Book Review: *Teaching with Comics Empirical, Analytical, and Professional Experiences*, by Robert Aman and Lars Wallner (Eds.)

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The book *Teaching with Comics: Empirical, Analytical, and Professional Experiences*, edited by Robert Aman and Lars Wallner, presents collective works arguing that comics foster "imaginative teaching" and intercultural understanding. By considering various disciplines, the compiled articles aim to support, extend, supplement, and elaborate within this core theme.

Aman and Wallner present their overarching argument for the use of comics in education by first presenting comics' struggle for legitimization in the classroom. Aman and Wallner focus on the development of comics into social commentary and their educational value. Their argument develops across four sections labeled as (1) *Comics as a Tool for Inquiry*, (2) *Art Education*, (3) *Language, Culture, and Communication*, and (4) *Social Sciences*.

Section 1 focuses on works which explore comics as a tool for critical examination. In *Breaking Boundaries: The Place of Comics in Art Education*, Clio Ding integrates art criticism to legitimize comics within art education while asserting that studying comics as an interdisciplinary form of art introduces them as a

serious form of study. Ding's (2022) mention of comparative and contextual analysis extends her explication of art criticism, providing further support for comics' integration in art curriculums in addition to literary classes. Finally, Ding's emphasis on an educational evaluation within art classes supports comics' multidisciplinary applications and she upholds its educational potential in higher education.

By focusing on visual-verbal interplay and interdisciplinary relationships found within comics, in *The Superpowers of the Interrogative Mode*, Noran Amin addresses how students understand, read, and interpret comics critically. Amin (2022) proposes a reading strategy called "interrogative mode", defined as a process allowing students to deconstruct elements of the material to develop their own understanding. Amin's interrogative mode places visual and verbal elements of comics in dialogue, allowing students to develop their individual interpretations by understanding, interrogating, and explaining the texts and images in combination. Amin effectively teaches a student-centered methodology of developing critical questions about the medium, expands the interrogative mode, and explains how to implement her strategy.

In *Comics and Social Emotional Laughter*, Donna Pursall (2022) regards childishness as a tool, instead of treating it as a fragility, while framing imagery as a baseboard for understanding emotions. By analyzing the visual cues used in children's comics, Pursall elaborates that "comics offer a light-hearted, non-threatening, and non-confrontational way" (p.70) to openly discuss emotions. She expands the idea by presenting humor as a healthy outlet for socio-emotional learning, placing importance on the depiction and perception of varying body shapes. Pursall's argument that "Humour comics offer an opportunity for serious lessons to be learned amidst laughter" (2022, p. 79) wonderfully reminds educators to be graceful with children's humor and to utilize its visual tools to assist in processing emotions.

The book then transitions to Section 2, which includes essays that discuss how to effectively use comics as a form of arts education. In *Comics Art Ed: Making Comics is for Everyone!*, Cathy G. Johnson explores the importance of the comic making process in education. Johnson demonstrates "how an arts education approach to teaching comics promotes important pedagogical values" (2022, p. 87) by identifying five pedagogical values: teamwork, ideation, literacy, self-actualization, and fun. Johnson focuses on the creative process and the identity of the artist, emphasizing that these factors hold more importance than the product itself

since skill development and self-expression occurs during the comic making process.

Johnson cites examples of practical experience, teaching methods, and diversity in graphic novels to support comic creation as self-advocacy. However, Johnson acknowledges the limitations of anecdotal evidence and suggests pursuing in-classroom experiments to support her findings with implementable methods that assist low literacy students.

The chapter *Cartooning in Educational Context: A Promising Way to Promote Cross-Curricular Work with Children and Adolescents* discusses literary benefits of humor within comics. According to Pedrazzini et al., "Cartooning can develop communicative, cognitive, emotional and social abilities" (2022, pp. 114-115) and they argue that because of text bubbles and imagery, comics are the prime example of how to teach multimodal learning. They suggest imagery helps children and adolescents understand social realities, so they conduct a cartoon workshop within different educational contexts that primarily aims to use comics to improve both cognitive and communicative skills.

Hannah Sackett's *Loosening the Straight-Away of Thinking: Comic Making as Arts Education* (2022) focuses on comic making as a tool to acquire multiple skills. While comic production is a way to practice technical skills such as illustrating or writing, by placing the emphasis on creation, Sackett establishes comic making as a process of self-learning. Sackett argues that the creative process of comic-making allows for the progression of cognitive skills, including developing narrative and self-reflection.

Sackett supplements her ideas by hosting a lunchtime comic club in a South England primary school for Year 3 students (aged seven and eight) over 13 weeks. Sackett identified consistent themes, topics, and characters within the students' works which reflected a focus on the development of narratives. Sackett concludes that open-ended practices produce independent student growth and interdisciplinary learning. The students exhibited development as writers, comic makers, and critical thinkers, thus presenting a viable argument supporting the implementation of comics in the classroom.

In Chapter 8, *Astérix in Scottish National Education*, Laurence Grove (2022) analyzes the use of *Asterix* as a learning example because of its adaptability. The utilization of *Asterix* in Scottish schools is best presented as lingual practice exposing its readers to Francophone literature. *Asterix* appealed to students

learning French as a foreign language as a creative tool and its use was well-received in the classroom. Grove's anecdotal evidence and case study provided positive feedback, suggesting that continuing *Asterix's* presence in the Scottish classrooms would benefit students' French language skills.

In Ashley K. Dallacqua, Dani Kachorsky, and Sara Kersten-Parrish's chapter *Developing Disciplinary Literacy Practices with Comics: Highlighting Students' Strengths, Questionings, and Knowings in School Spaces* (2022), the authors recognize that comics enter the classroom because they boost student engagement due to their popularity in non-academic spaces. They conduct three ethnographic studies centering on how reading comics across content areas supports disciplinary practices while utilizing a discipline-informed angle of interpretation. The first study hosted a student-driven discussion taking place in a 5th grade ESL class on *El Deafo* by Cece Bell, which produced empathetic contributions from the students. The second study assisted students in understanding historical contexts by introducing new perspectives on historical events within 7th grade history. The third study promoted science literacy and civic participation through a combination of materials, narratives, and imagery for AP science students. Thus, the interdisciplinary experiment and its benefits reflect a supportive case for integrating comics in various subjects.

Section three discusses how comics impact classes that teach language, culture, and communication, beginning with *Multi is More: Towards Media-Awareness and Multiliteracy in the Flemish Classroom Through Italian Comics*. With three official languages and English taking primary focus in Belgian secondary education, the chapter expresses concern for the presence of foreign language classes within the education system. Scholars Eva Van De Wiele, Michel De Dobbeleer and Mara Santi (2022) discuss how consuming literature in multiple languages across varying cultures assists in developing students' literacy beyond basic linguistic fluency. The team conducted three Italian workshops aiming to increase media awareness. The first workshop introduced comics theory and the media, the second consisted of thematic analysis and close reading, while the third provided the time and space to see if students retained skills from one and two. The study combined visual and lingual overlaps to incite specific reactions, resulting in an increased interest in media and student creativity. Despite the students disliking the language practice, the study produced reflective discussions and stimulated cultural awareness between Italy and Belgium.

Sylvia Pantaleo's chapter *Developing Student Creativity through Science Comics* aims to understand visual art, design, and conventions of comics while developing critical thinking through multimodal texts. Because using comics in class employs multiple skills simultaneously, Pantaleo (2022) argues comics' presence in science classes excellently demonstrates its cross-curricular uses. Pantaleo uses the OECD criteria of creativity to measure progress and places an emphasis on correlation between objectives. While Pantaleo concedes comics' use depends on the teacher's understanding of them, she concludes that comics in the sciences benefit students' science and literacy skills.

The final section includes works that investigate the benefit of comics in teaching social sciences. In *Using Comics to Teach East German History*, Michael F. Scholz (2022) demonstrates how comics motivate and engage students, stimulate critical thinking, and practice historical source criticism. Scholz discusses the benefits of teaching history through graphic novels by explaining how the drawn form materializes the past through visual formatting, making them well-suited for history pedagogy. Scholz references *Atze und Mosaik von Hermes,* published in 1955, to demonstrate comics' influence on attitudes regarding socialism, politics, and economics in East Germany while also using humor post-GDR [German Democratic Republic]. Scholz then considers reactions to the stories' purpose, intention, moral concepts, and the factual knowledge the comics' imagery conveys. Through this approach, Sholz uses a historical lens to implement and analyze comics' historical effectiveness.

Grace D. Gipson opens #*Black Female Identity Constructions: Inserting Intersectionality and Blackness in Comics* (2022) by establishing syllabi as impactful change and introducing hashtags as a media feature whose correct use functions as modern literacy. Gipson supports Jabari Sellar's argument that comics facilitate understanding, extend analysis, and replace less accessible texts, which transitions the focus to how categorized images can assist learning about localized topics such as Black Girl Reputation. Gipson beautifully elaborates on the importance of representation by providing an abundance of examples. However, while using hashtags for gathering visual information is useful, student use of hashtags is minimal due to negative, generational connotations associated with the symbol. Gipson's focus should center on representation within education and multiple ways of finding visual materials, such as comics, in addition to the hashtag. Despite this, Gipson's conclusion demonstrated how hashtags assist in locating specific images related to common themes or topics.

Materializing the Past by Zane Elward (2022) explores how the drawn form of comics retells subjective historical experiences through graphic histories or graphic journalism. Elward concedes that while subjectivity of comics is a strength in teaching about individual experiences, it potentially obscures historical truths or upholds propagandistic narratives; therefore, the chapter emphasizes that using imagery to communicate history must create a sense of responsibility while increasing active participation and students' retention of story. Elward acknowledges the limitations of using graphic novels in curriculum but maintains that all cultural artifacts require critical engagement.

Kirby Childress' *Immigrant Voices and Empathy: A Guide to Transformative Listening in Ruillier's Les Mohamed* introduces comics as a method of processing insidious traumas, specifically racism. Childress establishes that comics allow for visual empathy, meaning that comics visually display experiences that are otherwise difficult to imagine. By explaining the analysis' roots in Robert D. Stolorow's phenomenological approach to trauma, Childress dives into the importance of intention and how educators value the mediums that convey marginalized narratives.

Childress (2022) then explicates *Les Mohamed* (2011) by Jérôme Ruillier to demonstrate how Ruillier creates an experience through the comic in which the reader becomes a witness who uses compassion to interpret the story, as the comic opens dialogues between the author, the reader, and the narrative. Ultimately, Childress presents a straightforward approach to reading critically in a way that elicits empathy, which begins with reading with intent to understand, confront oneself, and actively experience internal empathetic transformation.

Teaching with Comics: Empirical, Analytical, and Professional Experiences presents valuable insight on the various benefits of implementing comics in the classroom. By considering the impact in multiple subjects, disciplines, and age ranges, the authors altogether demonstrate how comics improve student skills in many areas, from literacy to emotional intelligence. Through a compilation of theoretical and in-class research, the articles demonstrate accessible and impactful methods that utilize comics in education. Aman and Wallner's collaborative work is a valuable collection of education theory that supports comics use and excellently presents multiple perspectives that complement the shared goal of recognizing the legitimacy of comics in the classroom.

The book's interdisciplinary approach accomplishes its purpose of allowing readers to establish a well-rounded understanding of comics' positive impact in

teaching technical skills, cognitive skills, language skills, critical thinking, empathy, and more. *Teaching with Comics* presents effective empirical studies from various classroom settings and actively supports implementing comics to assist students in further developing multiple skills.

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