

Comics as an Intermediary for Media Literacy Education

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Abstract : The value of using comics in the literacy classroom has been explored since the 1930s. At that point in time researchers had begun to implement comics into daily lesson plans and, in some instances, had started the development process for comics-supported curriculum. In the mid-1950s, this type of research was cut short due to the work of psychiatrist Frederic Wertham whose research seemingly discovered a correlation between comic readership and juvenile delinquency. Since Wertham's allegations the comics medium has had a hard time finding its way back to education. Now, over fifty years later, the definition of literacy is in mid-transition as the world has become more visually-oriented and students require the ability to interpret images as often as words. Through this transition, comics has found a place in the field of literacy education research as the shift focuses from traditional print to multimodal and media literacies. Comics are now believed to be an effective resource in bridging the gap between these different types of literacies. This paper seeks to better understand what students learn from the process of reading comics and how those skills line up with the core principles of media literacy education in the United States. In the first section, comics are defined to determine the exact medium that is being examined. The different conventions that the medium utilizes are also discussed. In the second section, the comics reading process is explored through a dissection of the ways a reader interacts with the page, panel, gutter, and different comic conventions found within a traditional graphic narrative. The concepts of intersubjective acts and visualization are attributed to the comics reading process as readers draw in real world knowledge to decode meaning. In the next section, the learning processes that comics encourage are explored parallel to the core principles of media literacy education. Each principle is explained and the extent to which comics can act as an intermediary for this type of education is theorized. In the final section, the author examines comics use in his computer science and technology classroom. He lays out different theories he utilizes from Scott McCloud's text *Understanding Comics* and how he uses them to break down media literacy strategies with his students. The article concludes with examples of how comics has positively impacted classrooms around the United States. It is stated that integrating comics into the classroom will not solve all issues related to literacy education but, rather, that comics can be a powerful multimodal resource for educators looking for new mediums to explore with their students.

Keywords : comics, graphics novels, mass communication, media literacy, metacognition

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