Superhumans: How Teachers Use Graphic Novels

Scott Allen
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Introductions

Hi! My name is Scott Allen and I have been teaching for five years. I completed my Bachelor of Education at the University of Saskatchewan and am currently finishing up my Master's of Education, Curriculum Studies also at the U of S. I currently teach Senior English with Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools. My favourite graphic novel is The Watchmen (1986) by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons.
Acknowledgments

I am very grateful to the many people who supported me through this research.

I would like to thank Lanette Kuchinski and the many people involved with the Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation because without their generous funding and time, this research would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank the administrators and the students at my school who were patient and gave me the time needed to do this research. The superintendents at the GSCS board office who provided me with release time to prepare, and my advisor Geraldine Balzer for her constant assistance with the many ideas I have had.

But most of all, I would like to thank my amazing family. They have been patient, understanding, and always supportive of my work. I love you very much!
My Research Question

Current expectations in the Saskatchewan English language arts curriculum acknowledge that the language arts are not simply about reading and writing, but involve a good balance of listening, speaking, viewing and representing as well. Furthermore, the curriculum acknowledges the importance of any and all types of text (film, radio, oral storytelling, presentations, graphs, plays, graphic novels, etc.). Each text offers a way of understanding the world differently. Each text also requires that students master a unique set of skills in order to help them make meaning from the text.

In this study I have recognized the importance of using multiliteracies and multimodalities within the classroom via graphic novels. In my reading I have found that graphic novels open the door to multimodal literacy, where students are given access to a broad range of individual and overlapping modes each connected to a specific literacy style. The overall goal of my research is to further encourage pedagogical practices involving graphic novels to encourage student engagement in learning. Therefore, this research looked to answer the question:

What are the pedagogical understandings of teachers using graphic novels to encourage student engagement in learning?
Who Was Involved

I fulfilled the role of researcher but at certain times I was required to be a participant (in discussions) and at others times an expert (around creating professional development and modeling graphic novel use).

The participants for this study were four secondary language arts teachers: three English language arts teachers and one French language arts teacher. All of the teachers were from Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools. They taught a range of grade levels; however, three of them used their graphic novel with a Grade 9 class and the fourth used hers with a Grade 12 class. All of the participants had some basic knowledge on graphic novels, and all had been using a variety of pedagogical resources and strategies. However, only a few had actually taught with a graphic novel and in both cases it was used as supplemental material with no overt teaching of how a graphic novel works.
Setting

The locations changed based on the needs of the group. Whereas all participants taught their graphic novels in their respective classrooms, the collaborative discussions happened in meeting rooms (generously provided by the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation and the Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation for Research into Teaching) and restaurants, while the individual planning took place wherever the participants worked best.
In the Beginning

I sent out a call for volunteers within my school division. Within a short amount of time four participants were selected and the research began. Initially, we met at a restaurant so that the participants could meet each other and learn about my research objectives. It was important to me that on our first day everyone felt comfortable and relaxed. I wanted the participants to develop relationships with each other so that they could trust each other and eventually make the most out of their collaborative time.

Upon meeting at the restaurant we looked into potential graphic novel resources and set tentative timelines. It was exciting to watch the participants approach the teen and adult graphic novel sections in the Frances Morrison Public Library in downtown Saskatoon. They were like kids given free reign of their favourite department. They instantly went to their areas of interest. Two of the participants started thinking about which texts were best supportive of the curriculum content, while the other two just let themselves get lost with the texts. About an hour into the previewing, after I asked how things were going, a participant exclaimed, “My head will explode if I see anymore.” The massive volume of graphic novels available was something none of them were prepared for. So, they began their journey over the next six months into learning about, planning and eventually using graphic novels.
Literature Reviewed

The following authors were instrumental in designing my theoretical framework for this research:

What are the pedagogical understandings of four language arts teachers using graphic novels to encourage student engagement in learning?

Multiliteracies:
- Cope & Kalantzis, 2009
- Kress & Jewitt, 2003
- New London Group, 2000

Action Research:
- Hendricks, 2009
- Stringer, 2007

Qualitative Research:
- Merriam, 2009

Graphic Novels in Education:
- Monnin, 2010

Graphic Novels:
- Bakis, 2012
- McCloud, 1993
- Weiner, 2013

Visual Literacy:
- Carter, 2007
- Connors, 2012

Multimodal Literacy:
Methodology

I chose qualitative methods because I wanted to know the pedagogical understandings of teachers. I define pedagogy through the New London Group’s (2000) use of it; pedagogy includes why you learn something, what elements you learn, and how you learn those elements and apply them in a new context or a new type of meaning. So, pedagogical understandings for teachers include a lengthy process with many steps. Qualitative methods, specifically action research and case study, allowed for the flexibility and openness I needed to track the learning journeys of my participants. Each element within qualitative methods supported my research differently.

Action Research

Action research was a preferred methodology for several reasons. One, it focused on teachers and their practices, behaviours, experiences and perspectives. Two, it focused on self-reflection which gave me insight into how my participants understood their learning better than I could have observed. Three, it followed a systematic process (the action research cycle) that supports my understanding of the learning process (Hendricks, 2009; Stringer, 2008).

On the next page is a diagram of the basic research cycle I followed with my participants. It is based on Hendricks’ (2009) and Stringer’s (2008) research cycles. The action research cycle, as interpreted by both of the previously mentioned scholars, was supportive of the overall collaborative community I wanted to create. Through reflection, action and evaluation I was able to focus on my participants’ concerns as they arose, and I was able to stay democratic and empowering as all participants shared their voice or were given opportunities to share their voice. Overall, they were all strengthened in their professional practice because of the action research cycle.

Case Study

I followed a modified version of Merriam’s (2009) multiple case-study format. This research looked at four participants; however, I wanted to highlight their uniqueness as individuals throughout the process; individual case studies were preferred because they gave me the freedom to pursue their individual responses. Concurrently, there were themes that appeared in not only the individual case studies but also across the different cases that needed to be accounted for and a multiple case study framework worked best with it.
Basic Cycle for This Research

I love graphic novels and I know my students do too. But, am I using them right? How do other teachers use graphic novels to support student engagement in learning? What are their pedagogical understandings?

I interviewed teachers in personal and group interviews to learn about their pedagogical understandings around graphic novels and their use in classrooms.

The interviews revealed that participants had a great deal of prior knowledge on graphic novels and their potential benefits but the participants still had some over-arching concerns with using them.

To address the concerns of my participants I needed to design professional development around graphic novels and their elements and model how to read and analyze a graphic novel for the participants.

The PD and modeling was successful and helped participants prepare and deliver their mini-unit around graphic novels. But, I still needed to know how their classroom use went, how the students responded and what their personal reflections were with this whole process.

The best way to find out what my participants thought of this research and their overall thoughts on working with graphic novels was to analyze their artifacts and hold a final interview and focus group.

I analyzed their finished units and held exit interviews and a closing focus group.

The findings showed that teachers who spend time learning about the multimodal elements not only develop an interest of their own in graphic novels but are encouraged to use them as part of the pedagogical toolkit in their classrooms.

I facilitated a morning session on graphic novels with the participants. This was followed by a collaborative day where I modeled how to read and analyze *The Life of Helen Betty Osborne* (Robertson, 2008).
Another reason I chose case study research was its adaptability with other methods (Merriam, 2009). I could pursue any number of different methods to support my research if I found the need. A final reason was that case study is: “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit. Case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic” (Merriam, 2009, p. 16). Case study was open enough that I could include as much or as little description from my participants as was relevant.

Data Collection

Action research and case study helped frame how my participants learned the what and the how with regards to their pedagogical understandings and they were both broad enough to support and to help specify my data collection process. Below is the simplified version of the data collection process I followed:

1. Observational notes through the initial meeting and the subsequent three collaborative meetings.

2. I conducted one initial interview to learn the participants’ prior knowledge and one exit interview to understand their learning process and decision-making while they were planning and delivering a unit on graphic novels (Merriam, 2009).

3. I held one initial focus group to support collaboration, idea sharing and to uncover concerns, and one final focus group to review and reflect on the entire research process (Merriam, 2009).

4. I took in artifacts in the form of a completed unit plan on graphic novels, and in some cases, their self-reflection on their unit.
Pedagogical Understandings

The data was analyzed and presented in a linear process but was highly influenced by Cope & Kalantzis’ (2009) reinterpretation of the pedagogy of multiliteracies (NLG, 2000). Their article offered that the pedagogy of multiliteracies is realized through the what and the how stages; the what involved looking at the different modes of meaning or ways through which people make meaning (spatial, visual, oral, etc.) and specifically how they interact with each other (the multimodal), and how the process or pedagogical acts, through which they learn it (experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing, and applying). Following the language offered by the NLG (2000) and Cope & Kalantzis (2009) helped me understand my own participants’ pedagogical understandings (or pedagogical acts) as they learned about graphic novels. What follows is a brief overview of some of the major findings with what the participants learned and how they learned it and these were eventually taught to students.

Benefits

One of the best ways to support pedagogy of multiliteracies and to understand a learner’s level is to assess their prior experience with a subject. I was able to determine a great deal about what the average classroom teacher had for experience with graphic novels and what they considered important with using graphic novels.
ONE OF THE FIRST DISCOVERIES, APART FROM EACH PARTICIPANT HAVING SOME PREDOMINANT EXPERIENCE WITH MULTITACTICAL AND GRAPHIC NOVELS IN SOME WAY ALREADY, WAS THAT EACH PARTICIPANT IDENTIFIED SOME POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO USING GRAPHIC NOVELS WITH THEIR STUDENTS, MANY OF WHICH FOCUSED ON THE VISUAL ELEMENTS OF THE TEXT.

FOR MRS. MORRIS:

"I THINK THEY'RE NOT BORED IN LANGUAGE, THEY'RE NOT BORED IN TEXT, SO STUDENTS DON'T FEEL DEFERRED BEFORE THEY EVER BEGIN THE STORY?"

(Cailen, 2013)

WHEREAS MRS. ANDERSON:

"IT ALSO GIVES STUDENTS A MENTAL IMAGE THAT THEY ARE ABLE TO ASSOCIATE WITH, SO IT GIVES THEM A CONTEXT OFTEN TIMES AS WELL.

AND BECAUSE THEY HAVE THE VISUAL, I THINK IT HELPS THEM TO DEAL WITH IT A BIT MORE INDEPENDENTLY BECAUSE THEY ARE ABLE TO DRAW ON MORE LICENSED TO FIGURE OUT MEANING" (Cailen, 2013)

SHE CONTINUES:

"I KNOW THE KIDS LIKE GRAPHIC NOVELS AND THEY GET EXCITED ABOUT THEM. I LIKE HOW THEY PROVIDE A VISUAL, ESPECIALLY BUDDING READING. YOU CAN TAKE THEM TO AN ACTION, AND THEY WILL HOOK THEM INTO THIS TEXT, SO SACRIFICING THE CI AND DRAWING, ONCE YOU HAVE THE VISUAL, THEY CAN SEE IT IN ACTION AND THEY HAVE AN EASIER TIME UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT." (Cailen, 2013)

AND FOR MRS. GRAY THE BENEFITS OF GRAPHIC NOVELS WAS HIDDEN IN HOW SOME PEOPLE MIGHT PERCEIVE THEM:

"PEOPLE DON'T GIVE THEM ENOUGH CREDIT AS LITERATURE, I THINK THEY ARE DEFINITELY ONES THAT ARE ESSENTIALLY JUST GLORIFIED COMIC BOOKS, BUT THERE ARE ALSO NOVELS OUT THERE THAT AREN'T VERY GOOD LITERATURE, AND I THINK BEING A GRAPHIC NOVEL (SPERI?) TELL YOU ANYTHING ABOUT THE QUALITY OF WRITING?"

(Cailen, 2013)

AND MRS. GRAY HAD THIS TO SAY:

"I THINK IT'S A GREAT TEACHING TOOL, I DON'T EVEN SEE IT AS NECESSARILY BEING AN ADDITIONAL RESOURCE. I THINK YOU COULD USE THE GRAPHIC NOVEL AS AN ENCORE UNIT, I THINK IT WOULD APPEAL TO STUDENTS WHO AREN'T AS STRONG READERS AS WELL, BECAUSE YOU'VE GOT THE VISUAL THERE FOR THEM." (Cailen, 2013)
Challenges to Using a Graphic Novel

Lack of Knowledge

I mean you might analyze a little bit [of] the artwork in terms of tone and so on, but like I would still probably be sticking to more of the words like so when we study you know, in an English class, you’re looking for characterization, symbol, theme, plot and all that stuff. So that’s still what I would be looking for. So I guess the challenge would be to expand my own thought process like know what else I should look for in a graphic novel, to point out to kids. (Allen, 2015, p. 85)

I haven’t had enough experience myself with them to even you know, evaluate them fairly.

Time/Pacing

I don’t have any idea of how long it’s going to take. Like normally in a novel okay it’s going to take this long, but because there’s not a lot of vocab. But there’s lots of pages, I’m not sure the first time through, if this is going to take me a week, or 3 weeks, or like how much to focus on things? So it’s going to be a learning process the first time through… but as I’m planning it I’m like okay I’d like to look at this but I’m not sure if that’s going to take me ten minutes or the class” (Allen, 2015, p. 85). Do you know what I mean? Or I don’t know how long it takes to read twenty or ten pages of this because there’s really only like four sentences but there’s a lot going on in this page right? So that’s kind of a concern I have. Something that’s in the back of my head as I’m planning because I’m not quite sure how long a unit will take.
We met several times throughout the research as a collaborative group but the first meeting where we began sharing ideas around graphic novels happened after the initial interviews. Through collaboration the participants explained how they understood graphic novels and identified areas of concern, while still supporting each other through explanations and resource/idea sharing.

Mrs. Anderson read dozens of graphic novels but ultimately chose War Brothers (2013) because it fit within her curriculum and gave her the most ideas on how to use it with her students. She also liked it because it was like a little mystery” (Allen, 2015, p. 91). For example, she approached reading it by looking at the words first and then read it again but included both text and images. Each time she noticed more details and stylistic devices in it.

Mrs. Munroe visited local bookstores and bookshops. In the end she chose The Arrival (2006) because she felt that it was a story that connected to everybody. But, she agreed with Mrs. Anderson that multiple readings were necessary to get the most out of the graphic novel. However, she preferred to read as a reader first and as a teacher second. She mentioned to the group that she learned about some graphic novel elements (panel, palette, angle of shots, colour and font) by speaking to her sister who had done a masters project around them. The participants in the group had never heard the terms before and asked for more details from her and a conversation ensued.

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Facilitated Learning

The participants asked for more information on how to analyze a graphic novel and also which elements they should focus on. I offered to design and facilitate a professional development morning and afternoon with them. It was structured as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Morning PD</th>
<th>Afternoon PD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Introduced PowerPoint on graphic novels.</td>
<td>- Read and analyzed <em>The Life of Helen Betty Osborne</em> (2008).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Discussed multimodal literacy.</td>
<td>- During this time I modelled how I would read the whole story first using a sticky notes strategy where students make a comment, question, prediction, etc. on what they are reading and put it on a sticky note in the book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Read articles on visual literacy, multimodal literacy and graphic novels (see pictures for article titles).</td>
<td>- We then went back and analyzed each page by sharing our interpretations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Completed anticipation guide.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Went through PowerPoint on the graphic novel history and elements of graphic novels (this included a variety of practical activities to support learning about the elements such as giving examples of closure, showing different panel transitions and using effective lettering).</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Finally, we discussed some of the graphic novels’ use in education and their connection to the curriculum.</td>
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Unit Planning

Each participant chosen used the methods and strategies they felt best fit within their classrooms. However, due to time constraints not all units were the same length. All units did include some type of before, during and after reading comprehension activities. Below is a summary of the completed units.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>During</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mrs. Anderson</strong></td>
<td>- Anticipation guide to assess prior knowledge of graphic novel terms.</td>
<td>- Sticky notes activity during initial independent student reading followed by a group discussion and sharing of the ideas written on the sticky notes.</td>
<td>- Narrative assignment choose from one of the supporting characters and create their untold experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>War Brothers (2013)</strong></td>
<td>- PowerPoint on the elements of a graphic novel, panel transitions and form.</td>
<td>- Summary notes and asking questions handout.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Scavenger hunt on the different elements discussed.</td>
<td>- Two readings (individual and then group analysis).</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mrs. Gray</strong></td>
<td>- Student-led web quest inquiry on history of Iran.</td>
<td><strong>Used:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- PowerPoint on the historical context of Iran and Iraq during 1970s and 1980s.</td>
<td>- Group discussion.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Comprehension question checks and worksheets.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Vocabulary sheet.</td>
<td>- Exit slip about pros and cons to assess students’ interest and engagement in text.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Teaching modelling of how to read/whole-class read.</td>
<td>- What would happen next, panel drawing/narrative activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Munroe</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>During</td>
<td>After</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Arrival (2006)</td>
<td>- Introduced wordless text <em>The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore</em> (2012) to highlight storytelling without dialogue (visual storytelling).&lt;br&gt;- Went through anticipation (Mrs. Anderson’s version) and PowerPoint of the elements of a graphic novel.&lt;br&gt;- Some frontloading on short story elements via a KWL.¹&lt;br&gt;- Gave the text and asked students to search through it and discuss what they found.</td>
<td>- Structured notes on scenes or setting.</td>
<td>- Students were assessed on their knowledge through comprehension questions on a final exam.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mrs. Somers</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>During</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lost Innocence (2014)</td>
<td>- Students experienced graphic Trickster stories without guidance.&lt;br&gt;- Shared elements of a graphic novel, panel transitions and formed PowerPoints (her own modified version) and included an anticipation guide.&lt;br&gt;- Assignment on panel transitions.</td>
<td>- Students read once on their own and completed a sticky note activity on predictions, comments, etc.&lt;br&gt;- Then the whole class read page by page discussing and analyzing as they went.&lt;br&gt;- Used modeling.&lt;br&gt;- Think-alouds.</td>
<td>- Final assignment on where students had to go through the graphic novel and apply certain critical reading lenses and analyze the text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ The letters KWL are an acronym, for what students, in the course of a lesson, already know, want to know, and ultimately learn.
Reflections

All of the participants had time to reflect on their completed units and the action research process. One of the major themes revealed was the confirmation that graphic novels engaged students differently and sometimes better (regarding the visual curricular outcomes) than traditional texts. Concurrently, teachers valued the collaborative time and nature of this research process and saw value in repeating it.

Collaboration

Upon further reflection, all of the participants felt that there were many changes they could make to the graphic novel units. Again, in all cases the participants needed more time to revise their units and lessons and to build stronger final assessments around their students’ learning. What was clear from the interviews and focus groups was that none of the participants were willing to give up the collaborative opportunities this research allowed. In all their cases they would not have signed up had it not been for the support of their colleagues and through paid time off to collaborate with each other and I - none of which could have happened without the financial and personal support of the McDowell Foundation.
**Student Engagement**

Throughout the teaching of their units the participants found multiple instances of students engaged in learning. I have paraphrased their observations and presented them below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation (of student engagement)</th>
<th>What it Looked Like</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Increased Interest/“On Task”</strong></td>
<td>- Prepared for class with material out, homework completed (in one participant’s case the graphic novel unit was the first time her entire class had their homework completed) and responding to questions without scaffolding by the teacher.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Focused on-task individual behaviour, especially from students who are generally disengaged from class (e.g., one student who never usually shares her thoughts became very open and talkative when discussion on the graphic novel took place and now she is more open on average with her teacher).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Focused on-task group collaboration.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Actively working (no distractions like cell phones out or working on a different subject).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Offered deeper analysis in graphic novel than teacher had offered.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- In one participant’s observations her students started asking her for her recommendations on different graphic novels they should take out from the school library.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Faces focused on reading text rather than staring elsewhere.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Feedback</strong></td>
<td>- Teacher being told that the students were enjoying the graphic novel (this had never happened to the teacher before).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Active Discussions</strong></td>
<td>- Excitement from students led to energized discussions.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Lots of questions asked, responses given, students helping each other and group sharing.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

Implication and Recommendations for Using Graphic Novels to Encourage Student Engagement in Learning

Through the many interviews, focus groups, collaborative planning time, facilitated learning opportunities and informal discussions I came to learn that when teachers work together they can achieve truly great things. I am not meaning to sound cliché; however, all the participants in this research not only learned more about graphic novels and successfully used them in their classrooms, but they have all become strong advocates for supporting the continued use of graphic novels in their classrooms. When they planned their units they did not have to work on a new degree at university in order to prepare their students. Rather, they were able to adapt their current and best teaching practices to their new understandings of graphic novels. More importantly, no one suggested using graphic novels to replace other resources; rather, they preferred to see them brought in as a further tool to support students.

One of the major conclusions found was that the benefits of collaborative opportunities far outweigh the challenges. For example, Mrs. Somers was able to take all of her learning from the research and apply it to her Grade 9 transitions community through a professional development opportunity she offered in order to get them thinking about graphic novels and their use in the classroom. Furthermore, her co-teacher had witnessed the powerful impact graphic novels had on their students and is now a strong advocate as well. Between the two of them they have gotten their entire transition group on board to using graphic novels for the 2015-2016 school year and hopefully beyond. Mrs. Somers’ advocacy for Lost Innocence (2014) was so strong that she convinced the Greater Saskatoon Catholic school division to purchase enough copies so that all Grade 9 students, in each of the division’s high schools in Saskatoon, would have access to the powerful text. However, introducing, learning and using graphic novels in high schools were not without its challenges.

This research came with funding so we were able to find time to collaborate, learn and build. In reality, schools have many obligations and teachers find that there are many new ways their time is being stretched even thinner. So, what the school or teacher interested in using graphic novels must solve is the problem around finding the time to learn and use them. Furthermore, if they are able to find the time to learn and use graphic novels how will they be able to connect with teachers in their school or division, or even other divisions for that matter, so that they can develop the best or most appropriate knowledge needed?
Where can they find the time to preview resources let alone purchase the text that can sometimes be twice the price of a novel (but still a third of the cost of an average English language arts textbook)? The participants in this research offer one possible solution:

Ongoing PD. Because how many years have we sat down over the years and bring in this expert for a one-off and it’s lovely and exciting for a week and you forget but then you’re back in a regular classroom. The 2 things that have worked for me are content enhancement and literacy because of the ongoing nature and as you said you go and do it, you come back and you talk about it, you go out and do it, you come back.

In the end, the graphic novel is only a valuable resource so long as it remains a part of our students’ lives. Fortunately, the growth of the comic and graphic novel industry is still expanding and adults and students across the world find a great deal of value in the images and texts of graphic novels and comics. Teachers do not need to collaborate to develop an interest or a love for graphic novels - they simply need to get one, sit down and read it, but this time look at the pictures and words!
Resources Used

*The Arrival* (Shaun Tan, 2006)- 128 pages

This wordless graphic novel is often listed under the children’s section in libraries, but the text offers great opportunities for mature discussion around arriving and departing in life, immigration and emigration (and the difficulties associated with both), cultural barriers, language barriers, and the pursuit of a better life to name but a few themes. Take the journey with the protagonist who was forced to leave his family behind to travel to a new land full of fears and hopes. Many opportunities to use the text to teach dialogue, setting, visual literacy, characterization, camera angle, etc. Recommended for middles years to grade 9 students.

*In Graphic Detail: Using Graphic Novels in the Classroom* (David Booth & Kathleen Lundy, 2007) -119 pages

A useful resource for the teacher looking to learn about graphic novels quickly. The text is ripe with explanations, strategies, activities, and resource suggestions to help get a class working effectively with graphic novels right now! The authors share a love of literacy and graphic novels and make both very clear throughout this text.

*Lost Innocence* (Brandon Mitchell & Tara Audibert, 2014)- 64 pages

This unique graphic novel, created by the Healthy Aboriginal Network (from BC) begins and ends with the non-fiction accounts of residential schools and government policies. However, a moving and interesting fictional account occurs throughout the text as the reader follows a brother and sisters tale through a Canadian residential school. Strong connections to ELA and Social/History curriculums. Perfect for middle years (grades 7-9) students as the images are done tastefully, with the violence of residential schools being captured but not at the cost of offending the reader.
Persepolis 1 (Marjane Satrapi, 2000)-76 pages.

Set in 1980s Iran, this first volume follows a young Marji as she grows up in revolutionary Iran. Her liberal beliefs and values are questioned constantly by the tightened religious and political restraints of her society. Constantly threatened with violence or oppression by extremists Marji must rely on her family to help her make sense of her changing world.

Although the images appear childlike (purposely chosen by the author) the content is mature and covers torture, religious oppression and extremism, various eastern and western ideologies, war, and much more. It is currently recommended as a grade eleven resource in the Saskatchewan ELA curriculum.

Teaching Graphic Novels: Practical Strategies For the Secondary ELA Classroom (Kate Monnin, 2010)-236 pages.

Monnin focuses on using graphic novels to support literacy. This text offers brief explanations on common graphic novel terms, explores a variety of graphic novel strategies and uses in the classroom, and contains an extensive resource list. A recommended resource for teachers new to using graphic novels.


McCloud’s text is arguably the most referenced of its kind in both academic writing on graphic novels in education and in the visual literacy and the visual arts world. McCloud covers everything from how we make sense of the world through images and visuals to what the core elements of graphic novels and comics are. This is a must read for the teacher looking to understand the inner-workings of comics and graphic novels.

War Brothers: the Graphic Novel (Sharon McKay & Daniel Lafrance, 2013)-176 pages.

This is a horrific and haunting tale, based on her novel of the same name, that follows the life of a young Ugandan boy forced to become a child soldier. Inspired by documented conversations with child soldier survivors, this tale grips at the heart as much as it entices the mind. Because of the graphic subject matter, handled well in both text and image, this text is recommended for senior (11-12) grade levels. Many themes exist including (but not limited to) war, violence, coming-of-age, hope, faith, friendship, and relationships.
Useful Links

Many great First Nations resources available in a variety of multimodal and visual formats. http://thehealthyaboriginal.net/


Celebrating manga and graphic novels. http://www.getgraphic.org

Blog helping teachers select comics and graphic novels for the classroom. http://www.graphicclassroom.org/


Independent author explains graphic novels in English as a second language. http://members.shaw.ca/yaying/518final/

The author’s personal website that contains his work and comic inspired information. http://scottmccloud.com/
References


