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

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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

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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. Copyright laws make it difficult to possess comics for classroom instruction.