report

RDG 080 Intermediate Reading
Mr. Burke

The purpose of this assignment is for you to dissect a visual narrative into its different hierarchical parts. Much like reading a "traditional" text-only passage, the visual narrative has a thesis, main ideas, and supporting details. We have covered these concepts in Chapters 3-5 of the *College Reading Series* text. For this paper, your task is to read a comic book (not a graphic novel) that is 20-22 pages of actual story content and break it down into an essay that explains where the thesis is, the main ideas and how they relate to the supporting details.

Please use the questions to help you format your paper:

1. Look at title (cover) page. What is the thesis of the comic book? To determine the "thesis", use the steps in Chapter 4 for determining the implied main idea.

2. Approach each page of the comic book story/narrative as a having its own main idea. What is the main idea of each page? Look at the panels of text and art and how they exist as sequential icons. How do they contribute to the main idea of the story?

3. Overall, how do the individual panels support the thesis (from the cover)? Is the cover misleading at all?

4. Author's intent – What do you think is the author's intent for this story? Look at the artwork. What conclusions can you make about the artist's intentions of drawing?

5. Thinking Abstract: What is the political agenda of the comic book? Is any propaganda employed in the comic book that would be similar to a political cartoon?

The format of the report should be typed, size 12 NEW ROMAN font and double-spaced.

APPENDIX F

Reading Report #3: Graphic Novel Report

RDG 080 Intermediate Reading
Mr. Burke

For this last reading report assignment, we will be applying the reading theories from chapters 5-9 to the *College Reading Series* text to a Graphic Novel of your choosing.

What constitutes a graphic novel? A graphic novel is collection of periodic comic books that span an entire plot or story arc. A graphic novel can also be a stand-alone volume of work that depicts a story in a graphic way using pictures/drawings/paintings and dialogue with minimal narration. Length of the graphic novel varies from 48 pages to over a 1000 pages. For this assignment, choose a graphic novel you can read in a week's time.

PART ONE: When you acquire your graphic novel, read the graphic novel. As you do this, look at the graphic novel by chapter to chapter, scene to scene, action panel to action panel. As shown in chapter 6 of the *Effective Reader* text, divide up the graphic novel into an outline. For example:

Chapter 1 – What is the main idea of this chapter.

Scene 1 – who, what, when, where, why and how.

Supporting details of the event #1: What happens in each panel?

Supporting details of the event #2: What happens in each panel?

Supporting details of the event #3: What happens in each panel?

Scene 2 – who, what, when, where, why and how.

Chapter 2 – What is the main idea of this chapter.

Scene 1 – who, what, when, where, why and how.

Scene 2 – who, what, when, where, why and how.

Keep in mind that each chapter usually constitutes an individual issue/comic of the collected volume. Each issue usually has 3-5 scenes in it with a minimum of two action sequences per scene.

Part Two: Write a brief synopsis of the graphic novel without giving away the ending or plot twists. This should be no longer than 4 sentences. As you do this, think of yourself as the publicist of the graphic novel. You want people to read this text, so you have to write a creative synopsis that will hook the potential reader's interest.

Part Three: Write a critique of this graphic novel. What was appealing about this graphic novel? Explain the reasons why you chose this graphic novel for this assignment. Did the graphic novel exceed your expectations? If so, then you liked reading it. Why did you like the reading the graphic novel? If you did not like reading the graphic novel, then why was the graphic novel unpleasant? Please explain.

Also, what did you learn from the reading the graphic novel?

Part Four: What is your attitude towards reading the graphic novel? So far, you have had to read political cartoons and report on the subtext of it; to read a comic book and demonstrate your understanding of the thesis, main ideas and supporting details in relation to the pictures and text; and to read a novel of your choice and identify the main idea of each chapter. Of the comic book, the graphic novel and the regular novel, as well as the text book, which was the most pleasurable to read? Which allowed you to retain the most knowledge? Which was the easier for you to read and understand? Which was the fastest read and Why?

Lastly, what role does your attitude play over all in the reading assignments?

Part Five: How was reading the comic book, the novel, and the graphic novel similar and or different from the other? Be specific. If you had a choice to pick between the three, which would you prefer to see more of in the classroom.

*Any other comments?

APPENDIX G

Students' Reflective Journal (Optional)

RDG 080 Intermediate Reading
Mr. Burke

The reflective journal is optional and worth bonus points. You will keep track of your learning experiences with reading and writing in the course. You may discuss what you are writing, what you are reading in relation to your written work, and how one reading relates to other reading you are doing or have done. If you don't have much to write, this might help you if you try to answer the following questions:

1. Keep track of any writing/reading you have done or one of the reading reports/literacy autobiography you submitted during the semester. For example, what did you read; how long did it take you to finish; when and where did you read the material; what did you liked most about reading the material; and what practices were helpful?

2. Write what you think and how you feel about reading/writing assignment. You will have to talk about each individual writing assignment after you have completed it. The papers you would talk about would be any of the reading reports and the literacy autobiography.

3. Do you switch your attitude/identity/strategy when reading certain types of reading?

4. What is do you consider worthy of reading or "good reading"?

5. How do you cope with the academic challenges of the reading?

6. Have you ever gotten extra help from outside of class for writing papers and/or reading? What are they? What did you learn from the help?

7. How do you see yourself as a student reader in college?

8. Do you like reading for class, why or why not?

9. What do you learn about reading from this course?

10. What experience and practices shape you as a reader?

APPENDIX H

Exit Interview Questions

1. What did you learn most from having a course where Comics were used as instructional tools for learning reading concepts and reading strategies?

2. What did you like most about the Intermediate Reading course?

3. What did you dislike about the Intermediate Reading course?

4. What could the instructor do to make the course more rewarding?