

Teaching Literature through Comics: An Innovative Pedagogical Tool

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ABSTRACT

This paper tackles the usage of comics in classrooms. Today's proliferation of teaching literature through graphic novels proves to create better learning methods and motivating learning environment. Based on classroom actual practice, this paper demonstrates the benefit of the visual aspect of the graphic novel in enhancing EFL learning and teaching process. The paper exposes a modern alternative that solves the traditional literacy obstacles faced in literature classes. Adaptations of literary works in comic version have proved to be useful teaching tools in Arts classrooms. Graphic novels today offer new pedagogical methods that foster students' involvement and motivation in the learning process. The originality of the study emanates from the analysis of a literary extract in the context of a literature class through its graphic adaptation as part of an innovative teaching experience that ensures better reception and understanding of a classical American Novel. The paper focuses on the development of the graphic novel from a juvenile medium to a serious means of teaching in order to overcome the difficulties of teaching literary texts in classroom. It also sheds light on the various devices of graphic novels as adaptable key aspects of the genre to classroom teaching and as innovative and motivating teaching material.

Key words: Graphic Novels, Comics, Motivation, Adaptation, Learning, Innovative Teaching

INTRODUCTION

The post-modern age has stimulated the viewer's exposition to images more than written texts through a variety of media channels such as social networks, comic books, blogs and graphic novels (Mhamdi, 2016). The proliferation of images brought to the fore mediums previously considered secondary or cogently connected to childhood and adolescence. Comics and graphic novels seek to regain their longed for space within the academic arena by stripping out cultural preconceptions that have for long associated both mediums with "humorous, fluffy stories for kids, unaware that comics have, for the past 30 years, been primarily aimed at adult readers" (Brenner, 2011, p.262).

In 1992, Art Spiegelman paved the way towards the re-awakening of the graphic novel by writing *Maus*, that made him win the Pulitzer Prize. Additionally, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* credited the genre its potent socio-historical, political and gender engagement, thus, bringing it under the gaze of researchers and academicians. Furthermore, the popularization of the term *graphic novel* occurred after Will Eisner's publication of *A Contract with God* in 2006. Ever since, the genre has departed from its categorization as a "lowbrow medium" to embrace an elevated status in the academic circle (Varnum & Gibbons, 2001, p. x).

While a wide range of graphic novels and comic books have been subject to censorship, graphic adaptations of classic literature have gained an unprecedented tumult in the academic circle. Graphic novels and comics proved to be two different styles of "telling and digesting stories, neither better nor worse than prose as a delivery method for stories, and as they challenge how reading is defined, their addition to canon increases the variety and reach of storytelling" (Brenner, 2011, p. 257). The proliferation and the "constant appearance of new media and new channels of mass diffusion" has reached the literary field with the booming of many kinds of adaptations in the form of plays, movies, video games and comic art (Groensteen, 2007, p. 9).

These new formulas of adaptations preserve the act of storytelling with variations, additions, departures and "repetition without replication" (Hutcheon, 2006, p.7). In other words, adaptation has its own aspect that does not demolish the narrative as much as, in Hutcheon's words, it "re-interprets and then re-creates it" (2006, p. 8). It is in this context that a Graphic novel adaptation does not sever the graphic version from the narrative one, it is yet an addition, that offers an expanded and more flexible understanding of the narrative which is likely to enhance students' literacy. In addition, it favors "multimodality" or the combination of both text and images to channel information and therefore,

to promote and to strengthen visual literacy (Kress, 2003; Mhamdi, 2017).

A Graphic novel is a hybrid format, “a long-form of comic book that is currently the fastest-growing literary medium in America” (Eisner, 2008, p 148). As an innovative form of sequential art that has sprung in the middle of the twentieth century, graphic novelists unleashed creative force through the rendition of literary classics into irresistible graphic formulas. Eisner (2008) contends that the specificity of images in sequential art obviate interpretation and, thus, simplify the reception of its messages (p.149). This main characteristic of the graphic novel creates a platform for students’ engagement in the process of decoding, stimulates their visual literacy, develops their critical thinking and promotes motivation in classrooms.

Though graphic novels have refurbished their status in the educational field as useful tools of teaching and learning, there are still shy endeavors that oscillate between acknowledging the academic benefits of promoting graphic novels and comics in academic arenas and dismissing such art formulas as practical educational tools. Despite the prevalence of such back-driven opinions, as a visual medium, graphic novels reached even high regard as a useful and valuable text in classrooms. Carter (2007) affirms that ‘with the growing understanding of the importance of critical literacy, visual literacy, and other types of literacy that were once considered “alternate”, more attention has been paid to graphic novels’(p.1).

Hence, this paper seeks to argue the benefits English learners in art classroom can reap by studying graphic adaptations of literary classics. In an innovative move, this study embarks into a new teaching experience whereby the learner explores and analyses extracts from a literary work through its graphic adaptation. The paper, therefore, will dwell on the various devices of graphic novels as adaptable key aspects of the genre to classroom teaching and as innovative and motivating teaching material. This is going to be reached via the inclusion of authentic case studies stemming from an American Survey classroom experience of teaching a sample from Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* graphically and comparing it to their narrative version at the level of setting, characterization, point of view and socio-historical context. At this level, the inclusion of reader response theory as a main theoretical platform would foreground the energetic role of students in the process of decoding the graphic medium (Al-Mohammadi & Derbel, 2014). The paper will conclude by delineating the valuable aspect of graphic novels in classroom settings, yet, it will also comment on its cultural limitations.

This study embarks upon the following research questions:

- What challenges do English Language Learners face to analyze a piece of literature?
- How do graphic novels adaptations help students to overcome language barriers and to develop literacy skills while analyzing a graphic novel?
- In what ways do readers engage while reading a graphic novel?
- How may comics benefit English Language Learners?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The debate about comics and their intrusion to classroom teaching has gone through thorny historical periods. Since the appearance of comics in the 1930s in the United States, a debate about whether comics as a medium is worth of inclusion in the teaching process in classes or it lacks the potential to become part of the educational system has sparked multiple and contradictory views that lasted until today. For instance, in the early 1940s, W. D. Sones (1944) reports that between 1935 and 1944, comics “evoked more than a hundred critical articles in educational and nonprofessional periodicals” (p. 232). In addition, Yang (2003) notes, ‘educators also began designing comics-supported curriculum’. Along the same line, Hutchinson (1949) comments on the Comics Workshop of New York University usage of *Puck - the Comic Weekly* in hundreds of American classrooms. The power of representation inherited in the visual medium led Sidonie Gruenberg to contemplate that force noting: “There is hardly a subject that does not lend itself to presentation through this medium” (1944, p. 213). Its artistic nature prompted John Dewey’s (1934) consideration of the medium as a carrier of artistic expression and a salient element of education.

No sooner, had comics witnessed an avalanche of advocates of the medium’s usefulness as an educational tool, than it faced Dr Frederic Wertham’s accusations of the medium as a source of juvenile delinquency in *Seduction of the Innocents*. The 1950s stunningly caused comics to lose their first apprehension as a medium capable of enhancing student’s educational capacities. Instead, American social scene witnessed the rise of the comic Code Authority, a form of censorship or seal of approval that adorned the cover book of many comic books as a visa guaranteeing its suitability socially and culturally. By then, debates about including comics in classrooms seemed to be an unreachable possibility.

Despite the haunting presence of the 1954 legacy of investigation, the 1970s witnessed a shy awakening of previous attempts to bring comics to classrooms. It was not until the 1980s and the 1990s that a real reviving of the genre took place. P.L Thomas (2011) notes that the return of *Batman* by Frank Miller and the development of graphic novels through Spiegelman’s *Maus* and Will Eisner’s theoretical insights on comics helped the recognition of comics as a medium worthy of instruction in the classroom” (p.188). Thus, Greater attention has been attributed to graphic novels as a genre and to comics as a medium endowed with high value in classrooms due to its generation of “visual and critical literacy” (Carter, 2007, p. 1).

Graphic novels, for instance, came to the forefront of American literary scene and became one among nowadays-richest American educational tools. Many traditional literary texts are taught in the form of a graphic novel for “comics encourage the very abilities some educators in the 1940s feared it would squelch: reading and imagination” (Yang, 2003). The latter are two main qualities inherent in comics and strengthened by its visual dimension, the story is not merely imagined, but it is also perceived, its main components as setting, characters and events contemplated and identified easier than the narrative version. Despite its power-

ful educational quality, the scene is not devoid of wary voices vis a vis the usefulness of comics in classroom teaching.

Yet, the growing number of graphic adaptations of classic texts and their usage in classroom today proves to be a novelty or a revolution in the teaching of classic works of literature. A new interpretive vision of the graphic novel departs from the traditionalist analysis thread of a narrative text to embrace a unique flexibility detected through the fusion between images and words (Mhamdi, 2017a). Such form of sequential art “has evolved from humble beginnings into a graphically sophisticated and culturally revealing medium” (Sabin, 2005, p. 11). Graphic adaptations, therefore, prove to be helpful to decipher cultural and socio-historical context in a literary text. Graphic novels are traditionally thought of as a juvenile medium, destined to adolescent and young school learners. Today’s orientation towards graphic adaptations of various literature classics such as Shakespeare’s plays, Edgar Allen Poe’s short stories or even Mark Twain’s novels and the proliferation of graphic novels as Art Spiegelmen’s *Maus* and Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* have elevated the perception of the genre.

The erasure of the distinctions between high and popular culture in the postmodern era and the growing artistic merit of graphic novels are two main reasons behind the decrease of many demeaning critiques to the genre (Sipe 2011, p. 246). The collapse of boundaries between high and low brow artistic productions in the postmodern era smoothed the way towards the emergence of a wide array of adaptations whether in the form of graphic novels, movies, video games or plays. Thus, innovative experiences of understanding and analyzing visual mediums have flourished and have become part of classroom teaching methods for they do offer new teaching perspective and construct better learning environment (Al-Mohammadi & Derbel, 2014).

Graphic adaptations of American novels such as those by Mark Twain stand for a “reception continuum model” as Linda Hutcheon puts it in her work on adaptation theory, for they serve the purpose of revisiting or translating a text (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 171). It is an “extensive transposition, a transcoding that can involve a shift of medium or genre” (Hutcheon, 2006, p 8). This process of creation or innovation always already bears the traits of the original texts, yet adaptations open up new perspectives without falling into the category of the dangerous supplement. Comic illustrations of narrative texts, however, run along the line of fidelity, those that attempt true faithfulness to the original text, and those texts that use the originals as jumping off points for something decidedly different (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 171). Therefore, the teacher ought to go through a selection process to pick up for students the most suitable comics adaptations that pay respect to the original text in order not to fall into confusion or detach the narrative from its historical and cultural context.

Comics, therefore plays the role of facilitator to allow students, for instance, to identify the various techniques of storytelling, characterization, point of view and themes deployed in the graphic novel. The hybrid aspect of the graphic novel allows students to develop visual literacy. By linking

images to the narrative text, students smoothly get involved into the sequence of events and develop positive reading habits. The amalgamation of two modes of communication or what Kress (2003) terms as “multimodality” fosters students’ visual and critical literacy (p. 35). As readers, students depart from the simplistic analysis of a prose narrative during which they merely engage with the written surface of the text, to dip into a profound combination of text and images using the multiple tools of graphic novels such as panels, speech balloons, captions ect...

Carter (2007) asserts that graphic novels impinge on the reader/students various reading strategies and levels of attention that can be reached via its visual dimension. Eisner (2008) maintains that an image is in itself a precise statement that brooks little or no further interpretation and when words are added, they no longer serve to describe but rather to produce sound, dialogue and connective passages (p. 127). The learning experience, therefore, is “a two way process involving a reader and a text” (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 268). Students even the most demotivated ones, would not be able to resist the call of the visual medium to create meaning. Images are endowed with subtle power that demands the reader/viewer to exercise as much attention and involvement to reach the hidden meaning as prose. Such potential fosters students’ critical literacy and tends to create a self-independent learner (Al-Mohammadi, 2014).

Deepening the student’s reading engagement and experience constitutes, therefore, one of the characteristics of the graphic medium that furthers the development of an independent-learner portrait. For instance, graphic novels call on the student “to take an active role in reading by questioning the author’s motives and analyzing particular viewpoints” (Fisher & Frey, 2007; Versaci, 2008). In addition, Reading comics requires self-direction, the student/reader selects what to pay attention to at first hand, the text or the image and chooses the part of the page to concentrate on. At this level, the student unconsciously performs what Scott McCloud (1993) terms as “Panel transitions” which are vital to the comprehension of the graphic novel (72-75). While alternating between text and image, the student develops visual literacy. Furthermore, Students gain, an awareness of the grammar of comics such as symbols, panels, images, sounds that boosts comics literacy.

Yang (2003) sheds light on the visual nature of comics as having salient educational qualities mainly during the reading process because they are not time-bound and because of their spatial quality. Comics/graphic novels are, thus, a tool that serves student to explore key components of literary analysis such as characterization, setting, tone and mood using the color or visual cues from the images along with the printed text (Fisher & Frey, 2007). Therefore, graphic novels engage students and accord them with better opportunities for critical discussions than traditional narrative prose. This is mainly due for one crucial difference between the graphic medium and the narrative one which is that of the “gutter”.

McCloud (1993) states that “space between the panels is what comics aficionados have named ‘the gutter’ and in

the limbo of the gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea” (p. 66). It is in this sense that students/readers contribute to storytelling in a manner different from traditional narratives. In fact, the student/reader participates in the creation of the story, predicts and explores what lies in-between gutters by filling in those gaps via imagination to form a unified whole. This is particularity of the graphic novel favors engagement, motivation and re-creation of events by students which strengthens their critical and even media literacy. At this level, many linguistic barriers between students and a piece of literature falls which smoothes the process of teaching and learning.

Chun (2009) comments on the practicality of using graphic novels in the classroom which contextualizes the featured language in ways that aid ELL students in learning how to use the language (p. 146). Students often face various barriers in the process of analyzing a traditional piece of literature, yet in the context of teaching graphic novels, Patricia Duff observes that “students noted that the colorful pictures, contextualized vocabulary and interesting content provided a compelling hook into reading” (as cited in Norton & Vanderheyden, 2004, p. 217). Graphic novels apprehend students attention and stimulate their deductive reasoning usually slowed by the wholly narrative format of traditional narratives. In this way, students can develop cultural literacy in the process of experimenting with literacy skills (Al-Mohammadi, 2015).

Graphic novels like *Maus* and *Persepolis* engage the students culturally and historically by mediating, for instance, the horror of the Holocaust and the abduction of Iranian women freedom in post-revolutionary Iran. The graphic medium does not only encourage students to explore social and cultural issues. Following a similar line of thought, Morgan and Ramanathan (2005) comment on the graphic novel as a “communicative vehicle” that channels what I would call historical literacy which encourages critical reflection on the events of the story, characters traits and setting as part of such historical context. Recent graphic adaptations of Mark Twain’s *the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* have captured the historical and the ironical spirit of the age and of the nineteenth century writer.

At this level, the teacher ought to be vigilant in her/his choice of the most appropriate graphic adaptation of the novel in order not to get the students confused. The more graphic adaptations are faithful to the storyline of the original novel, “true to the time and place of the original fiction”, the better students would apprehend its social and historical context (Royal, 2009, p.31). For instance the recent manga-inspired versions of *Twain’s Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (2009), and two different editions of *Graphic Classics: Mark Twain* (2004, 2007), volume eight in Eureka Productions’ *Graphic Classics* series include narratives that use comics to stress Twain’s narrative line and the style of his fiction. The latter is the source from which I used some graphic samples as a new method to acquaint the students with various aspects of the novel which seemed difficult to be identified and analyzed in the presence of a traditional narrative.

METHODOLOGY

This study tackles the issue of teaching literary classics through their graphic adaptations. It explores the innovative learning prospect such educational experience could offer to students of English literature. Seeking to answer each main research question revolving around the benefits of adapting graphic novels in helping students to overcome the probable language barriers they may face, the methodology of the study rests upon the actual practice of a sample of American survey class observations and focus group discussions.

The current study is conducted at Al-Buraimi University College (BUC), in the American Survey class during the 2016-2017 school year and it involves two sections from semester five. This research is driven by various questions that kept lingering in my mind every time I teach Mark Twain’s *the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to mixed ability students. What if I teach Mark Twain’s graphic adaptation of the same classic. How would graphic novel adaptations help my students to overcome language barriers and to develop literacy skills? In what ways will my students engage while reading a graphic novel? The recurrent struggle of students to analyze the various narrative elements of the novel, to identify the narrator’s sarcasm and the various historical and racial references to American past, were the rationale behind the submergence of the afore-mentioned questions.

Participants

In the light of the students struggle with the classic text I took up the chance to introduce to them one of the graphic versions of the novel which is faithful to the story line. This study was held on two sections of students of English Language and Literature at the English department at Al-Buraimi University College (BUC). A total of 30 participants were divided into two groups of 15 each where group A reflected on the introductory narrative passage extracted from the first chapter of Mark Twain’s *the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, group B visualized the graphic vision of the same passage. Both groups had to answer identical guiding questions tackling the setting of the narrative, characterization, point of view and socio-historical context. The main purpose of the study was to nourish the course with new methods of teaching literature through the visual power of comics/graphic novel to stimulate students critical thinking which itself constitutes of the course’s main learning outcomes.

Instruments

The literature section was divided to two groups of fifteen students. While the first group reflected on the introductory narrative passage of Mark Twain’s *the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the second group visualized the graphic adaptation of the same extract. My choice of the same story line but in two different formats, the first graphic and the second narrative, is mainly driven by the necessity to figure out which of the versions would motivate students, stimulate their critical thinking and above all allow for better understanding of literary tools such as point of view, setting, irony and characters. The reading and reflection process was supported by a variety of guiding questions on both versions.

Each group was allowed 15 minutes as a time frame to answer 7 guiding questions that can be stated as follows:

1. Identify the setting of the narrative in terms of place and time.
2. Identify the narrator and draw his social and physical portrait.
3. What is Huck's feelings about his adoption by the widow Douglas and her sister Miss Watson on this passage?
4. Comment on Huck's tone vis a vis the widow Douglas's goal to "sivilize" him.
5. Identify one instant of irony.
6. Identify the main event that links Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to this novel as voiced by Huck in both versions of the same passage.
7. Identify the main theme in this passage.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study yielded three main findings. First, the study of the narrative passage as opposed to its graphic version revealed the practicality of teaching literature through comics as it fostered students' engagement favoring a unique multi-literacy experience. At a second level, the study of the graphic version also expanded students' historical knowledge. Finally, the exploration of the graphic version in contrast to the narrative one stimulated students' motivation via the dynamism inherited in the graphic genre.

Both reading processes have yielded different and curious reactions and analysis that I will seek to align with the innovative teaching and learning opportunities that graphic novels offer to teachers and students. Indeed, Students reactions to both versions and their answers supported my findings. What cannot escape the curious eye of the teacher is the students elevated motivation and involvement in the process of scrutinizing the graphic version opposed to a classic silence interrupted by shy whispers on the narrative passage. The below Findings have been related to this article critical stance.

Findings of Questions 2, 3, 4 and 5: Student/Reader Engagement

Data collected from these questions reflect that contrary to a slow, disengaged reading of the prose narrative, the analysis of the graphic version of chapter one highlighted the involvement of students who were guided by both the narrative text and the visual one. Students showed an ability to navigate gutters, moved smoothly from panel to another identifying the main character Huck and delineating his curious relationship to other characters as Tom Sawyer or the adoptive widow Douglas. They were even able to establish the link between the actual novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* as the latter ends where the former begun. A point that remained obscure to the students who were still struggling with the narrative extract. In fact, it is in this sense that Cary (2004) points to the value of using comics in ELT, where "abundant visual clues increase the amount of comprehensible input and consequently boost reading comprehension" (p. 13).

Derbel (2017) also underlines the potential of Comics to effectively mediate the thematic dimension, through their grammar rather than words (p. 41). This is what McCloud (1993) calls, "comics' important icon" – the gutters and panels, assist as general indicator of space and meaning (p. 9). Thus, the reading process and involvement is supported and strengthened by the grammar of comics which functions as a means of liaison between the content of the panel and meaning construction. For instance, by visualizing Huck, students were able to comment on the physical appearance of the avatar and his social status which allowed them to answer the second question. What is transmitted through the panels intends to "convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" and I would add that this study has figured out that graphic novels has a motivating effect on students (McCloud, 1993, p. 9).

The act of analyzing a graphic novel includes a spontaneous alternation between the reading of the images and the narrative text. The students responsible for the analysis of the graphic version smoothly kept alternating between both. Indeed, graphic novels favor the transaction between reader and text which makes of the genre a suitable vehicle for reader-response theory. The students, therefore, noted the use of irony through the avatar's reaction towards the Widow Douglass's project of 'civilising' him, which facilitated their comprehension and, therefore, their answer to questions 4 and 5. Huck's visual expressions, his reluctance and dissatisfaction with the Widow's plan to render him a socially decent boy triggered the students smile and added a funny mood to the classroom atmosphere contrasted to the second group's dissatisfaction and struggle with a the obscurity of the vocabulary.

What has also been worth of attention is that while the analysis of the graphic novel allowed the students to gain a unique multiliteracy experience interfacing multiple sites of literate practices, the analysis of a prose narrative merely limited the student to the print literacy (Carter, 2007). Since my students generally face various difficulties to read and to comprehend a classical piece of literature, the graphic medium introduces complex ideas in a simplified and direct format. Following the same line of thought, Gorman (2003) also states, "the visual messages in a graphic novel alongside minimal with the frustration that often plagues beginning readers as they struggle to comprehend the meaning in a traditional text-only book" (p. 11). Meaning also encompasses the historical background of the novel which is a salient part of analysis and a booster of critical thinking (Mhamdi, 2017b).

Findings of Questions 1, 6 and 7: Historical Contextualization of the Narrative

Students' effective engagement and involvement in the reading of the panels and its symbols has favored the practice of historical and social contextualization of the events. The graphic version of the first chapter of the novel opens with a map that illustrates the Mississippi river along which American cities are geographically drawn. The comic representation of the map serves two main purposes. First, it contextualizes

the reader and the story in terms of setting. Second, it sheds light on the symbolic dimension of the river and the towns above and below it as far as the history of slavery and consequently of the character Jim in the novel is concerned. Obviously, the students were not able to match the symbolic dimension of the map to its broader historical frame without a brief introduction to the history of slavery in the United States of America and the civil war between south and north.

At this level, the text-only students were able to directly refer to the setting mentioned in the title of the opening chapter but their identification was limited since they could not refer to the history of slavery alluded to in the graphic format by the drawing of a compass. Being supported by the historical introduction to the novel and the visualization of the compass, the students responsible for the analysis of the graphic version identified the symbolic dimension of Huck and Jim's adventures through the Mississippi river as their route towards freedom. The graphic adaptation of Twain's novel offers a unique insight into the history of slavery through the representation of Jim, the runaway slave through the Mississippi with slave states below, free state above, a geographical division that the students of the visual medium would visualize in the opening panel of the chapter. Such visualization allowed them to conveniently contextualize the narrative in terms of place and time as opposed to a superficial historical reference procured by the text-only students. The minimal representation of Huck in the same panel fishing by the side of the river further strengthens the concept of adventure which is a central one in the narrative.

Frey and Noys (2002) stress the salient inspection of representations of history through the graphic novel: "what we mean by history in the graphic novels how the graphic novel is a site where 'history' itself or representations of history are put into play: interrogated, challenged, and even undermined" (p. 258). The visual representation of Jim foregrounds the aim of the novel to highlight the social controversy over slavery between south and north. The graphic novel re-works the issue of slavery through a series of adventures both Jim and Huck come through in the middle of their escape towards freedom. The narrator sheds light on social hypocrisy, reexamines notion of freedom and right and wrong. At this level, students were unconsciously dealing with two main layers: the story as visualized and the historical thread driving it. Yet, while the only-text students were aware of the narrative line as narrated by Huck, but indirect historical references further complicated their understanding of the passage, the second group of students dealing with the graphic version of chapter one reached an identification of the theme of slavery and the notion of freedom. Hence, the graphic novel paved the way towards a more eligible contextualization of history and a clearer identification of the main themes.

Thus, Graphic novels provide opportunities to students to effectively engage with historical issues, it furthers their reading of history and support their prior knowledge of various issues that allowed the second group of students responsible for the graphic analysis to correctly and smoothly answer questions 1, 6 and 7. As Cromer and Clark (2007) observe, "the graphic novel format allows them to access the

text in various ways beyond what the traditional linear format of print text can offer" (p. 589). In addition, the hybrid aspect of the graphic novel supports and encourages various and more meaningful readings and it offers in depth analysis than a simple narrative dimension. It is this double dimension of visual and textual that drives students' motivation and raises their degree of curiosity even the usually reluctant ones among them.

Graphic Novels as Psychologically Motivating Genre and Innovative Educational Tools

Students behavior, their noticeable sense of ease and energy during the process of comprehension and strive to answer all seven guiding questions led the researcher to notice the positive motivational effect the graphic genre can have on students/readers. Images, colors, dynamism inherited in the graphic genre, panels, bubbles and clearly visualized characters constitute the various reasons students burst out when I asked them about what attracted them in the graphic adaptation of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Such motivation in the process of analyzing the graphic passage is credited the innovative approach I followed while seeking to reach the course's learning objectives through the deployment of a new medium. Adaptations of literary works in graphic format proved to be useful in the English art class because of its directness, brief aspect and light tenure that has attracted and has stimulated the involvement of learners struggling with language.

It is also important to notice that students frustration decreased compared to the only text students. The form radiated an air of comfort and easiness because of its visual dimension, and mainly because of Huck, the avatar's direct communication with reader/student in the opening panel made the students feel as if they were part of the narrative itself. Such self-reflexivity is also one of the reasons that have fostered their understanding and their involvement in class activities. The reading experience of a graphic novel seizes to be a form of intellectual torture to weak and passive students and turns to an enjoyable experience (Al-Mohammadi, 2015). The process of analyzing characters, plot, themes and tone becomes an enriched form of learning through images.

Students responsible for the analysis of the graphic extract have produced better quality of work and they have gone through a motivating learning experience in a way traditional fiction does not yield. The only text students reached some similar comments about the components of the narrative text as setting and characters in longer time frame. Yet, their output was not as rich as the first group and they were almost bored and developed a kind of reluctance to continue the whole activity. Analyzing graphic novels provide students with multimodal literacy skills that allow them to understand other visual texts or hybrid texts in depth. Hence, graphic novels develop and construct self-confidence and self-independent learning. Despite the benefits students can reap from teaching literature through graphic novels, the medium may tackle troubling cultural issues which are discussed henceforth.

Limitations of using Graphic Novels in Class

Graphic novels offer students various opportunities to learn through practical combination of textual and visual mediums which furthers their engagement and involvement in the analytical process. Yet, some limitations still push teachers to the edge of suspicion to use graphic novels as instructive materials in classrooms. Cultural inadequacy of the visual domain might be one of the reasons mainly in feminist graphic writings which might tackle issues of body and sexuality, issues that remain forms of taboos in many societies. In addition graphic novels such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* or Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* exhibit political stance and traumatic events that can provide cultural and historical literacy on the one hand, yet offer debatable and sensitive political agendas on the other hand. As Hammond points out, "reasons educators may be slow in their acceptance of graphic novels may be due to mature themes in some of them" (Hammond, 2009, p. 56).

Unfortunately, many institutions and educators still behold comics as a juvenile medium in spite of all the studies that have proved its adequacy and its benefits inside classrooms. This traditionalist stance causes the medium to fluctuate between acceptance and repulsion. In other words, its real academic merit is still subject to a large debate. Adding to this, the widespread conception of graphic novels as inappropriate medium to the teaching of literature, a subject considered elevated compared to the low brow conceptualization of comics. Though many graphic novels engaged in serious cultural and historical issues, some people still associate them to immoral content. Yet, the study poses a set of cultural limitations due to its visual aspect that might, in certain cultural conservative spaces, poses cultural barriers mainly when it exposes feminist issues related to body and sexuality. In addition, the visual exposition of traumas, violence and politics open up troubled yet prohibited spaces.

CONCLUSION

Teaching literature through comics offers new opportunities to adapt new teaching methods and to broaden students' horizons by enrolling them into a new learning experience. Despite the long history of struggle to limit the use of the graphic medium as a teaching tool, the medium figures, today, among the most deployed methods in classrooms as it boosts students' engagement, expands students' historical knowledge and exacerbates students' motivation. Following the same line of thought, this research study proved the practicality of using a graphic novel to teach classical literature. The paper has also delineated the opportunities such innovative teaching method would offer to students compared to a narrative literary genre through a teaching class experience.

The medium, however, still suffers from a set of cultural limitations nourished by simultaneous censorious calls to decline its educational benefits and to foreground its long held consideration as "the lowest rung of the cultural ladder" (Weiner, 2003, p. 3). Its seductive, yet culturally venomous aspect categorizes comics or graphic novels as a low brow medium trapped into a long history of struggle to settle itself as an academically accepted tool, that still despite its

practical aspect in classroom teaching, struggle to leave the margin. In this context, many studies tackle the complex relation between censorship and comics while other research challenge the silencing aspect of censorship by turning the medium to a tool of resistance and transgression.

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