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Graphic Novels: A Brief History, Their Use in Business Education, and the Potential for Negotiation Pedagogy

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Abstract

Over an extensive history, graphic novels have developed into a legitimate form of fiction and nonfiction for readers and students. Use of graphic novels in classrooms has proven effective in facilitating learning for students, as a conduit for lifelong reading, a tool for increased comprehension and critical literacy, and a stimulus for interest and comprehension. In applying this to teaching negotiation and conflict management, graphic novels may be effective in engaging students and increasing understanding when terms and concepts are confusing or vague, especially in their differences, and can help students understand the process and outcome of negotiation, both objective and subjective. It is in this way that the use of graphic novels in teaching negotiation and conflict management links to the nexus of research, theory, practice, and pedagogy. The article closes by describing these connections, and offering some suggestions for how to source material and include it in classroom settings.

Keywords: negotiation, communication, teaching, learning, graphic novels, pedagogy.

Graphic Novels: A Tool for Teachers, a Resource for Students

The concept of the graphic novel, sometimes referred to as a “graphic narrative,” has a contested actual definition. In a broad sense, graphic novels are longer works or omnibuses of comics content (Tychinski, 2017) and are considered such here. In fact, graphic novels and comics content are so closely tied in terminology that they may be used interchangeably, with an important difference: Graphic novel-type content typically contains the full arc of a storyline or narrative, while a comic is released in a serial or episodic manner (Kelly, 2014). While a comic may tell a story over many issues, a graphic novel typically covers its message or material in one work. Further, while length certainly can be a determining factor in differentiation, it is not necessary that a graphic novel be an incredibly lengthy work. Another similar definition describes them as book-length works in the medium of comics that may be representative of stories based in fiction, nonfiction, or may be produced for informative uses (Stein & Thon, 2015), or more simply, as comics in book format (Schwarz, 2002). Graphic novels as they exist today evolved over time from the concept of comics and comic books, originally published as entertainment periodicals (Tychinski, 2017) through the convergence of comics and narratology beginning in the 1930s (Stein & Thon, 2015).

According to Broome (2017), the field of negotiation and conflict management brings together theory and practice, and that the negotiation field exists at the intersection, or *nexus*, of research, theory, practice, and pedagogy. The use of graphic novels and comics content in the classroom fit into this nexus, by integrating theories behind learning, such as visual and content literacy, and practice, that is the content of these works as a conduit for student learning of negotiation and conflict management concepts. This is especially true where conflict resolution and negotiation theory and research are not accessible due to its abstraction from the *real world* (Broome, 2017). This paper posits that the use of graphic novels and comics content works in negotiation and conflict management pedagogy offers a launching pad to develop various theories to the field specifically, an invitation to design studies or pilot tests of research in their use and that their use may be more than just academic, but have the potential to add to the practice of negotiation and conflict resolution in the real world.

A Brief History of Comics and Graphic Novels

Though in publication for several years previous, illustrated comics initially gained ground in popularity in 1938 with the emergence of *Action Comics #1*, the first ever release of the stories of Superman (Tychinski, 2017). Over time, the comic-style narrative increased in reach and popularity on a global scale as television was invented and the demand for superhero and other comics-related stories spread. In fact, scholars agree that much of the evolution of the comics medium and graphic novel was driven by the existence of competition to traditional literary works posed by larger and more established media and their industries, such as film, radio, and the aforementioned television (Stein & Thon, 2015).

The earliest examples of what may be firmly referred to as “graphic novels” were known as *album-type* comic books—compilations of stories originally released as serial works pulled together to be sold as complete sets (Tychinski, 2017). In the 1970s and early 1980s, the emergence of the true graphic novel began with the advent of mass book merchandising. This change allowed for mass production of longer works, and for writers and artists of comics and graphic novels to become self-sufficient, encouraging self-publishing and the release of works catering to their own interests in the lengths of their choosing (Tychinski, 2017).

Over the past 25 years, graphic novels and comics have developed to be an accepted and respected form of literary expression, becoming regarded as legitimate works of fiction and nonfiction. Over time, this genre of literature has grown to be widely accepted among audiences, including considerable internal field development. Assemblies such as the American Library Association (ALA) have established groups and conferences—such as the annual International Graphic Novels and Comics Conference and the ALA’s yearly Graphic Novel Conference (“Convention Profiles,” 2017)—giving renown to the genre on national and international scales. Along with this has come a system of awards developed for the genre or in conjunction with other awards, such as the Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards (“Eisner Awards History,” 2012) and the Hugo Awards category for Best Graphic Story (“Hugo Awards. . .,” 2015). Comics-type works even have an established academic journal, the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* (“Journal of Graphic. . .,” 2017).

Outside of internal field development and acclaim, some graphic novels have worked to legitimize the medium through recognition external to the field. An example is seen in the novel *Maus* by Spiegelman, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1992. Other examples of graphic novels that have gained acclaim include *Fun Home* by Bechdel, which has been nominated for traditional literary awards as well and even adapted into an acclaimed and award-winning musical (Alverson, 2014), *Last Day in Vietnam* by Eisner, both winners of the Eisner Award, as well as *Boxers and Saints* by Yang and *Stitches* by Small, winners of the National Book Award (Alverson, 2014).

Aside from these newer examples, adaptations of literary classics exist as well, such as *Crime and Punishment* by Dostoevsky and various works by Kafka (Schwarz, 2002). Many more examples exist in this genre, with more applications available as the validity and acceptability of graphic novels expand.

Graphic Novels in the Classroom

One further step in legitimizing the medium is the rise of use in classrooms in frequency and popularity (Chun, 2009). For example, winner of the Pulitzer Prize, *Maus*, has been used in teaching across disciplines at the secondary and university levels (Chun, 2009). This graphic novel in particular has been used to teach in various subject matter, including history, sociology, language, and psychology (Chun, 2009). In fact, many of the above-described graphic novels have been used as well, including *Fun Home* and *Last Day in Vietnam*. Other, less literary but still applicable and sometimes more recognizable titles have also been utilized, such as omnibus editions of the X-Men, used to teach ethics and business topics (Gerde & Foster, 2007). Graphic novels and comics function well as tools for education, and their ability as tools for teaching spans a broad range of topics. This is due to many reasons. Graphic novels acknowledge the impact of visuals in literacy and learning (Schwarz, 2002). The medium has a proven ability to function as a conduit to increase reading activity in students uninterested in reading in general. For unengaged students, the use of visual media in communicating material can assist in building complex reading skills by harnessing students' existing interests ("Using

Comics. . .” 2008). In this way, reading comics and graphic novels leads to other reading (Alatis, 1989), which may include fiction, non-fiction, and educational materials. These materials have been used in all levels of education, from K-12 to university levels. For example, the graphic novel *Maus* by Spiegelman has been used for teaching in university-level history courses (Chun, 2009).

Graphic novels also appeal to readers at all skill levels. In the past, graphic novels or comics materials have been viewed as primarily for children, and readers may have that intuition when considering the notion of utilizing them in negotiation and conflict management education. This is an understandable intuition, however incorrect, as more significant literary works have been authored in this format. The author suggests, in fact, that as a first step of understanding the legitimacy of graphic novels, readers new to the format access what might be known as “classic literature” as a foray into the genre. For example, a reading of *War and Peace*, an oft difficult read even for adult and/or advanced readers, would be an equally if not more impactful part of an education in graphic novel format than in typical literary context. Alverson (2014) explained that such a reading in fact lead to their own personal experience in greater understanding of the work and eventual curiosity to read the piece in its original format.

As graphic novels and comic books contain a great deal of language in varying complexities, they are suitable for students at different levels of language and reading proficiency (Alatis, 1989). At all levels, these works serve well to help in differentiating between terms and concepts, with exceptional ability when students are considered novices in a topic or discipline (Alatis, 1989). In this way, graphic novels serve to enable students in their learning of new subjects. For students learning previously unseen terms or exploring new concepts, the combination of images and text enables engagement and fosters critical discussion that is not possible with simple written texts, due to the conveyance of the textual meanings through the visual mode of representation (Chun, 2009). The visual narrative accompanying the text in graphic novels provides clues, contextual and other, that give light to the meaning of unfamiliar words, terms, or grammatical structures (Krashen, 1989). This provides students with an engaging learning opportunity that acknowledges the largely visual world they live in (“Using Comics. . .”, 2008).

Much of the increased comprehension comes from the necessity to use what is known as “visual literacy.” Visual literacy is defined as the ability to “read,” interpret, and understand information presented in pictorial or graphic images (Stokes, 2002) and has been proven to enhance learning, especially in subjects where prior knowledge is low (Chanlin, 1997). In fact, studies on visual literacy have shown that the use of graphics in instructional modules in general promotes achievement (Kleinman & Dwyer, 1999), that visual media summary is more effective than verbal summary, and that visual media summary alone can be more effective than combined media summaries, such as visual and audio (Stokes, 2002) found in comics and graphic novels.

Theories surrounding using visual literacy in teaching further support the use of graphic novels in classrooms. One theory of visual literacy, Genre Theory, posits that as advancements are made in technology and information delivery, teachers should use a multimodal approach to information delivery to have the greatest impact on their students’ understanding (Unsworth, 2004). This theory argues that learning has always excelled when literacy is multimodal (i.e., through written language as well as image) and that each part can inform different aspects of topics to be learned. Images, on the one hand, may display what the world is like via social context, where text follows the logic of speech to guide students through reporting of actions and events, and description of procedure and terminology (Unsworth, 2004). In this way, image and text are complementary to each other as well as to students’ learning.

Beyond regular-level comprehension, the visual literacy necessary to comprehend the form and format used in graphic novels can be used to increase what is known as “critical literacy.” Theories of critical literacy posit that certain forms of information delivery encourage readers to move beyond a surface-level comprehension and delve into deeper understanding of pieces of text. This occurs through identification of underlying ideologies or belief systems inherent in any medium of words and images (Boatright, 2010), such as graphic novels or comics content. Using this critical literacy, when reading graphic novels, the reader often creates an overall meaning by relating the words and images to their own experiences (McNicol, 2014). This provides them with a specific relatability to the works not generated by traditional educational texts. Graphic novels prove a provocative resource

for engaging students in complex issues (Boatright, 2010) in literary and interpretive contexts.

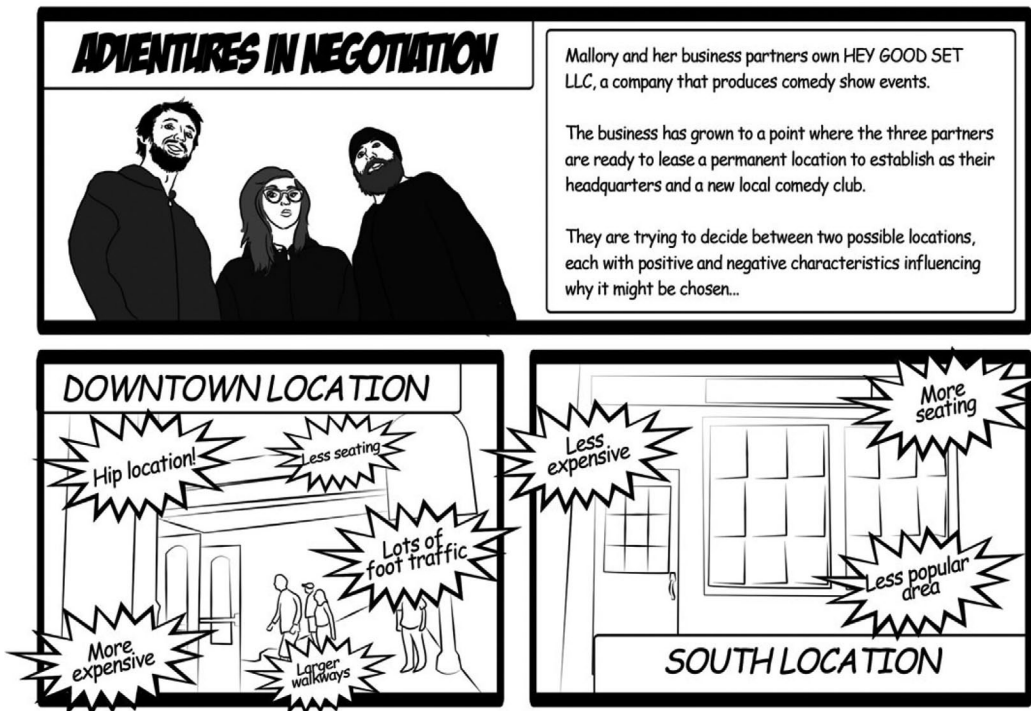
Overall, utilization of visual and critical literacies is beneficial for student skill development across disciplines. This includes development of comprehension, critical thinking, creativity, context, emotional connection, and information acquisition (McNicol, 2014; Stokes, 2002; Unsworth, 2004). Due to these types of success in teaching, the use of graphic novels for education is spreading and gaining acceptance. Their use is no longer limited to simple storytelling or narrating history. One now finds them used for teaching health, math, science, safety, and teaching English as a second language. Beyond direct learning of subject matter in graphic novels, students may also gain critical literacy in a general sense from the medium, examining how color affects emotion, pictures can stereotype, or how realism (or lack thereof) may play into message delivery of works (Schwarz, 2002). Even Kaplan testing has incorporated the graphic novel for SAT prep courses (Short & Reeves, 2009). Increasingly, use of graphic novels is not limited to teaching children or young adults; it is spreading in higher education as well. Graphic novels are used for teacher education (Hall, Hall, Hodgson, Hume, & Humphries, 2012) and for business education (Gerde & Foster, 2007). For example, colleges across the United States, including Duke University and Ursinus College in Pennsylvania, include *Fun Home* as recommended reading or as part of courses in various disciplines, such as ethics and psychology (Scudera, 2015).

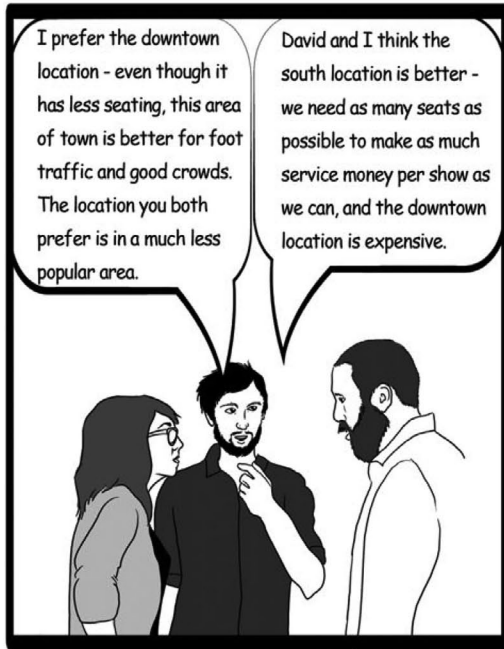
Success in using graphic novels to teach speaks to the medium's establishment as a modern form of narrative that is effective in teaching the complexities and social context of specific topics. In fact, studies show that graphic novels have a higher impact on learning outcomes such as verbatim recognition, as compared to traditional textbooks (Short, Randolph-Seng, & McKenny, 2013). Interestingly, comics and graphic novels have been used for development of understanding of concepts in business (Gerde & Foster, 2007). A specific case is found in their use for exploring business ethics and business-and-society topics in the classroom (Gerde & Foster, 2007). Graphic novels provide visual representations that aid student learning, successfully engaging students more effectively than current textbooks do alone (Short & Reeves, 2009).

Graphic Novels in Education and the Potential for Negotiation and Conflict Management Pedagogy

Graphic novels might be particularly effective in teaching negotiation and conflict management. Using this engaging and effective medium can help students learn the complex, difficult, and before-unseen subjects in negotiation and conflict management classes. For many students, college or university courses are the first time they encounter negotiation and conflict management as a subject, making them novice learners in this area. Also, many times, precise understanding of concepts and terminology in this subject can elude students. This may be especially true when a term or topic to be learned is confoundingly similar to others. Using a visually represented narrative that connects the terms with socially relatable situations can encourage students to understand the terminology by delving into the concept and seeking the deeper underlying concepts and theories (Boatright, 2010). For example, students may learn the five types of integrative tactics—logrolling, expanding the pie, bridging, nonspecific compensation, and cost-cutting (Pruitt, 1981)—more effectively through the combination of image and text representation offered by graphic novels, than through other forms of teaching. Students often seem to find precise understanding of these concepts to be challenging; they use the terms interchangeably, demonstrating difficulty in understanding what they have in common and how they are different. For the purposes of demonstrating the efficacy of graphic novel form for clarifying these terms, *logrolling* is defined as understanding both parties' priorities and making concessions until a mutually satisfactory deal is found, *expanding (or modifying) the pie* is defined as adding or changing resources so that both sides can meet objectives, *bridging* is defined as when a new option is developed that meets both parties most significant needs, *nonspecific compensation* is defined as generating alternatives to allow one party to obtain their objectives and compensate the other party for accommodating their interests, and *cost-cutting* is defined as one party achieving their objectives and the other party's costs are minimized if they agree to go along (Pruitt, 1981). The illustration at the end of this article demonstrates how utilizing a graphic novel form of material can provide clear, relatable explanations, accompanied by vicarious application

through the actions of the characters, which students are likely to file away correctly and retain. It should be noted that this example is one of many in the range of how a graphic novel might be presented. There is a broad spectrum of graphic novels—from those with extensive expository and/or narrative content displayed in words, and those with none, existing only in pictures. The most important thing about the graphic novel or comics content used is that it use the visual to understand the written content, and to utilize the format and form to improve engagement and understanding.

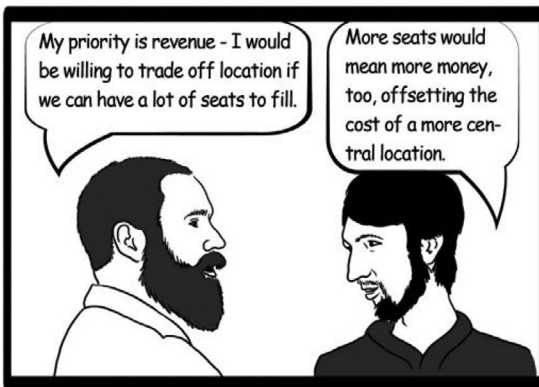




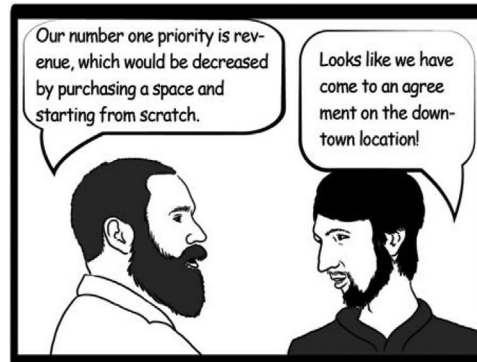
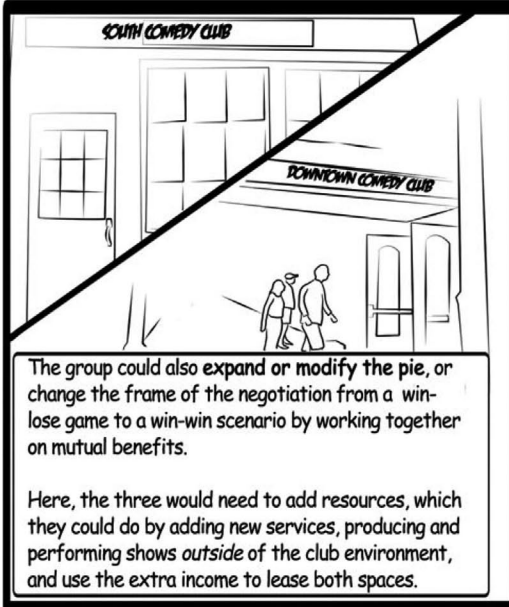
Mallory recognizes that she and her partners will need to negotiate to come to a win-win decision on the comedy club location, and considers how to get the best outcome for everyone. Not only is her relationship with her partners important, but the multiple issues under negotiation.

She sees that because of this, she is dealing with an **integrative negotiation** - one that involves multiple issues and a long-term relationship - versus a **distributive negotiation** - involving a single issue and no long-term relationship.

But there are other issues at hand as well...



By understanding each others' priorities, the group may be able to use **logrolling**, a tactic where each party makes concessions to come to a mutually satisfactory deal.



Mallory accepts the position as nonspecific compensation for allowing Kyle and David to obtain their objectives. As such, the three decide that as CEO and lease signator Mallory will negotiate the lease terms with the rental agent, Margaret.

There are three options on length and cost. Margaret will get the greatest commission for the longest, and HGC will get the lowest monthly cost. She decides to try cost-cutting to acheive her objective.

LEASE CONTRACT 6 month lease, \$2000/month

LEASE CONTRACT 1 year lease, \$1800/month

LEASE CONTRACT 3 year lease, \$1200/month

Date of lease contract:

1-PARTIES: This Lease contract is between you, the persons signing the contract)



Mallory, I have an idea: if you choose the longest lease offering, I will include the cost of obtaining a liquor license in the closing fees. This offers additional savings to the low monthly rent rate.


Mallory considers the alternatives: while a shorter lease is less risky, ultimately signing a longer lease will result in lower costs overall, acheiving the goal of she and her partners to have high profits.

After careful consideration, she decides to take Margaret up on her offer.

She signs the 3 year lease contract, and contacts her business partners to tell them the good news.

After leasing the downtown location, Mallory and her business partners go through the remaining steps to open their comedy club. Eight months later, the doors open.

Smaller rows between seats make room for additional seating, and the new comedy club has so much foot traffic from its location that the new business not only makes all the parties happy, but is successful from the very start.



In a similar manner, other sets of concepts or terms, such as a range of distributive tactics and the difference between an “interest” and a “position” can be explained and demonstrated through graphic portrayal, aiding students of negotiation and conflict management

to grasp them with greater precision. Other, more challenging topics may be covered as well, for example, improving the ethical conduct of students enrolled in negotiation courses. Often times, students believe that maximizing their own value in negotiation is the best outcome without regard for interests of the other party; however, this can be improved by enhancing long-term perspectives and appealing to the students' ethical egoism, perhaps by reinforcing the idea of reputation impact (Schroth, 2008) and the role of apology in conflict management (Lewicki, Polin, & Lount, 2016; Tomlinson, Polin, Gray, & Barry, 2017). This type of reputation impact and the structure of an apology in the long term may be shown effectively through the use of a graphic novel, as images can clearly convey emotional contexts to students. Similarly, students may gain understanding of other emotional contexts, such as anger. The emotion of anger in negotiation is a complex topic, and things such as positive and negative inter- and intrapersonal effects (Callister, Geddes, & Gibson, 2017; Hunsaker, 2017) may be shown in an engaging and understandable way.

The unique capability of a graphic novel to influence students to seek deeper comprehension of the topics they cover lends a particular advantage to the study of negotiation and conflict management. Comics offer an incredibly graphic way, for example, to show students how negotiators might react emotionally to a given conflict or negotiation situation. A visual representation of emotion in concert with negotiation strategies and tactics may help in not only grabbing student attention but driving them to seek a deeper more critical understanding of these ideas, and to understand not just the objective but also the subjective outcomes of these situations.

When deciding how best to use graphic novels in teaching negotiation and conflict management, this article lends several suggestions. First, it should be noted that for the use of graphic novels to be effective, textbooks do not need to be replaced, although it is not unheard of. Graphic novels excerpt-anthologies have been developed as tools for the classroom in the past, such as *Reading with Pictures*, a volume of short stories addressing topics in social studies, math, and science, though this example was developed for secondary-school-level readers (Alverson, 2014). An advantage of this type of development is customization: Each story is developed and includes research-based justifications for using these materials in the classroom.

Second, in a college or university setting, graphic novels and comics content should be added to coursework and textbooks as supplementary material or “enhancements.” This is best suited to use in situations where students struggle in understanding complex concepts, or when the students in the class are considered novice learners (Stokes, 2002) of the material, being introduced to it for the first time. One suggestion for inclusion of these materials is adding full-length fiction graphic novels with topics and themes identified, allowing students to seek out said themes and topics to demonstrate understanding. Another suggestion is to use excerpts of existing works to show visual representations of challenging subjects, such as those already described as examples in this article. Finally, it is suggested that graphic novels be developed with negotiation and conflict management themes, topics, and subjects in mind. These can be original, collaborative works between scholars, educators, and those in fine arts and/or graphic design. For example, an academic or teacher may work directly with a graphic designer to create content to ensure need-fit for their specific course. Matz and Borbely (2017) have called upon teachers to incorporate reading of full book-length descriptions of real-world negotiation into negotiation courses. Graphic novels could be utilized to make such assignments engaging, and existing graphic novels and classics as described above may be especially good at filling this role.

Third, once teachers have developed some experience with teaching with graphic novels, they may innovate new approaches to utilizing this medium for teaching negotiation and conflict topic. For example, given that design processes have been shown to have learning benefits over other forms of learning in the context of negotiation (Druckman & Ebner, 2013), it may be that putting students in the driver’s seat by tasking them to create a graphic novel (or a part of one) on their own, rather than reading one, might be a beneficial course assignment. Learning by doing and the use of simulations increase levels of knowledge in those participating (Cuhadar & Kampf, 2015). In fact, it is hoped this paper leads to ideas for research, such as a pilot test in the use of graphic novels and comics content in classroom, or a pilot test of the efficacy of the creation of graphic novels and comics content by students in classrooms as well. The author hopes this paper and the three aforementioned ideas for use are inspirational for theorists, practitioners, and teachers.

Conclusion

The use of graphic novels in the classroom fits well into the nexus of research, theory, practice, and pedagogy as a possible innovative device for application in teaching negotiation and conflict management.

This paper serves as an introduction to theory based in visual and critical literacies. Due to their ability to teach students new material in a way that is engaging and which increases overall comprehension of material, a broad spectrum of subjects has seen a high effectiveness in utilizing this medium for teaching. Because of this effectiveness, teachers should use graphic novels and comics in teaching negotiation and conflict management. This would be especially helpful in teaching topics, terms, and concepts that are easily confused with one another, or which introduce entirely new material that is challenging for students, as it will engage these novice learners and illustrate concepts that are new or challenging well.

While development of entire graphic novels to replace textbooks for courses is unnecessary, new graphic novels or comics content may be developed for specific concepts or applications. Previously published works may be applied as well. Overall, the addition of these types of material will increase not only engagement and understanding, but have been shown to increase visual and critical literacies overall in students, which is helpful for any student in an educational setting.

In connection to research, it is hoped this paper works as a launching pad to develop a pilot test of effectiveness of using graphic novels to teach negotiation, or to design a study around this idea to develop a theoretical framework that applies directly to the discipline.

Finally, in practice, I would like to suggest the use of graphic novels not just in the academic classroom, but in the workplace. The use of comics content to demonstrate issues in corporate training, for example, may be effective, such as sexual harassment. The use of graphic novels in this way also has potential for consulting, or for conflict management training in organizations.

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