PLAYING AND LEARNING THROUGH TEXT AND IMAGES: EXAMINING

FEATURES OF ADOLESCENT LITERACY AND THE POTENTIAL OF

GRAPHIC NOVELS AS A SUPPORTIVE TOOL

By

Emily Ann Bushta

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Committee Membership

Dr. Nikola Hobbel, Committee Chair

Dr. Natalie Giannini, Committee Member

Dr. Michael Eldridge, Program Graduate Coordinator

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ABSTRACT

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Graphic novels have been making their way into the classroom steadily during the past two decades. Whether their use is for a pedagogical purpose or pleasure, graphic novels are grabbing the attention of adults and youth alike. As general interest arises surrounding graphic novels, increased scholarship discussing their purpose, structure, and use has appeared across a variety of disciplines. Educators, especially those with younger students, are drawn to the genre. Their interest has produced a growing body of literature; however, these publications often lack quantitative data and typically offer qualitative conclusions about the benefits of graphic novels in classroom contexts. So far, various studies have been conducted ranging from extra-curricular reading groups to comprehensive units within language arts classrooms. By exploring how research about graphic novels is collected and determined, my topic will be focused on how graphic novels could potentially benefit adolescents and their literacy development. My examination will: 1) synthesize the scholarship discussing graphic novel novels and identify gaps within it; 2) determine key features of adolescent literacy; 3) investigate and

interrogate potential applicability of graphic novels in support of adolescent literacy

development.

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INTRODUCTION

My love of reading has continuously expanded since childhood. The magic that any single book holds is based on its ability to construct an imaginary world and make it feel real. As I got older, I branched out from classic children's literature like *Black Beauty* and *The Lion, The Witch, and the* Wardrobe to other genres, specifically comics such as manga. Manga, a genre of comics originating from Japan and/or influenced by this specific art style, was the first medium I began to read and collect. Some were presented as serial chapters of multiple series published in a single magazine, like Shojo Beat. Others are released with multiple chapters in a single volume. Series such as *D.N. Angel* and *Death* Note were strewn about my room as I voraciously read through the volumes available to me via our local county library. By the time I had encountered a graphic novel, I was relatively well versed in knowing how to read comics. Maus by Art Spiegelman, a Pulitzer Prize winner in the category, Letter Awards, was assigned as part of the class curriculum during my sophomore year in high school. Reading this book not only changed how I saw comics as a genre, but drastically shifted my ideas about what comics could be. Popular movies at this time were V for Vendetta and Watchmen, and I came to understand that these movies were adaptations from comics books, also known as graphic novels. Later in my educational journey, I was required to read Fun Home by Alison Bechdel. Again, my worldview shifted as I saw a comic book, in this case categorized as a graphic memoir, being used to teach identity, and representation in literature. The possibilities became endless as I realized that comics are being

increasingly legitimized as literature and hold untapped benefits for teaching beyond each story's narrative. Over time, my love of comics has grown, and I am regularly amazed at the diversity that I find within this medium. Even though I have always loved reading, discovering comics has changed the way I engage with texts and understand the narratives told within them.

As I have seen throughout my educational experience, comics have been slowly gaining acceptance as legitimate within academic contexts. While some educators use comics as a tool within their pedagogy, the stigma surrounding comics continues to portray them as less valuable and educational than traditional text-based literature. This stigma has changed over the past two decades from complete disavowment to a more tolerant and sometimes an enthusiastic approach. However, much work is left to be done to convince the majority of educators as well as administrators, parents, and students about the uses and benefits of engaging with comics for serious academic inquiry. Scholarship surrounding the usage of comics and graphic novels in classroom applications reflects that people, whether they are educators or students, typically like comics. Providing visibility to the genre was necessary in the elementary "why comics?" argument phase, but few academics have gone beyond why they personally think comics should be used as an educational tool or be considered equal to canonical literature. Much of the conversation can and should be expanded to consider and explore aspects of literacy (both traditional and multimodal), artistic purpose, and cultural and social significance. Within contemporary scholarship, most examinations and discussions relating to the role of comics in classroom contexts and their potential benefits as well as

potential disadvantages would be beneficial to further scholarly understandings of these subjects.

As I began to pursue my interest in comics from an academic and educational perspective, I have focused my attention on examining the ways that comics were being used to supplement or support adolescent literacy development. However, much of what I have found in my research is that educators were interested in using comics in their classrooms, but their publications reflected a narrative focused on destigmafying their use, and encouragement to use comics in praxis. Some scholars gave specific educational reasons for their usage: engaging students to read and write or increasing academic vocabulary and language development (see Muller, Chun, Danzak, Smetana et al, Hammond, Cook, Lawrence et al, Gavigan and Albright), and others used of their publications to disambiguate notions of what comics are and the variety of genres that they embody (see Hammond, Cook). In order to get an answer to my question: can/do comics support adolescent literacy development in academic contexts, other questions that must first be asked and then answered.

The Question of Legitimacy

The goal in early scholarship about graphic novels focuses on the genre, or medium depending on one's stance, and its legitimacy as literature. Since comics' earliest appearance in American culture, there has been a narrative regarding comics strictly as entertainment (see Chute). While comics and graphic novels are sites for entertainment, they must also meet the standards of the medium and follow formats to best convey plot,

purpose, and intent. However, the beauty of this artistic medium is that it is flexible and artists use their abilities to convey their art in numerous ways. The amount of effort and consideration is one of many reasons for why comics have been legitimized. Besides artistic license, the rhetorical moves made by the author indicate similarities to the literary canon. Just like other novels, these stories tell us about love, loss, adventure, cultural experiences, and individual growth. Instead of leaving all of the details to be imagined within the reader, which is also valuable, comics and graphic novels provide visual details to tell and enrich the narrative being told. The conversations legitimizing comics as literature have been firmly established and remain present even if marginally in related scholarship.

The question of legitimacy has dominated much of the conversation surrounding graphic novels, but now arguments have branched out to explore and address their pedagogical usage. Scholars have begun to look at the ways in which students engage with content, understand elements of writing and genre, and generate writing by incorporating structures and themes from graphic novels (See Chun, Danzak, Cook, Moeller, Hammond, Lawrence, Albright, Smetana et al). While all of these topics are worthy of further study, the scholarship addressing where adolescent literacy fits within the pedagogical framework relying on graphic novels is lacking. Identifying the ways in which comics can be used to support adolescent literacy development, or the ways in which they are adverse, is necessary for reinvigorating the English Language Arts curriculum and developing a deeper understanding for how students acquire their literacy skills.

METHODOLOGY

Can graphic novels be used to support adolescent literacy development in academic contexts? To get an answer to this question, we must focus on one of the most crucial elements of literacy: reading. Before discussing the specific qualities of reading I will be focusing upon, I would like to briefly unpack the word "literacy." Literacy is comprised of several components and can be understood through different ideologies, but it can be essentialized as reading and writing. It should be noted, there are distinctions between types of literacy: early literacy, adolescent literacy, and adult literacy. For this review and the subject matter, I will be solely using adolescent literacy to guide my review and analysis. Adolescent literacy is defined as the skills gained when students read to learn rather than the acquisition of skills to learn to read (Chall 34). Thus, adolescent students are working to develop their individualized understanding of a text, and ideally, produce writing influenced by their comprehension. However, when students engage with a graphic novel or comic as a text, they must first read it before any element of writing can be introduced. Therefore, I will be centering my inquiry to look at how / what happens when graphic novels are read by adolescent readers. To even further narrow my inquiry, I am posing the question, what makes a good adolescent reader?

While numerous components determine what makes a good adolescent reader, I will be focusing on three qualities: comprehension, engagement, and fluency. Student comprehension is an essential characteristic of a good adolescent reader because this skill ensures the student fully understands key ideas and themes of the text they are reading.

Student engagement is a necessary aspect of a good adolescent reader because it keeps the student aware of what they are reading, why they are reading it, and how this reading is relevant to their educational experience. Fluency is also an important characteristic of a good adolescent reader because it enables the student to read with precision and speed as information is being processed. These three qualities exemplify one of the end goals of literacy: the ability to read well by taking the information presented and making individualized conclusions. Other characteristics can be found when asking what makes a good adolescent reader. However, focusing upon comprehension, engagement, and fluency allows for a specific and detailed framework to be constructed and used when examining both empirical and practitioner conversations about adolescent literacy and graphic novels.

Rather than searching for and using a theoretical framework to approach this review, I am instead surveying fourteen empirical articles in various related fields as well as eight practitioner articles. In approaching this survey, I will examine these articles for literacy development terms and concepts, specifically in regards to comprehension, engagement and fluency as well as literacy (specified as traditional or not) and multiliteracies (also known as multiple literacies). By coding the practitioner articles, I will trace conversations of what has been explicated or abandoned when discussing adolescent literacy, and in some cases, general and/or traditional literacy when incorporating comics within a secondary classroom curriculum. Additionally, there will be sections addressing explicit concepts used in developing adolescent literacy namely

efferent and aesthetic reading, reader response and engagement, and language development.

Once these conversations regarding literacy have been outlined, I will discuss how graphic novels are juxtaposed within the authors' claims. Identifying how graphic novels are used within classroom applications and the reasoning behind their usage will provide insight to what has changed in academic scholarship and praxis regarding the perception and implementation of graphic novels and comics in the past decade. Has the conversation moved beyond the question of legitimacy? Or do people simply like comics and want to read them?

The ways in which graphic novels can be used as an educational tool have been explored in some capacities, but my interest and this project narrows itself to look for specific links between graphic novels, comics, and adolescent literacy development. I hope to identify and map out what we know about adolescent literacy development in relation to comics and identify gaps.

Literacy, which can be defined based on numerous criteria, remains at the heart of this examination. As I listed above, some specific distinctions will be noted throughout this discussion. A major distinction to be covered includes a historical and contemporary review of traditional literacy as well as an in-depth examination of both multimodal literacy and multiliteracies. Additionally, there will be sections addressing explicit concepts used in developing adolescent literacy namely efferent and aesthetic reading, reader response and engagement, and language development. The scope of this project

does not allow space for addressing literacy development in non-academic contexts, and which would detract from my research question and analysis.

The guideline this project follows is that of a review. By surveying what is known about adolescent literacy development with particular attention to aesthetic and efferent reading, reader fluency, student engagement and academic language development as well as hallmarks of what constitutes a good adolescent reader, my goal is to identify the gaps in the larger conversation of the role of comics in classrooms. Bringing awareness to these fields and their related nuances, I hope to contribute a perspective of what has been covered and what still needs to be said. Due to the various constraints that come with being a graduate student, I will neither be conducting any primary research nor be making a directed argument stating comics should to be used to support adolescent literacy development. However, I do intend for readers to gain a consciousness of both adolescent literacy development and comics as seen from these perspectives, and as such, be able to make their own conclusions and perhaps inspire further investigations into this subject.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is Literacy?

What does it mean to be literate? According to the Oxford English Dictionary's webpage, literacy is "[t]he quality, condition, or state of being literate; the ability to read and write" (OED). While this definition takes an essentialized and literal approach, literacy can also be viewed as the ability to decipher and gain meaning or communicate through visual media or other socially constructed cues. Literacy as a definition and a concept is not stable. Often, literacy is redefined as society and academia discover and reconstruct notions of educational praxis and theory as well as other related disciplines. As outlined by the authors of *Literacy: A Critical Sourcebook* in their introduction, literacy can be simplified to be seen as "...the straightforward encoding or decoding of print. Literacy is a single thing, measurable through a standardized text. Literacy will have direct and specific effects on thinking or on behavior or on social mobility" (Cushman et al 2). This definition is what typically appears in fundamental conversations regarding literacy. However, numerous scholars have contributed scholarship to broaden this understanding of literacy, which is seen in the sub-disciplines of early literacy, adolescent literacy, adult literacy, and multiliteracies.

Historically, literacy in the United States has been only accessible to those with wealth and social status, typically white populations. Thus, racial minorities and those in poverty were not given the opportunity to acquire these skills. However, as Harvey J.

Graff discusses in "Histories of Literacy in the United States," literacy has not been the

defining factor of survival or even gaining wealth or status (215). The teaching of literacy

and the acquisition of its skills is not the only factor in gaining social, cultural or

economic mobility. Proficient literacy abilities serve an important purpose for those with

or without the means to change their socially and/or economically ascribed position.

For racial minorities, immigrants, and individuals living in poverty, literacy has

been a means of liberation and a skill to be used to resist to the status quo, particularly

white heteronormative patriarchal culture. Literacy has been used to supplement and

preserve diverse cultural practices as well as past experiences. Pieces of history left out of

the traditional canon of literature have been passed down throughout history. Slave and

immigrant narratives speak truth to their actual lived experiences of a period rather than

an outsider recounting secondhand involvement. Until the twentieth century in the United

States, literacy also was not specifically focused on reading and writing skills. Rather,

literacy was taught to instill and preserve moral fibers of society as well as perpetuate and

reinforce existing principles and views (Graff 216-217).

With this historical past in mind, what is literacy's role to the modern intellectual

and educator? Literacy is an essential aspect for all areas of learning. However, this skill

is typically curated within the Language Arts classroom. As noted above, contemporary

views of literacy vary, so the baseline definition of literacy used for this analysis

concentrates on an individual's ability to read and write fluently as well as effectively, as

well as to possess the skills required to decode, understand, and converse with and about

ideas within a multitude of texts. It should also be noted that there is a distinction

between early literacy and adolescent literacy, and this analysis is wholly focused on the latter because of these distinctions.

<div align="center">What is Adolescent Literacy?</div>

The literate individual must be able to interpret meanings in numerous contexts and mediums according to overall recent scholarship. Yet, distinctions must be made for what constitutes literacy for different age ranges based on developmental capabilities. Early literacy is the period where young children are beginning to learn how to understand the medium of written language and internalize the structures which underlie said language (Nutbrown 4). Adolescent literacy is the next developmental stage in learning how to read and write. Adolescent literacy is not limited to the literacy skills obtained during adolescence, but rather the skills gained in grades 4-12; the transition from early literacy, where students learn to read, to adolescent literacy begins when students are reading to learn (Chall 34).

The purposes of early literacy and adolescent literacy differ, which also means the key tenets of each diverges. Many of the concepts and skills introduced in the earliest stages of literacy development are used as a scaffold to build upon those ideas and provide a conceptual framework to understand, engage with, and generate critical thought. The development of the skill set pertinent to adolescent literacy is comprised of numerous characteristics. John Guthrie and Jamie Metsala outlined in their publication, "Literacy in North America," that ideally:

A highly achieving student, whether at grade four, eight, or twelve, must

not only comprehend passages of text but must also (1) integrate

information across multiple texts, (2) critically relate paragraph meanings

to personal experience, (3) employ knowledge from texts to evaluate

science observations or historical documents, and (4) compose complete

messages in the form of stories and reports for actual audiences (382).

To achieve these hallmarks and be truly literate in modern society, students must master a collection of literacy features. Regarding adolescent literacy development, these characteristics include specialized reading strategies for approaching intricate texts, utilization of multiple and social literacies, reader motivation, development of vocabulary, awareness of textual structures and features, and exposure to diverse texts particularly addressing both genre and perspective (Rehbein et al). While each of these features are considered fundamental to adolescent literacy, the scope of this project requires a narrowed focus which does not allow for all of these aspects to be fully discussed. Within my review I will be focusing upon three essential components of adolescent literacy, which are efferent and aesthetic reading, reader response and engagement, and language development.

Efferent and aesthetic reading

In all acts of reading, the reader is interacting with the text for a purpose. Reading a store catalogue differs from reading a collection of poems by bell hooks because a store catalogue is read for information whereas a poem is read for pleasure. Engaging with each text has a different purpose, in this case efferent and aesthetic, and requires different

skills to decode them (Rosenblatt xvi). Louise Rosenblatt, one of the founders of literacy

scholarship and an exponent of its significance to the human experience, has made a

distinction between efferent and aesthetic reading that changes how modern academics

understand literacy today, particularly within an adolescent-focused pedagogy.

Efferent reading requires the reader to examine a text for information, like facts

and verifiable evidence, and does not promote emotional or personal connections to the

text (Rosenblatt xvii). In contrast, aesthetic reading encourages the reader to interact with

the text on an emotional and personal level, where experience alters and gives insight to

the moods, circumstances, and conditions presented (xvii). Efferent and aesthetic

readings occur beyond the classroom and are integrated within all forms of reading.

These purposes cannot be separated from literacy. People read manuals to know how an

object works or how to fix something. People also read to appreciate the beauty of

language and storytelling.

Adolescents are learning how to interact with texts for both reasons. Aesthetic and

efferent reading are imperative to adolescent literacy because students must learn how to

differentiate the purpose and value of a text to determine how its information should be

retained and mentally catalogued. Students are required to deconstruct a text's meaning

in a manner they can understand and define. Different texts serve different purposes to

the reader. However, knowing the context for why something is being read becomes

essential for the reader, whose approach and concluding thoughts about the text are

influenced by context.

Within an academic context, efferent reading is required to establish and build upon the student's knowledge. Therefore, it is beneficial to teach students how to strategize whether they are required to enact their efferent or aesthetic reading skills and strategies. In doing so, students develop their metacognition, the "awareness and understanding of one's own thought processes, esp. regarded as having a role in directing those processes" ("metacognition, n"). Once a reader knows why they are reading and develops skills for how to read a particular text or genre, their focus can remain on the text and its meanings. The implementation of these skills into a student's schema provides clarity rather than the information becoming jumbled with the reader's thought process. A student's ability to assess reading contexts determines how efficiently they process a text's main concepts and make connections within and outside of the text (Rosenblatt 25).

<u>Reader response theory</u>

Utilizing student's intellectual and cultural capital helps students learn how to see their interactions with a text as transactions. Viewing these interactions as transactions encourages students to use their experience and authority to understand a text. Pedagogically, using Rosenblatt's reader response theory to help students realize their relationship to a text in addition to furthering comprehension promotes adolescent literacy development. Rosenblatt's theory operates under the notion that, "…the adolescent needs to encounter literature for which he possesses the intellectual, emotional, and experiential equipment… The teacher's task is to foster fruitful interactions—or, more precisely, transactions—between individual readers and individual

literary texts" (25-26). Reader response theory maintains the notion that students gain meaning from interacting with a text rather than simply receiving meaning from it.

When adolescents are encountering a new text, they use their prior knowledge to figure out the information presented. A student's schema provides a layout into which new material to become integrated. However, if no pre-existing schema exists, then comprehension of the recently encountered information decreases. By making pedagogical choices in support of increasing textual comprehension and student understanding, the transaction occurring between a reader and a text fosters an individualized awareness within the student of both the student's cognition and information encountered. In doing so, the student engages with a text rather than passively encountering it. This engagement increases textual comprehension as well as encourages each student to be actively involved with the creation of their knowledge and understanding of the task at hand.

Some critics note that reader response theory as developed by Rosenblatt does not consider cultural difference or experiences, and how these aspects impact how a reader engages with a text (Brooks and Browne 76-77). The transaction occurring between the reader and the text will vary based on who the reader is. Ethnic, social, cultural, and linguistic attributes impact the ways in which a reader engages with a text as well as what resonates with them. Some call for a reader response theory that addresses how these cultural experiences impact how a reader reads a given text. Otherwise, as certain critics say, "...focus[ing] exclusively on the reader/text transaction is to ignore the crucial influence of social, cultural, or situational contexts on the nature of this transaction"

(Beach 1-2). Another criticism of reader response theory involves the idea that texts determine their own meaning, with or without an audience, and should determine the conversation surrounding the text, which is conceptually known as formalism.

Oppositional critiques of formalist-driven reader response theory advocate that meaning is entirely determined within and by the reader, and that texts are simply ink upon a page (Brooks and Browne 76-77; Beach 1-2). Rosenblatt's transactional reader response theory lies between these two concepts. There is a negotiation occurring between the text and the reader to create meaning.

Engagement

Active student engagement encourages students to participate within their education and make conscious efforts to further their learning. Yet, some students feel their academic abilities are lacking. If educators can help adolescent readers "...develop their reading repertoire in a way that validates their identity…" their perspective of school literacy is broadened so they are included too (Franzak 227). Incorporating the multiple literacies of students will bolster their confidence as an academic and as a reader. Increasing student engagement is also accomplished by incorporating texts students are interested in. By integrating adolescent focused texts, such as "...books based on movies or television, specialty magazines, comics, and cartoons," students are more likely to take an interest in other assigned texts (227). One study discovered that middle school students viewed their classroom as "one of the least likely places to find the materials they want[ed] to read" (227). If engagement is a goal for adolescent literacy, it follows that educators must strive to make their classroom inviting to students and help

them realize their intellectual potential. Applying methods and techniques to inspire students to be involved with their learning is helpful, but it would be wiser to utilize materials students have taken an interest in to bolster student engagement. Literacy development amongst adolescent academics requires more than developing and facilitating reading purposes, and student engagement. Academic language development must also be factored into the equation.

Academic language development

Once adolescents have developed their literacy skills to understand the purposes of reading, how to navigate texts and their meaning effectively, and become engaged with their education, their focus must turn to language. Language development, within and outside of academic contexts, is necessary to interweave the other aspects of adolescent literacy to support a comprehensive literacy. As students develop an understanding for how language works, their comprehension of language improves. Students "...develop sophistication in their comprehension of language, whether listening or reading, and in their production of language, whether writing or speaking… They use language for information and understanding, for literary response and expression, for critical analysis and evaluation, and for social interaction" (Johnson and Johnson 706). In every interaction and context, students are using language to comprehend and communicate with the world around them. Students practice their language abilities far beyond the classroom walls. Yet, how much of academic language is being practiced outside of school? Oftentimes, there are limited opportunities for students to interact with academic language amongst peers and family. Every occasion to expose and exercise

academic language within the classroom must be taken. Teaching students how to use academic language, where to find their definitions, and how to identify them within texts allows to students to take these skills and apply them elsewhere. Students are also given access to the power of language by developing these skills. Being able to use academic language encourages students to participate fully within academic discourse as well as recognize what others are utilizing the language for. Academic language and its development is only one aspect of adolescent literacy development. Yet it cannot be separated from the literate engaged individual, just like the individual's skills to understand and employ reading purposes as well as read fluently.

What makes a good adolescent reader?

Student comprehension is an essential characteristic of a good adolescent reader because this skill ensures the student fully understands key ideas and themes of the text they are reading. In the article, "Key Areas of Effective Adolescent Literacy Programs," the authors articulate that "[r]eaders who are successful at comprehending what they have read employ a variety of strategies before, during, and after they read" (Marchand-Martella et al 170). Developed comprehension skills allow readers to understand and remember the content which has been read. Some of the essential strategies used to help students increase and cultivate their comprehension abilities include the activation of prior knowledge, monitored comprehension, asking and generating questions, use of graphic organizers, decoding text structures, use of mnemonic devices, summarization of the encountered content, reciprocal teaching, supporting metacognition, and utilizing methods designed to motivate students (Marchand-Martella et al 170-175).

Student engagement is a necessary aspect of a good adolescent reader because it keeps the student aware of what they are reading, why they are reading it, and how this reading is relevant to their educational experience. If students are disempowered and/or unable to realize intrinsic reasons for engaging with a text to learn, then they are likely to stop participating in literacy building acts. "Ownership is important in the process of empowering students toward quality performance and self-determination. If reading and learning are valued for their own sake, they become learning goals" (Swan 286). Motivating students to be involved in their education is necessary for them to be successful adolescent readers. Some of the ways to support student engagement within the classroom include providing autonomy support, implementing social collaboration opportunities, incorporating explicit strategy instruction, selecting stimulating texts for reading, and fostering real-world interactions (Swan 286-289).

Fluency is also an important characteristic of a good adolescent reader because it enables the student to read "accurately, quickly, and with proper expression" (Marchand-Martella et al 2013). For adolescents to understand the different purposes of reading, they must also be able to comprehend textual meanings fluently. What any particular text can mean varies; the context of the author, reader, and the work itself, and the audience's literacy skills all impact how a reader interprets and understands a piece of writing. For a reader to be fluent, they must be able to combine efferent and aesthetic reading skills along with other kinds of readings. Reader fluency is essential for comprehensive literacy development within adolescent academic contexts.

If students are unable to strategically navigate a text, they miss more than the narrative and textual features. These students are missing complex ideas and worldviews as well as an opportunity to intellectually explore concepts such as authorial intent, symbolism, and language usage. It is the student's responsibility to unravel intention, shape perspectives, and formulate an opinion using clues and facts from a text. Students must be active readers to become fluent readers, which trends show that marginalized adolescent readers tend to read submissively (Franzak 226). Students must be reassured that they have the authority to interact with a text and make claim to it. Their interpretation and experience with any text is just as valuable as their peers or instructor. Grappling with difficult yet approachable texts strengthens the individual's abilities to understand them. By presenting appropriate yet challenging material, students are able to exercise their interpretation expertise while pushing their boundary of understanding.

Jim Burke, veteran teacher and English studies scholar, believes language, especially within academic contexts, requires the student to fully engage with all aspects of the language being presented. All teachers should encourage students to "…recognize that the writer chose that word, crafted that sentence, put those words in that order for a specific purpose" (Burke 256). Teaching students the significance of words, their placement and meanings enables them to grasp broader conceptual notions and the connections between ideas. For students to analyze and interpret perspectives, they must first be able to navigate the text successfully. Without developed reader fluency, main points and key ideas may be missed. Reader fluency empowers students to draw their own conclusions after analysis and synthesis of a text and their own ideas. While reader

fluency is beneficial to everyday life, it is essential for effective participation in academic

conditions. Thus, reader fluency is a mandatory component of adolescent literacy.

What is Multiliteracy?

As notions of what literacy is defined as shift, there have been new distinctions

made about what literacy can be reiterated as and further explicated upon. Traditional

early twentieth century notions of literacy were focused entirely on language, especially

within a solely national design of language, and was conceptualized as a fixed system

with non-negotiable rules; all of which were based on the assumption that it is possible to

interpret and determine correct usage (Cazden et al 64). This construction of literacy

presents an authoritative type of pedagogy, which more recent conversations surrounding

literacy and related pedagogical practice move away from. One of these conceptual

developments, multiliteracies, has become an essential element to the modernization of

literacy studies. Multiliteracy practice and pedagogy differs from traditional literacy

practices "...by incorporating a much broader range of meaning-making practices into the

literacy curriculum: linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial, and multimodal" (Trimbur

661). These additions expand the possibilities for how reading and writing functions

within the literate individuals, and interrogate the boundaries of knowledge. The New

London Group (NLG), composed of prominent literacy scholars, developed and designed

a framework for what multiliteracy pedagogies look like as well as how they differ from

traditional language focused literacy pedagogy:

"[in] contrast [traditional literacies], focuses on modes of representation much broader than language alone. These differ according to culture and context, and have specific cognitive, cultural, and social effects… Multiliteracies also creates a different kind of pedagogy, one in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes" (Cazden et al 64).

The notion of multiliteracies incorporates the multifaceted contextual knowledge required to navigate the majority, if not all, texts into conversations relating to literacy and its pedagogical praxis. By incorporating multiliteracies into the literacy framework, this concept is used as "...both an analytical tool to understand changes that are taking place in the means and channels of communication and an organizing principle for a literacy curriculum that enables students to participate fully in public, community, and economic life" (Trimbur 660). Encouraging students to internalize skills and practices to foster literacy empowers them to engage with the world around them. Ultimately, this is the goal for a student-centered literacy pedagogy. The incorporation of multiliteracies in literacy praxis allows for a variety of expertise and understandings, which influences how individuals appropriately and successfully interact with literacy and social contexts (Anstey and Bull 21).

What is a Comic? What is a Graphic Novel?

Is there a difference between comics and graphic novels, and what they mean? Both are visual texts. Both require the reader to interpret images, whether pictorial or symbolic language, to reach a common conclusion. Most of the scholarly conversations surrounding graphic novels in the classroom relies on the reader's understanding that graphic novels are a lengthy multimodal text rather than a single-panel image or brief narrative known as a comic. However, similarities and differences between the two genres are not always delineated in these publications. Both graphic novels and comics share the multimodal medium, but the vast mixture of elements and features used to create content does distinguish one from the other.

Comics are often seen to portray less critical content such as the daily lives of a character, like the commonly known Garfield©, or the fantasy realm of superheroes like Batman©. Scholars have found it difficult to articulate what comics are exactly, and previous scholarship has offered two models for talking about comics and their features as a genre. According to D. J. Dycus, graphic novel scholar and author of *Chris Ware's Jimmy Corrigan: Honing the Hybridity of the Graphic Novel*, "Earlier, ten or fifteen years ago, comics was described primarily as a blend of visual and verbal elements" (3). The originating scholar for much of the academic conversations discussing comics, Scott McCloud, clarified what comics are defined as in his seminal text, *Understanding Comics*. According to McCloud's definition, a comic requires, "...juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (9). This definition provided specific language to describe texts who are at the intersection of art and literature. Inspired by

McCloud's work, Hillary Chute's research provides some historical context for what comics have historically been defined as. According to Chute in her publication, *Why Comics?*, "*Comics* encompasses the newspaper *comic strip*, which began in the U.S. in the 1890s; the *comic book*, which began in the 1930s; and the so-called *graphic novel*, which began as such in the 1970s" (6, italics in text). Yet, the differences in current terminology for labeling a text as a comic or graphic novel are often correlatory to the text's length. Comics tend to be short strips with few panels to convey thought or purpose. Comics can also be serialized and be composed of a longer story arch, or contain several different stories from different artists, like a compendium.

In contrast, graphic novels are whole narratives comprised of hundreds of panels and volumes of pages. Over time, a holistic concept of comics began to functionally represent the aforementioned nuances of the medium. Whatever the length or content, these genres within comics can still be essentialized to the term "comics" with its meaning being described as "drawn sequential narrative work with multiple panel" (Chute 8). Dissimilarly, the term cartoon, from which comics historically originate from, began to refer to a single-panel image rather than its first definition in the nineteenth century noting it as a "humorous drawing" (Chute 6). There are innumerable traces from which graphic novels and comics are more alike than different, particularly in consideration for how they fit within a genre as well as using an identical medium. Past conversations about what comprises a comic have now begun to shift to incorporate a spectrum of elements which incorporate aesthetics, style, word choice, and genre. Current conversations investigating and debating the definition of comics and graphic novels are

still heavily influenced by McCloud's framework of what constitutes a comic. Returning

to Dycus's outline of these conversations, recent criticism "...has tended to describe

comics as a form with an inherent tension -- a conflict between visual and verbal

elements" (3). Each aspect, fragment if you will, creates multiple threads of tension to be

pursued in the comic. The common thread found within these two models is the ways

word and pictures work together is unlimited (McCloud 152). As detailed in McCloud's

Understanding Comics, there are seven broad categories which can be seen in most, if not

all comics:

1. Word-specific combinations: pictures illustrate, but don't significantly add to a largely complete text (153)

2. Picture-specific combinations: words do little more than add a soundtrack to a visually told sequence (153)

3. Duo-specific panels: both words and pictures send essentially the same message (153)

4. Additive combination: words amplify or elaborate on an image or vice versa (154)

5. In parallel combinations: words and pictures seem to follow very different courses--without intersecting (154)

6. Montage: words are treated as integral parts of the picture (154)

7. Interdependent: words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone (155).

While the terms, comics and graphic novels, can be explicated in broad or narrow ways depending on the scholarship, the fundamental understanding of what this medium is composed of relies on the relationships and tensions found between text and image. The foundational understanding that comics and the similarly structured, graphic novel, require the reader to make meaning from the connections formed between image and text is my adapted version of the working definition of comics. As such, this will be the definition used for the remainder of this paper. The terms, comics and graphic novels, will be used interchangeably throughout this paper because of this fact, and when contextually relevant, will be specified accordingly.

How are Comics and Graphic Novels Positioned in Secondary Curriculum?

Comics and graphic novels appeal to a wide and ever-growing audience, and their use as learning materials has increased exponentially in the past few decades. While this medium has become more widespread within popular culture, it has begun to occupy space in university culture, the art world, and in some cases, global politics; all of these developments have helped comics become known as common reading materials (Chute 4-6). Early pioneers of the comic curricula set a trend for educators to not only integrate these texts, but to create immersive lessons to engage students and actively develop literacy skills from them. In several of the publications from educators who use graphic novels in their classrooms, many admit that their interest in the medium motivated their decision to use comics in the classroom. Personal interest may have driven some

educators to use comics, but many have found that adolescent students are beyond interested.

Since graphic novels are viewed as an alternative text when compared to traditional print-only texts, the appeal of their use is often investigated by those who want to find ways to teach alternatively. Discovering the best practices to teach English Learners (EL) is a relevant and current task for the modern school teacher. Christian Chun's article, "Critical Literacies and Graphic Novels for English-Language Learners...," details how the graphic novel, *Maus*, can be used as a teaching resource for both EL's and native speakers. According to Chun, the graphic novel "achieves the status of literature with the complexity of its theme, the subtlety of its characterizations, the visual metaphors expressed through its compositions, and its seriousness of purpose" (147). Chun's stance is that graphic novels are literature which should be taught in the classroom based on its composition. The combination of visuals and text helps make a cohesive narrative for all students, but particularly EL's. Teaching students how to decode texts is part of any literacy-based instruction, but when visuals become involved, multimodal literacy becomes engaged. Multimodal literacy is the utilization of skills and abilities to deconstruct a variety of texts, such as images, sounds, and videos, and then reconstruct meaning and understand its implications. Chun makes a case for a pedagogy of multiliteracies, the use of many types of literacies, as a continuum for literacy practice. Therefore, graphic novels can aid in language-focused pedagogy, which is pertinent in an English as a Second Language classroom. Chun focuses on the formulation of identity

and connections between EL's and their peers, but does not address other aspects of language or literacy development and their relationship to graphic novels.

Like Chun, Robin L. Danzak explores the connections between EL's, developing multiliteracies, and the formation of identity through graphic novels in her article, "Defining Identities through Multiliteracies….". The article summarizes findings from Danzak's study, which uses a multiliteracy pedagogical approach to having EL's write and construct a graphic personal narrative about their or their family's immigration to the United States. The conclusion of the study was that this project encouraged authentic writing opportunities for teenagers to engage in literacy production and the literate community (Danzak 195). The notion of using graphic novels, or comics as seen in this study, as a genre to re-tell EL immigration narratives incorporates multiliteracy into the curriculum while also strengthening core literacy skills, particularly writing. In both Danzak and Chun's publications and their related studies, the pedagogical focus is helping EL's formulate a bilingual identity by creating space within the literate community for them. While there is immense value in fostering identity and community amongst students including EL's, a gap remains in scholarship for the other ways EL's benefit from the use of graphic novels within their classroom. Theorization and a following study of how EL's benefit, remain neutral, or are at a deficit for using graphic novels within the classroom would further the pedagogical understanding of graphic novel use and in addition, its relationship to adolescent literacy and multiliteracies.

While EL's represent a significant percentage of adolescent students, other student demographics also require literacy support. Of these populations, incarcerated

youths require additional support for furthering their education due to limited access to resources. Karen Gavigan and Kendra Albright's article, "Writing from behind the Fence," recounts their findings about how the use of graphic novel as a genre and a medium in the creation of an informative text aided in literacy development and improved writing self-efficacy.

The development of "informational literacy skills" occurred while researching and collecting information about the graphic novel's subject, HIV/AIDs (Gavigan and Albright 45). However, students also engaged with multimodal literacy as they collectively wrote their graphic novel and were required to brainstorm and create visual imagery along with associated text. These students did read and receive copies of the final product, which was a collaborative piece with the students, the researchers, and a hired graphic designer. The study appeared to have a positive impact on the students and their literacy skills. However, the design of the program used would be difficult to implement on a larger scale due to funding and resources. A small-scale version may be enacted, such as students creating individual graphic narratives as done in Danzak's study, but these changes would alter key elements such a collaboration and community action.

Linda Smetana and her co-authors created a summer reading program, which was intended to support reading, writing, and literacy development for deaf students, and reported their findings in "Using Graphic Novels in the High School Classroom…". Like Gavigan and Albright's study, this study was conducted outside of the traditional classroom setting. Besides promoting graphic novel use within the curriculum, the

authors offered reasons for how they support literacy development. Graphic novels are relatively accessible for most students after they learn how to interpret the text's format. For deaf students, graphic novels provide extra support for understanding narratives, learning new vocabulary, and gaining student interest in reading. "Due to their visual nature, comics and graphic novels provide a context-rich, high-interest story environment for acquiring new vocabulary" (230). Certain forms of language practice are not possible for deaf students, such as vocal conversation with peers, and this impacts the development of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). The authors compare language learning for deaf students to be similar to EL's; both must "…learn the language as they learn to read and write; however, they must do so without receiving the support of oral interactions with family members and friends or hearing the sounds of the spoken language" (228). By studying graphic novels as a genre, through reading and writing, Smetana et al argue that deaf students are impacted in positive ways, both from a personal and pedagogical perspective.

Multimodal literacy is gaining interest from the academic community as the globe shifts from a print text format to a multimedia format containing much more than simple text. Due to this shift, people must make meaning of this format and extract information from it. Heidi Hammond's article, "Graphic Novels and Multimodal Literacy…" advocates for teaching multimodal texts as well as multimodal literacy. She also details some of the effects of using graphic novels within the secondary classroom curriculum. The standard for teaching traditional literacy, which is primarily print- and text-oriented.

Hammond attempts to widen a space for multimodal literacy to be included. Hammond writes that we "should devote as much attention to acquiring multimodal literacy as we do in mastering traditional literacy" (23). Using graphic novels to incorporate multimodal literacy development within the classroom has benefits, such as "boosted student literacy and confidence," but drawbacks are still present, mostly issues such as limited funding, teacher preparation, and potential accessibility issues (30). Overall, Hammond's main point, after her introduction to multimodal literacy, graphic novels, and the results of her study, is that "...graphic novels help students develop the skills necessary to thrive and be fully literate in the 21st century" (30).

Reading comprehension is a major element within literacy development. Mike Cook's article, "Now I "See"..." discusses the findings from his study, which examines the effects of graphic novels on high school students' reading comprehension. Using a framework informed by schema and transactional theory, Cook used his study to see how graphic novels support a traditional text and see what potential benefits graphic novels offer for all students, not just struggling readers (28). His findings suggest students typically benefited from graphic novels being used as part of the curriculum since "…not all students read and respond to visuals in identical ways (36). Graphic novels and their multimodal format helped bolster developing literacy skills and provided opportunities to discuss ways to engage with graphic texts. The limitations within this study, which Cook addresses, consider how reading comprehension was tested and measured. Only one format was used when testing reading comprehension: multiple choice; further testing in varied formats might allow different manifestations of knowledge to be displayed.

Some of the literature surrounding graphic novels and literacy development focuses on overall improvements in literacy skills or certain kinds of literacy, such as multiliteracies and multimodal literacy. Salika Lawrence and the coauthors of "Summer Program…," focused on developing and furthering academic literacy skills. Almost all of the authors of this study were additionally teachers incorporating the curriculum and participants within the study. Their curriculum purposely used graphic novels to support students and improve their reading and writing skills for academic purposes. In addition, the curriculum incorporated learning about technology and its academic uses. Besides outlining the curriculum, Lawrence and her coauthors detail how graphic novels support reading, writing, and technology skill development for secondary students. The group of teachers used subject specific minilessons which "…included strategies for comprehending visual texts, writing comics, learning the research process, and understanding technological basics…" (485). The authors also emphasized using relevant topics for students to study and respond to, such as social justice issues. Encouraging connections between classroom learning and external life experience helps students engage with critical literacy as well as multiple literacies. This can further be done with graphic novels and technology use within the classroom, which is seen in this study.

Before graphic novels were seen in secondary classrooms, comic books and related visual art were simply read for pleasure. Comics were cheap, relatively accessible, and typically had wide range of readers demographically, such as children and young adults. Due to its history, it has been difficult to shift the perception of graphic novels from niche entertainment to literary artifacts among students and teachers alike. Robin

Moeller's "A Question of Legitimacy" shares the main points of her small-scale study of how graphic novels are perceived by students within secondary classroom. In addition, the article includes the teacher's response to their use within the curriculum and student opinion. The teacher from the study did consider and acknowledge the benefits to using graphic novels as supplemental texts to the traditional text, but did not want to fully replace the original copies. The study had half of the class reading a traditional text while the other half reading a graphic novel of the same story, which involved the original author of the traditional text. While students felt there was no educational value for using graphic novels, students who were interviewed preferred the graphic novel to the traditional text and felt they were more engaged when reading (715). The comparison of reading a traditional literature text versus a graphic novel text suggested how students retain information and what differences they focused upon, like superficial aspects such as characterization. The theoretical framework underlying Moeller's study relates to new media theory and multimodality, which "describes[s] the way in which individuals make sense of text through different modes, such as writing, signs, symbols, and music" (710). Though the study focused on perceptions of graphic novels by the teacher and students within the study, literacy and associated pedagogical subjects were apparent throughout the article even when not directly discussed.

DISCUSSION

From the publications covered in this review, people, teachers and students alike, clearly enjoy comics, and that the use of this medium within classroom contexts has value. The specific value of comics, whether it is to support students who struggle in developing their adolescent literacy skills or to broaden these skills to engage in multimedia contexts, is explicated in articles and books. However, little research on the explicit connections between the development of adolescent literacy development and using graphic novels as subject material within a curriculum is exists. Simply put, the reasons that graphic novels should be used in classrooms has become the primary focus and argument of many of these publications. There have been brief studies on student engagement and interest, comprehension of the text being read, and how the use of visuals in a text impacts how students learn about language. It is time for publications to investigate and report their findings on what actually happens when students read graphic novels in educational setting, especially within literacy scholarship.

Often within academia, students are assigned reading with efferent purposes in mind. Students are enrolled in school to gain knowledge and develop their understanding of the world, and reading certainly is a means to convey information. How can educators encourage students to read for both efferent and aesthetic purposes? Engaging students with an alternative text such as comics, reading purposes and their distinctions can be taught to students and help develop their self-sufficiency in deconstructing texts, their meaning, and purposes. In "Reading Comics, The Invisible Art", Shirley Brice Heath and

Vikram Bhagat begin their section about how students feel stigmatized and ashamed for reading comics because it implies minimal reading abilities or childish interests. Though trends have begun to change socially and culturally, which favor the inclusion of graphic novels and comics in the classroom, there are still those, educators and parents alike, who are skeptical about the academic value the genre has to offer. "Everywhere, print-only books hold the highest position for literacy achievement; art forms that mix words and pictures in bold colors receive attention primarily as commercial trivia" (586).

Comics as a genre have not been taken seriously in academic settings until recently. However, graphic novels are now being incorporated into classroom curricula from elementary to higher education due to increased student interest and the readability of these texts.

Graphic novel use in education also indicates to students that educators value their interests and see them as individuals rather than simply groups of adolescents. If students' potential interests in reading are devalued, the incentives for them to become successful readers are reduced. Students should be encouraged to read whatever they like for aesthetic reading purposes. Taking students' interest in comics can be a beneficial tool for showing them how to read for efferent reading purposes as well as engaging them. When examining student engagement when comics were used, Brice Health's prior interviews with programs using comics to develop adolescent literacy found that, "…readers saw the pictorial and verbal representations of their own experiences as strong motivation not only to read but to extend what were for many narrow ways of using textbooks…" (Brice Health and Bhagat 589). Giving students opportunities to select texts

as well as experience representative literature engages them as readers and as individuals. Student engagement is crucial for students to advance their comprehension about reading purposes. Students may be more engaged when reading comics due to factors such as the increase of multimedia as means for communication in the twenty-first century, exposure to narratives and experiences which are more reflective of contemporary history, and the frequent blend of standard, and colloquial language. If students see themselves represented within a text, they are more likely to make connections between what textual moves the literature uses as well as whether the text can be utilized for aesthetic or efferent reading purposes, or even both.

All subject areas in academia require students to read. Using reading as an educational tool is essential component of modern pedagogy. Since students are more likely to be pushed to read across the curriculum, the question arises if all students can read autonomously and assemble meaning from texts. Generally, their own reading interests are not accounted for when texts are selected for in-class reading, which impacts the outcome of how students find purpose in the act of reading. "…[S]tudents are expected to become independent readers, yet they get limited opportunities to explore their own interests in reading, to read at their own pace, or make their own decisions about whether or not to read a book," which ultimately impacts how students understand the purpose of reading and how they strategize textual navigation (Franzak 228). Incorporating student choice to complement pedagogical and curriculum decisions can distribute the power of learning more equally amongst educators and their students. While curriculum design should not be solely handed over to students, student

involvement with pedagogical decisions encourages them to become actively involved in their education.

Expanding what students read and their purposes for doing so supports the overall goal of developing adolescent academic literacy. By engaging students with comics, their skills are broadened while also seeing diverse representations of populations and place, which are more likely to be representative of their backgrounds than the traditional canon. If students are not involved in texts, their interest in understanding its meaning and how to purposefully interact with its language and concepts wanes. Thus, it is necessary for students to be informed of how and why individuals read, for what purposes, and why their engagement with the text and its ideals matter. Both efferent and aesthetic reading purposes and student engagement with comics aid in the student's development of reader fluency, another integral aspect of adolescent literacy development.

As students engage with literary texts, they must determine how to interpret the words and meaning on the page. Instances where students instantly recognize words and can easily construct the context in which they are being used in encourages and furthers student knowledge. In other encounters, students, particularly those who struggle with word comprehension, cannot decipher the meaning of a word and become inhibited as learners. Thus, they miss critical components which make up the narrative. Graphic novels can aid students who are attempting to develop their reading fluency as well as students who are proficient readers and easily navigate textual meanings. Comics provide

a different opportunity to engage with a text and its features by using other visual representations of meaning instead of words.

When examining features of literature and its deconstruction, students must be able to recognize subtle cues and construct meaning. "Many of the trappings around comics resemble those of literature: secondary texts document the history of cartoon creator's lives as well as offer deconstructions of their pictorial and verbal representations" (Brice Heath and Bhagat 586). The use of visuals in comics deviates from the standard form of language. Elements of literature are wholly represented. Students are presented with a different modalities and formats to glean meaning from. Skills learned and practiced while examining comics can later be applied to other genres of literature. Students will also gain a visual representation for new words, which will improve their ability to recall the learned word's definition in the future. All of these elements tie together because language is a symbolic visual. If letters were not ascribed meaning, they could not form words. Without words, much of language cannot be practiced, and writing could only be pictorial in representation of thought. By using comics, students gain exposure from texts necessary for literacy development while also learning other ways to comprehend and critique different perspectives. In addition to aiding reader fluency, students are exposed to different forms of language and vocabulary, both academic and informal, when reading comics.

Students must learn many aspects of adolescent academic literacy, and language development and use is at the top of the list. Students are exposed to language all of the

time whether they are within the classroom or out and about in the world. However, the exposure students receive from academic language is limited outside of school contexts.

To reinforce academic language and student understanding of its use and contexts, graphic novels as a genre can bridge the gap between types of language. Part of understanding how language works and is used requires the reader to expand their existing lexicon of words. Students must also be able to identify words, especially foreign words sharing roots to words already known, to proficiently navigate through a text. Comics add a visual element to help illuminate the meaning of a word and how it contributes to a situation's context. "Vocabulary recognition and inferencing come through contextual clues hidden in pictorial details and linked to experiential knowledge of readers…" (Brice and Bhagat 588). Using pictorial images and text in conjunction gives more information for the student to draw inferences from. The pictorial aspect in graphic novels adds an element which is more accessible, especially when students encounter foreign words and contexts. This additional element requires the student to decode and process internally more information, but with more detail and through using more than one form of textual communication. As McCloud puts it, "Cartooning isn't just a way of drawing, it's a way of seeing," which in turn can be viewed as a different method of seeing a text (31). Adding an additional method to experience and understand language within academic contexts only strengthens students' language development and abilities. Not only does this alternative method help define the meaning of language, but it also exposes students to both academic and non-academic language.

All students are exposed to non-academic language in everyday life. Using a text like graphic novels blends both forms of language and their use. When students read and interact with comics they use their prior knowledge of non-academic language to comprehend common terms. By doing this, they can understand a situation or plot within the text in its basic form. They use this basis to construct meaning for more complex narratives as well as words. Using common language and pictorial cues activates their prior knowledge. Thus, students are adding new information and experiences to what is already known rather than trying to construct new knowledge bases to store information. Connecting students' prior knowledge and abilities to process new information is supplemented when using graphic novels. Overall, comics contribute to emerging academic language development among students, and further their construction and solidification of terms and meaning.

CONCLUSION

The language arts classroom is changing. Teachers and students are examining different types of texts and formats of reading and writing in an increasingly diversifying curriculum. To ensure student learning, specifically regarding adolescent literacy, the curriculum taught must be accessible for all students. One way to encourage accessibility is through visual art. Exploration of other genres, particularly visual ones like graphic novels, is necessary. The blossoming interest in graphic novels, both generally and within academic scholarship, isn't wholly new. Yet, this interest isn't going anywhere, and people are finding ways to incorporate them into the classroom. Studying trends and gaps in educational scholarship discussing graphic novels not only will this allow us to think about how we can use them, but by seeing gaps in the research we can identify what we do and do not know about how their use can be beneficial to adolescent literacy.

Understanding features of adolescent literacy and how this literacy develops can further potential applications of effective graphic novel usage. My argument is that comics are likely able to support adolescent literacy development in academic contexts based on what we know about adolescent literacy and the features that graphic novels contain as a medium. By defining essential features that must be addressed and developed for adolescent literacy, such as comprehension, engagement and fluency, connections can be made from existing scholarship that the usage of comics in adolescent literacy pedagogy potentially transforms and supports how students acquire and advance their literacy abilities.

The conversation about graphic novels and their use in academic contexts is all over the place. Each author has a very specific reason for why their implementation is beneficial to classroom learning and student engagement. Yet, these claims often lack quantitative data and/or detailed information about student experience and performance. By compiling the past few decades of this scholarship and identifying patterns, future academics may be more likely to consider researching graphic novels and pedagogical usage, especially when investigating adolescent literacy development. Others who are interested in literacy studies may also benefit from seeing key aspects about adolescent literacy development organized, and then further considered towards the specific genre of graphic novels. By reading my scholarship about these connections, readers may choose to investigate further and adjust their views, whether they are pedagogical or not, to consider the relationship between graphic novels and adolescent literacy development.

Graphic novels and an academic interest in them has only increased in the past two decades. Scholarship has already begun to examine the potential benefits for their pedagogical application within and outside of a language arts curriculum. Several studies draw connections between how students are engaged by the genre, and how specific texts are used to supplement curriculum concepts. Popular graphic novels such as *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, which is utilized to discuss the World War II Holocaust, and *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, a queer memoir, are used to help students visualize the narratives and experiences of those who differ from them as well as provide representation for students who identify and relate.

Besides educators, other individuals involved in academia such as librarians are taking an interest in what graphic novels have to offer for their library patrons, especially budding readers who are of elementary schooling age. More opportunities have arisen for those who want to explore and add to the conversation since an obvious interest in graphic novels and their role in academia has been established. Further lines of inquiry include, but are not limited to: case studies using specific pedagogical frameworks and incorporation of graphic novels in the curriculum; researching and explicating the connections between specific graphic novels and historical and/or cultural phenomena; surveying educators, academic faculty and staff, authors, parents/guardians and/or students about the genre; collecting and anthologizing previous studies where graphic novels were used to convey specific information and results. Though scholarship surrounding graphic novels and comics in general is increasing, countless gaps to be are available to be filled with scholarly discourse regarding pedagogical implementation and use.

Specific topics to be studied regarding the use of comics in curricula with the intention to support adolescent literacy development include manufacturing a qualitative framework to collect and analyze data with specified focuses such as reading comprehension, vocabulary awareness and acquisition, academic and non-academic language acquisition, fluency, student engagement, motivation, multimodal literacy acquisition, and comprehension. Other topics to be studied include conducting surveys of both educators and sixth grade through twelfth grade students regarding their experiences with multimodal texts including comics and graphic novels, analysis of literacy curricula

and related educational standards with contemporary uses of comics, and further research on diverse adolescent populations and their experiences reading comics.

While various suggestions for how and why graphic novels aid adolescent academic literacy development, some of which are explored within this paper based on existing scholarship, many connections and discoveries still await the eager researcher. It is necessary to identify and understand how to best teach students and guide their knowledge toward a self-sustaining and critical mindset. Pedagogical practice is ever changing yet still requires an informed and well-researched foundation to critique new theories and practice. Encouraging graphic novel use as literacy tools within educational development will give better chances for students who require extra support while reading and decoding a text to learn.

Sometime during my undergraduate years, a woman and I were discussing books. It was so long ago I have forgotten the specifics, but one thing she said still sticks with me today. Regarding what other people were reading she said, "I don't care what they are reading. As long as they read." Since then, my prescriptivist notion of reading changed drastically. Books may carry specific markers of greatness and their audience can certainly debate these qualities. However, it is not the reader who should suffer in finding pleasure when reading, rather they should be encouraged to keep doing so. If graphic novels can become a place of respite for both proficient and struggling readers within the classroom, then they can begin to decode, debate, and reconstruct language with their peers. These actions are what aides in literacy development, especially within an academic focus, among adolescents.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Chart of Terms Used in Articles relating to Literacy

	Literacy (Academic, authentic, traditional, critical, multiliteracies)	Writing	Reading and Reading Comprehension	Vocabulary and Language Development (Academic)
1.			X	
2.	X			X
3.	X	X	X	X
4.	X	X	X	X
5.	X	X	X	
6.	X		X	
7.	X			
8.	X			
Total:	7	3	5	3

1. "A Question of Legitimacy" - Moeller

2. "Critical Literacies and Graphic Novels…" - Chun

3. "Defining Identities Through Multiliteracies…" - Danzak

4. "Using Graphic Novels in the High School Classroom…" - Smetana, Odelson, Burns, Grisham

5. "Graphic Novels and Multimodal Literacy…" - Hammond

6. "Now I "See"..." - Cook

7. Summer Program Helps…" - Lawrence, McNeal, Yildiz

8. "Writing From Behind the Fence" - Gavigan and Albright

Table 2: Chart of the term "Literacy" and its various forms used in articles

	Literacy	Academic Literacy	Authentic Literacy	Multimodal Literacy	Multiple Literacies (Multiliteracies)	Traditional Literacy
1.						
2.		X			X	
3.	X				X	
4.	X					
5.	X			X		
6.					X	
7.					X	
8.	X					X
Total:	4	1	1		4	1

1. "A Question of Legitimacy" - Muller

2. "Critical Literacies and Graphic Novels…" - Chun

3. "Defining Identities Through Multiliteracies…" - Danzak

4. "Using Graphic Novels in the High School Classroom…" - Smetana, Odelson, Burns, Grisham

5. "Graphic Novels and Multimodal Literacy…" - Hammond

6. "Now I "See"…" - Cook

7. Summer Program Helps…" - Lawrence, McNeal, Yildiz

8. "Writing From Behind the Fence" - Gavigan and Albright