The Social Studies (2013) **104**, 38–45

ISSN: 0037-7996 print / 2152-405X online
DOI: 10.1080/00377996.2012.665957

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

"Your Credibility Could Be Shot": Preservice Teachers' Thinking about Nonfiction Graphic Novels, Curriculum Decision Making, and Professional Acceptance

J. SPENCER CLARK

School of Teacher Education and Leadership, Utah State University, Logan, Utah, USA

This article examined the value of using nonfiction graphic novels as historical narratives in the social studies curriculum. Preservice teachers evaluated several graphic novels and identified attributes of graphic novels that could contribute to students' development of historical thinking and understanding of multiple perspectives. Despite the preservice teachers' value for graphic novels as resources and their desire to use them in their future classrooms, all of the preservice teachers identified reasons why they would not be able to use graphic novels in their future school context. The findings suggested that the preservice teachers' desire to be accepted by their school community took precedence over their intention to use resources that they deemed engaging and beneficial for student learning.

Keywords: graphic novels, multiple perspectives, historical thinking, curriculum decision making, professional acceptance

The use of historical narratives can have a significant impact on students' historical understanding (Barton and Levstik 2004; Ehlers 1999; Olwell 1999). In a chapter on the use of historical narratives Keith Barton and Linda Levstik (2005, 133) wrote, "It is important in the development of any mature historical understanding that learners see history as a human enterprise made up of interpretations, subject to revision, and expressed through a variety of genres." Graphic novels allow readers to engage in new interpretations of history by offering revisions of historical events and the circumstances of historical actors' lives. Graphic novels are a genre that has been in a constant state of development over the past thirty years. In their development as a genre, graphic novels have gained significant popularity among young readers (Schwarz 2002) and credibility among critics (Grossman and Lacayo 2005; Special Awards and Citations 2011); however, the genre has failed to gain significant popularity or credibility among educators. The purpose of this article was to highlight some of the beneficial attributes of graphic novels in the social studies curriculum, as well as identify some of the possible challenges that impede the genre's acceptance into the social studies curriculum.

Address correspondence to J. Spencer Clark, Assistant Professor of Social Studies Education, School of Teacher Education and Leadership, 2805 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322, USA. E-mail: spencer.clark@usu.edu

Multiple subject areas have recognized the possibilities of graphic novels in the curriculum (American Library Association 2006; Gallo and Weiner 2004; McTaggart 2008; Schwarz 2002; Versaci 2001). However, there are only a small number of articles that even connect graphic novels to the field of history or social studies (Cromer and Clark 2007; Frey and Noys 2002; Matthews 2011; Werner 2002). The availability and content of graphic novels have expanded in the past ten years, and this is especially true for graphic novels relevant to the social studies classroom. The graphic novels discussed in this article represent a wide array of nonfictional topics and include historical events such as the battle of Gettysburg and Hurricane Katrina, historical documents such as the 9/11 Report and the U.S. Constitution, and people such as Anne Frank, Che Guevara, and Malcolm X. Despite these relevant social studies topics, as well as attempts by advocates to establish graphic novels as legitimate texts, graphic novels are still discounted by many social studies educators as a result of their lineage to the comic book (Cromer and Clark 2007). Furthermore, there has been little empirical research examining the use of graphic novels for educational purposes in social studies and other subject areas.

For many who are unfamiliar with graphic novels, their lineage to the comic book defines their viability as a resource, especially compared to other literary forms. Yet the attributes that link the genre to comic books—the interplay between images and text—are exactly what make graphic novels a unique and possibly engaging narrative form for

students to explore historical topics (Cromer and Clark 2007). This interplay between the text and images has become increasingly a part of modern media; thus, graphic novels offer students opportunities to develop new and multiple literacies by engaging with narratives about social studies topics. The narratives also contained in nonfiction graphic novels often present difficult historical situations in which historical actors must make choices when faced with external pressures. Resources that represent historical situations in this manner have been found to be valuable as mediums to engage students in forms of historical thinking (Endacott 2010).

The purpose of this study, then, was to explore how preservice teachers valued graphic novels as resources and specifically as historical narratives for the social studies classroom. I wondered if the preservice teachers would identify similar possibilities for the genre in the social studies curriculum, just as the previous literature had advocated. Furthermore, I wondered if the bias that has traditionally plagued the graphic novel genre would affect the preservice teachers' decisions about the graphic novels' value in the social studies curriculum and in their future classrooms. The participants in this study found graphic novels to be valuable for the social studies curriculum in the same ways discussed above, along with several other ways; however, the participants felt that their use of graphic novels in their future classrooms would be limited because of the genre's reputation and lineage to the comic book. The preservice teachers perceived that traditional narrative forms were preferred in both professional and societal contexts, and this perception dominated their thinking about the use of graphic novels in the social studies curriculum.

Clarification of the Term Graphic Novel

The term graphic novel can be very confusing for people who are unfamiliar with the genre. For example, in discussions about my work with graphic novels, people will often think that "graphic" denotes explicit content. Certainly, some graphic novels do have content more appropriate for adult audiences; however, the content of most nonfiction graphic novels is suitable for middle or high school classrooms. Stephen Weiner (2004, 5), author of *The 101 Best Graphic Novels*, defined the graphic novel as "A cousin of comic strips, a graphic novel is a story told in comic book format with a beginning, middle, and end. Graphic novels also include bound books conveying nonfiction information in comic book form." Weiner noted a confusing aspect of graphic novels in his definition: How can a "novel" be nonfiction? Stephen Tabachnick offered a similar definition of the graphic novel in his introduction to *Teaching the Graphic Novel* and went on to clarify the confusion in the labeling these graphic works as "novels" despite the nonfiction content of some graphic novels. Tabachnick (2009, 2) wrote:

> The graphic novel is an extended comic book that treats nonfictional as well as fictional plots and themes with the depth and subtlety that we have come to expect of traditional novels and extended nonfictional texts. The term *graphic novel* seems to have stuck despite the fact that graphic novels are often compelling nonfictional works, such as biographies, autobiographies, histories, reportage, and travelogues.

This distinction is important in considering nonfiction graphic novels used in this study as narratives. All of the graphic novels used in this study also used a blend of primary and secondary sources in the development and support of their narrative. For example, the Howard Zinn (2008) graphic novel, *A People's History of American Empire,* is based on his book *A People's History of the United States.* One instance in the graphic novel discusses the internment of Japanese Americans and has pictures of the executive order issued by President Roosevelt and a flyer from the Wartime Civil Control Administration, along with Zinn's analysis (Zinn 2008, 125). The other graphic novels discussed in this article are based on primary accounts of historical events and individuals' lives. For example, *A.D.: New Orleans after the Deluge,* by Josh Neufield (2009), provides five accounts of Hurricane Katrina from individuals that the author interviewed in New Orleans. *Ché: A Graphic Biography,* by Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colon (2009), is based on Ernesto "Ché" Guevara's diary entries as presented in his memoirs. *Gettysburg: The Graphic Novel*, by C. M. Butzer (2009), uses soldiers' letters, nurses' diaries, and other recorded dialogue to provide an account of the famous Civil War battle. Malcolm *X: A Graphic Biography,* by Andrew Helfer (2006), is based solely on the Malcolm X's biography *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley* (1987) and includes photographic pictures. The *9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*, by Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colon (2006), presents important sections of the 9/11 Report in graphic form. These examples represent only a small number of nonfiction graphic novels available for the social studies classroom (see Appendix for list of nonfiction graphic novels for social studies).

Review of Literature on Graphic Novels

The value of graphic novels has been cited in other subject areas; however, there have been only a small number of studies that draw on empirical data. Much of the literature on graphic novels includes articles about the history of graphic novels and their evolution from comics, critical analyses of the work of various authors or artists, and early studies of the use of comics in education. As graphic novels have become more popular, educators have begun to conduct studies on their use in the classroom. Many recent studies about using graphic novels in the classroom support their ability to motivate reluctant readers and aid less skilled readers in reading comprehension. Other studies

on comics and graphic novels have noted their usefulness in providing cross-curricular connections, alternatives to traditional content, opportunities for critical thinking and analysis, and tools to bridge in-and-out of school literacy (Gorman 2003; Schwarz 2006). However, most examples in which comics and graphic novels were actually used in classrooms were supported only with anecdotal evidence, leaving much space for future inquiry.

Among the existing research, there are very few negative perspectives for the use of comics or graphic novels in the classroom. Probably the most frequently mentioned, and overall primary finding in studying graphic novels, was their ability to motivate students to read (Annett 2008; Cary 2004; Cho, Choi, and Krashen 2005; Lamanno 2007; Matthews 2011; Morrison, Bryan, and Chilcoat 2002; Seyfried 2008). Comics and graphic novels were also found to benefit English language learners (ELL) in developing comprehension skills (Cary 2004; Chun 2009; Serchay 2008). Frey and Fisher (2004) found that graphic novels helped a struggling group of urban ninth graders develop their comprehension and writing skills. In studies concerning critical thinking skills, Versaci (2001) found that his students participated more in discussions of comics than with other literary texts, while Carter (2007) found graphic novels and comics to teach critical reading and thinking skills with relative success. Overall, the literature concerning graphic novels in other subject areas establishes that graphic novels can provide an alternative motivation and/or manner for students to engage in traditional learning activities.

Just as in other subject areas, there has been little empirical research in terms of historically based nonfiction graphic novels. Matthews (2011) provides the only empirical research for the use of graphic novels in social studies education. Matthews' (2011) research involved preservice teachers and examined their interpretations of graphic novels. Mathews (2011) found that preservice teachers valued the graphic novel format as a means to motivate struggling readers. For content, Matthews (2011, 436) found that preservice teachers "critiqued the novels instead of critiquing the social issues discussed." Most of the research about nonfiction or historically based graphic novels has proposed possibilities for the use of graphic novels in the teaching of history, including a whole journal issue (*Rethinking History*, Volume 6, Issue 3, November 2002). Considering these possibilities, graphic novels purportedly allow their readers to interpret historically driven texts in new ways, learn about subjects that only had a fragmentary existence in the traditional curriculum, and use the reader to take an active role in the interpretation of the content (Cromer and Clark 2007; Frey and Noys 2002). To clarify the possible value of representing history through the graphic novel, Frey and Noys (2002, 258) explained, "What we mean by history in the graphic novel is how the graphic novel is a site where 'history' itself, or representations of history, are put into play: interrogated, challenged, and even undermined." Graphic novels, then, provide the possibility of alternative perspectives to traditional historical narratives, allowing students to develop a more diverse understanding of history through multiple interpretations that challenge their prior understanding of historical situations.

The Study

This research was a case study undertaken in my social studies methods course. The twenty-four participants in this study were preservice teachers in an undergraduate secondary social studies methods course at a large midwestern state university. The course consisted mostly of students who were preparing for their student teaching experience in the following semester. These participants were chosen because I taught the methods course. However, the course focused on introducing, experiencing, and evaluating social studies curriculum and instructional methodology. Therefore, as the instructor/researcher, I wanted my students to consider graphic novels in that process as a regular part of the course. In using my students as participants, I had no control over the demographics of those who participated and chose to analyze data from all of the participants.

The study was structured so that each student would read two graphic novels over two weeks. The first graphic novel that each participant read was Howard Zinn's (2008) *A People's History of American Empire.* For the second graphic novel, participants had their choice of twelve graphic novels. Each preservice teacher chose one of the five graphic novels mentioned above based on their own interests. The students read *A People's History of American Empire* the first week and then read their other choice of graphic novel the next week. Students discussed *A People's History of American Empire* in a discussion board forum, in groups, and then as an entire class. The other graphic novels were discussed in small reading groups, as well as in a whole class discussion. The data sources for this study included six discussion forum posts on an online discussion board; post-it notes, on which students recorded their thoughts while reading the novels; a written analysis of the graphic novels, with students discussing the attributes of graphic novels, their educational value, and their place in the curriculum; and individual interviews with six students, conducted by the researcher, in which the students self-selected to participate. The discussion posts were completed the first week and before discussing the graphic novel in class, the post-it notes were collected the second week, the written analysis was collected the third week, and the interviews were completed during the initial three weeks following the spring semester.

Preservice Teachers' Views on Graphic Novels

Many of the preservice teachers were not excited about reading graphic novels in the course and could not foresee

much value in reading two graphic novels. Nearly all of the students changed their perspective after engaging with the two texts. Ann exhibited this attitude in her interview and said, "I wasn't thrilled. I thought the assignment might be kind of pointless, and I wouldn't enjoy the books. My opinion was totally changed after I read *Gettysburg*, and it seemed like some of the other books were equally interesting and educational" (Ann, Interview). Marco shared a similar attitude in a forum post about *A People's History of American Empire* and wrote:

> I feel as if the content is actually quite valuable. At first I was a bit hesitant to jump to this conclusion, as I am not a fan of graphic novels. However, the book flowed quite nicely and was easy and interesting read. Furthermore, it provided first-hand narratives of tragic and imperialistic events that have happened throughout the course of American history. For example, the first-hand narrative provided for the Battle of Wounded Knee section was horrific, as Black Elk described women, children and babies being gunned down by white men. It also provided great primary resources throughout, including historical photographs, newspaper clippings and historical documents. I feel that students would be more apt to read this as opposed to a general textbook. (Marco, Forum)

Anne and Marco demonstrated that they came to value the genre in several ways for the social studies curriculum and felt that graphic novels could benefit their students. The following sections present some of the ways the preservice teachers valued the graphic novels.

Multiple Perspectives

Nearly all of the students in this study noted that the graphic novels greatest value was in their presentation of multiple perspectives, which included new perspectives they were not aware of in several historical situations. Possibly one of the best examples of presenting multiple perspectives can be found in the graphic novel *A.D.: New Orleans after the Deluge*. Justin noted the graphic novel's impact and value in his analysis and wrote, "*A.D.: New Orleans after the Deluge* provides readers with a variety of individuals who were all affected by the storm differently, each providing their own perspective on the tragedy and ultimately providing individuals with a more accurate account of the event." Holly also noted the emphasis on multiple perspectives and the value of their use in *A People's History of American Empire.* In a forum post Holly wrote:

> I believe the content is highly valuable, as it not only discusses issues in American history that are not normally discussed, but also employs a variety of less traditional perspectives to do this. Because this is a graphic novel, it often takes the perspective of those who were actually involved in the events being discussed which is a very different approach than students would find in a textbook.

The preservice teachers demonstrated that the graphic novels they read offered valuable narratives that included new and multiple perspectives that were not typically found in the traditional social studies curriculum.

Reader Engagement

Preservice teachers in this study found, similar to the previous literature (Matthews 2011), that graphic novels would be valuable for engaging unmotivated readers. The format of graphic novels differs from traditional text, and the format of each graphic novel differs, which offers readers a variety of ways to engage with the text. Anne noted this fact in her interview and said, "They could be more valuable for certain students who do not enjoy reading . . . because graphic novels present information in a different way that could be more appealing to these students." Darin noted the value of graphic novels in a similar manner, but on a more personal level. In his interview Darin said, "I'll be honest, I don't like to read . . . which I know is bad to admit as a teacher but I enjoyed reading the Zinn book . . . and the 9/11 report one was fascinating . . . the mixture of documents and images was great." The preservice teachers valued graphic novels as narratives that could possibly engage students who typically do not enjoy reading, not to mention engage them in texts about history and current events such as the 9/11 attacks.

Historical Empathy Through Contextualization

All of the preservice teachers valued the graphic novels as narratives that could promote types of historical thinking among students. Most of the preservice teachers identified graphic novels as valuable ways to engage readers in thinking about historical empathy, because of the way the graphic novels portrayed the actors in context. Gary commented about this in his interview and noted that in *A People's History of American Empire* he learned about new events and perspectives. He was able to better understand their actions through the way the graphic novel contextualized attitudes among the actors. Gary wrote:

> First, like I had never even heard of the U.S.'s involvement in the Philippines invasion and then to learn about the Spanish-American War in Cuba and the 25th Black Infantry . . . the way they were treated . . . there is so much racism going on in those . . . wars . . . and you see it in the pictures along with the quotes . . . but I guess it was not long after the Civil War and then you throw-in the Monroe Doctrine and I guess even a little bit Manifest Destiny . . . and you can see the way people thought about other people that allowed for this to happen.

Sam also demonstrated empathy from the contextualization of Malcolm X's life in describing his experience with *Malcolm X: A Graphic Biography*. Sam wrote in his analysis, "Malcolm X is always presented as the violent half of

the Civil Rights Movement. The book presented a series of events . . . losing his parents, his horrible foster parents, and his racist teachers" and "I think I can see why he viewed the world the way he did . . . I definitely can understand him in a different light" (3). The graphic novels presented difficult historical situations and were able to present them in ways that contextualized the historical actors' decisions. The format of the graphic novels combined with their narrative forms contributed to effectively contextualizing the actors and the causes and consequences of their actions in a detailed and meaningful manner.

Historical Agency

The preservice teachers also valued graphic novels as a resource because they thought they could engage students in thinking about historical agency. Peter Seixas (1993) noted the importance of understanding historical agency and wrote, "Historical agency implies that people in the past faced choices, that they made decisions, and that the resulting actions had consequences. . . . historical agency is necessary for conceptualizing people's interactions with the social and cultural circumstances in which they found themselves" (303). Thinking about historical agency often involves identifying what actions were taken, by whom, and why. To think about historical agency also involves identifying and understanding the constraints that restricted individuals' actions, or in other words to engage in historical agency is to consider how much agency was possible for an individual in a given situation. Anne noted the value of the graphic novel *Gettysburg*, which emphasized the actions of lesser-known individuals involved in the circumstances of the famous battle. Anne commented on this in her interview:

> His [the author's] use of a wide span of people allows students to realize that there is not just one person in any historical event, but many that influenced the outcome and history as we know it. Students learn that it was not just President Lincoln or General Robert E. Lee that influenced the outcome of a battle such as Gettysburg and how we remember it, but that it was field nurses such as Eliza Farnham and everyday soldiers who died in battle that influence the history we know about an event such as Gettysburg.

In another interview, Dan commented on the value of *A People's History of American Empire* and the way it portrayed individuals and decisions they made despite the constraints of difficult circumstances. Dan said:

> I like how Zinn showcased actual people . . . people who were in these conflicts and stuff. I feel like his [Zinn's] perspective is kinda narrow and I wonder which perspectives he left out . . . but I really liked hearing about Eugene Debs and like the Black infantry in Cuba . . . and even in Iran . . . Mossadegh I think . . . they made sacrifices in such difficult events.

The preservice teachers found that the graphic novels held value in the way they portrayed historical situations and the actors in those situations. The graphic novels allowed for readers to see more explicitly the individuals' positionality and the constraints they faced when they made difficult decisions and sacrifices.

Historical Inquiry

The preservice teachers also found graphic novels to be valuable for historical inquiry. They found that graphic novels could help them raise questions about their own culture and experiences and allowed them to investigate the past to raise questions that possibly have relevance for the present. Olivia noted this in a forum post and wrote:

> I learned about several pieces of U.S. history, which was never even discussed in my history classes in high school. I had never heard of the My Lai Massacre, Pullman Strike, and the invasion of the Philippines, which were excellently covered in the Zinn book. It makes me think about stories in the news now and all of the places that the U.S. is involved in. I want to know more about these historical events, it is part of our history and I feel like our society sweeps so many things under the rug.

Mark also had questions after reading *A People's History of American Empire*. He noted not knowing much about President Ford's administration and was surprised to read about President Ford's actions after President Nixon's impeachment. However, Mark was more surprised by another aspect of the period, the administration's connection to corporate interests. Mark wrote in a forum post:

> How can we be surprised that companies like Halliburton are involved in shady government dealings now, if they were doing the same thing 30 years ago? But I am sure many people did not know about it just like I didn't. Now, I want to know what other companies have a shady history with the U.S. government.

When preservice teachers read the graphic novels, they engaged with unfamiliar historical situations and actors, which compelled them to inquire about both current and historical events.

Concerns about Using Graphic Novels

The preservice teachers valued graphic novels in a variety of ways and engaged with the social issues and multiple perspectives comprised in the narratives. When the preservice teachers were asked if they would use graphic novels in their future classrooms, they all said that they wanted to use them; however, they felt that they would not be able to use them because of professional constraints. The preservice teachers were worried about professional acceptance at two different levels of interest: community and school.

Community Interests

For community interests, preservice teachers thought that they would be constrained in using graphic novels for two distinct reasons. First, preservice teachers were aware of the previously discussed bias toward graphic novels due to their lineage to the comic book. The preservice teachers thought that people would discount their teaching and curriculum if they used resources associated with comic books, despite the value they held for them as resources. Charlie stated this in his interview, "My colleagues, administrators, and parents . . . and well, possibly students will think I am just giving them comics to read, instead of actual historical texts, even though they are just as good of resources." Preservice teachers also were concerned about the graphic novels displaying an un-American connotation. This concern was especially apparent for the preservice teachers' thinking about the Zinn graphic novel. The preservice teachers were fearful that colleagues, parents, and administrators would see them as advocating anti-American curriculum. John noted this in a forum post about *A People's History of American Empire*, "It is clear in reading this book that it has undertones that oppose American military decisions in our history. This may not be acceptable where I teach." Many other preservice teachers shared a similar concern, like Sarah who wrote in a forum post, "The novel is not very traditional in the way it portrays the United States. Conservative districts may not allow me to use the novel." The preservice teachers' concern about being accepted as a professional was based on common societal views, and these views weighed heavily on their decisions about using graphic novels in their future classrooms. Preservice teachers also thought that community values and the parents' views of graphic novels would constrain their use of graphic novels in their curriculum.

School Interests

The preservice teachers were also deeply concerned with how they would be viewed by their colleagues, and most importantly, their administrators at the school level. The preservice teachers were concerned about their professional credibility and how their colleagues viewed their competence as a novice teacher. Despite really enjoying and valuing the graphic novels he read, Gary stated in his interview, "[By using graphic novels] your credibility could be shot. And for that reason I don't think I'd use them." The preservice teachers even thought of specific situations in which their colleagues would possibly constrain their use of graphic novels. In his interview Dan said:

> If I am teaching like world history with four other teachers . . . there is no way I could use the graphic novels . . . they [the four other teachers] would find out from the students, and the parents and everyone would probably think my class was easier and complain, or I don't know . . . it just isn't worth it probably.

The preservice teachers also thought that they would have to justify their use of graphic novels in their social studies courses. Anne noted some concern over meeting the standards with graphic novels. In her interview Anne said, "I liked *Gettysburg* a lot, but I don't know if the content supports the standards well-enough. Maybe it could work in one of those classes that is a combination of english and history . . . standards wise." The constraints in using graphic novels that preservice teachers discussed at the school level illustrates their concerns about professional acceptance and the bias about graphic novels as historical narratives and resources.

Implications

The findings of this study suggest that in-service teachers and social studies methods instructors should consider graphic novels as viable resources to explore for use in their courses. Different from Matthews' (2011) study, the preservice teachers in this study critiqued the content of graphic novels, as well as their ability to cover difficult social issues. The preservice teachers in this study identified several attributes of graphic novels that engage readers in aspects of historical thinking (empathy, agency, and inquiry) in the context of social issues and engage readers with new and multiple perspectives on these social issues. These attributes make graphic novels another genre that is valuable to the social studies curriculum because they effectively engage students through the use of historical narratives. As mentioned by many of the preservice teachers, these historical narratives also focus on many historical situations and actors that are not typically covered in the traditional social studies curriculum. Graphic novels provide a way for readers to engage with voices often left out of the social studies curriculum and develop valuable skills in historical thinking.

The findings of this study suggest that social studies methods instructors should also consider the tension in preservice teachers' thinking about their curriculum decisions. Each preservice teacher found value in graphic novels for the social studies curriculum; however, each preservice teacher also noted constraints that would limit their use of graphic novels in their future school context. The preservice teachers' thinking about decisions to use graphic novels in their social studies curriculum was based on how the preservice teachers thought those decisions would be accepted by the greater school community. Their thinking relates to a perspective on curriculum decision making held by Barton and Levstik (2004), who identified two purposes that guide many teachers' actions or decisions in the classroom. One of these purposes was professional acceptance, or simply, teachers want to fit in. Barton and Levstik (2004, 254) wrote "they want to be accepted as a competent professional by fellow teachers, administrators, and parents." This desire to be accepted means that teachers will possibly

act as others do around them regardless of what they have learned in teacher education courses. Preservice teachers and expert teachers alike will make choices to achieve the goal of acceptance in their school community (Barton and Levstik 2004). The preservice teachers in this study valued the graphic novels as a resource but were deeply concerned with how they would be accepted in their future school communities.

The preservice teachers were not yet in a school context in which they could or could not be accepted as professionals. Without a school context to gauge acceptance, their thinking about curriculum decisions was based on perceptions of what is acceptable and not acceptable in schools. These perceptions were based solely on their experiences in schools, as both a student and observer. These perceptions are of concern because making decisions that are based on perceived standards of acceptance, as the preservice teachers did, is problematic for how preservice teachers think about their future role in the profession. The preservice teachers' perceptions of acceptance are somewhat misconceived and generalize all teachers into a group of traditional stalwarts that scrutinize their colleagues' decisions. In this way, the perceived standards of acceptance are also problematic because the preservice teachers assume that someone else will tell them what to teach, and in this instance, they are not willing to negotiate their own values with the status quo. Furthermore, the preservice teachers' assumptions about acceptance and their unwillingness to negotiate their values happened in their teacher education courses, when they should be honing their skills as a curriculum developer and identifying resources that fit their purpose for teaching. Unfortunately, this study suggests that they are possibly thinking more about what they are expected to teach or what is deemed acceptable to teach by qualified or experienced others.

The preservice teachers did demonstrate effective curriculum development skills in their evaluation of the graphic novels. They identified attributes of the graphic novels that would be valuable for the social studies curriculum and thought about the benefits for students, yet those benefits were not enough for them to decidedly use them as resources. In a way, the preservice teachers did not value their own ability to make curriculum decisions. They did not feel capable of choosing a resource based solely on their own reasoned judgment. The preservice teachers' thinking in this study lacked a sense of agency as curriculum developers, because they failed to see the possibility of creating new learning opportunities for their students. They also failed to see the possibility for innovative practice and thought that they would need to make decisions that immediately fit into their perceptions of the acceptable social studies curriculum in schools.

How do we get preservice teachers to better understand and value their ability to make curriculum decisions? It is a difficult question, but a seemingly important one if we hope to cultivate curriculum developers who can create and implement curriculum that benefits their students' learning. This study presented a unique case of curriculum decision making; however, the preservice teachers' concerns over being accepted at such an early stage in their career is disconcerting, especially when it means they abandon resources that they personally value and deem beneficial for students.

References

American Library Association & The National Coalition Against Censorship & The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund. "Graphic Novels: Suggestions for Librarians." 2006. http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/ifissues/graphicnovels_1.pdf.

Annett, Doug. "Implementing Graphic Texts into the Language Arts Classroom." *Minnesota English Journal* 44, no. 1 (2008): 150–79.

Barton, Keith, and Linda Levstik. *Teaching History for the Common Good*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004.

———. *Doing History: Investigating with Children in Elementary and Middle Schools.* New York: Routledge, 2005.

Butzer, C. M. *Gettysburg: The Graphic Novel*. New York: Harper Collins, 2009.

Carter, James. "Introduction—Carving a Niche: Graphic Novels in the English Language Arts Classroom." In *Building Literacy Connections with Graphic Novels: Page by Page, Panel by Panel*, edited by James Carter, 1–25. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2007.

Cary, Stephen. *Going Graphic: Comics at Work in the Multilingual Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004.

Cho, Grace, Hong Choi, and Stephen Krashen. "Hooked on Comic Book Reading: How Comic Books Made an Impossible Situation Less Difficult." *Knowledge Quest* 33, no. 4 (2005): 32–4.

Chun, Christian. "Critical Literacies and Graphic Novels for English-Language Learners: Teaching Maus." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 53, no. 2 (2009): 144–53.

Cromer, Michael, and Penney Clark. "Getting Graphic with the Past: Graphic Novels and the Teaching of History." *Theory and Research in Social Education* 35, no. 4 (2007): 574–91.

Ehlers, Marsha. "'No Pictures in My Head': The Uses of Literature in the Development of Historical Understanding." *Magazine of History* 13, no. 2 (1999): 5–9.

Endacott, Jason. "Reconsidering Affective Empathy in Historical Empathy." *Theory & Research in Social Education* 38, no. 1 (2010): 6–49.

Frey, Hugo, and Benjamin Noys. "Editorial: History in the Graphic Novel." *Rethinking History* 6, no. 3 (2002): 255–60.

Frey, Nancy, and Douglas Fisher. "Using Graphic Novels, Anime, and the Internet in an Urban High School." *English Journal* 93, no. 3 (2004): 19–25.

Gallo, Don, and Stephen Weiner. "Bold Books for Innovative Teaching: Show, Don't Tell: Graphic Novels in the Classroom." *The English Journal* 94, no. 2 (2004): 114–7.

Gorman, Michelle. *Getting Graphic!: Using Graphic Novels to Promote Literacy with Preteens and Teens*. Washington, OH: Linworth, 2003.

Grossman, Lev, and Richard Lacayo. "Watchmen." *All-TIME 100 Novels*. Last Modified October 16, 2005. http://entertainment.time.com/2005/10/16/all-time-100-novels/#watchmen-1986-by-alan-moore-dave-gibbons.

Helfer, Andrew. *Malcolm X: A Graphic Biography*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2006.

Jacobson, Sid, and Ernie Colon. *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2006.

———. *Ché: A Graphic Biography*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2009.

Lamanno, April. "Exploring the Use of Graphic Novels in the Classroom: Does Exposure to Non-Traditional Texts Increase the Reading Comprehension Skills and Motivation of Low-Functioning Adolescent Readers?" 2007. *Proquest Dissertation Abstracts* (UMI No. 3284960).

Matthews, Sarah. "Framing Preservice Teachers' Interpretations of Graphic Novels in the Social Studies Classroom." *Theory and Research in Social Education* 39, no. 3 (2011): 416–46.

McTaggart, Jacquelyn. "Graphic Novels: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly." In *Teaching Visual Literacy: Using Comic Books, Graphic Novels, Anime, Cartoons, and More to Develop Comprehension and Thinking Skills*, edited by Nancy E. Frey and Douglas B. Fisher, 20–34. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008.

Morrison, Timothy, Gregory Bryan, and George Chilcoat. "Using Student-Generated Comic Books in the Classroom." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 45, no. 8 (2002): 758–67.

Neufield, Josh. *A.D.: New Orleans after the Deluge*. New York: Pantheon, 2009.

Olwell, Russell. "Use Narrative to Teach Middle School Students about Reconstruction." *The Social Studies* 90 (1999): 205–8.

Schwarz, Gretchen. "Graphic Novels for Multiple Literacies." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 46 (2002): 262–5.

———. "Expanding Literacies through Graphic Novels." *English Journal* 95, no. 6 (2006): 58–64.

Seixas, Peter. "Historical Understanding among Adolescents in a Multicultural Setting." *Curriculum Inquiry* 23, no. 3 (1993): 301–27.

Serchay, David. *The Librarian's Guide to Graphic Novels for Children and Tweens*. New York: Neal-Schuman, 2008.

Seyfried, Jonathan. "Reinventing the Book Club: Graphic Novels as Educational Heavyweights." *Knowledge Quest* 36, no. 3 (2008): 44–8.

"Special Awards and Citations." The Pulitzer Prizes. Accessed December 8, 2011. http://www.pulitzer.org/bycat/Special-Awards-and-Citations.

Tabachnick, Stephen. *Teaching the Graphic Novel*. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009.

Versaci, Rocco. "How Comic Books Can Change the Way our Students See Literature: One Teacher's Perspective." *The English Journal* 91, no. 2 (2001): 61–7.

Werner, Walter. "Reading Visual Texts." *Theory and Research in Social Education* 30, no. 3 (2002): 401–48.

Weiner, Stephen. *The 101 Best Graphic Novels*. New York: Nantier Beall Minoustchine, 2004.

Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of American Empire*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008.

Appendix

List of Relevant Social Studies Graphic Novels

Biographies

- *The 14th Dalai Lama*. Tetsu Saiwai. 2008.
- *Ché: A Graphic Biography*. Spain Rodriguez. 2008.
- *Ché: A Graphic Biography*. Sid Jacobson & Ernie Colon. 2010.
- *J. Edgar Hoover: A Graphic Biography*. Rick Geary. 2008.
- *The Lives of Sacco and Vanzetti*. Rick Geary. 2011.
- *Malcolm X: A Graphic Biography*. Andrew Helfer. 2006.
- *Nelson Mandela: The Authorized Comic Book*. Nelson Mandela Foundation with Umlando Wezithombe. 2009.
- *Ronald Reagan: A Graphic Biography*. Andrew Helfer. 2007.
- *Trotsky: A Graphic Biography*. Rick Geary. 2009.

Holocaust, Genocide, or Ethnic Conflict

- *A Family Secret.* Eric Huevel. 2007.
- *Anne Frank.* Sid Jacobson & Ernie Colon. 2010.
- *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda.* Jean-Philippe Stassen. 2006.*/**
- *Maus: The Complete Maus (Books 1 & 2).* Art Spiegelman. 1992.
- *The Search.* Eric Heuvel, Ruud van der Rol, & Lies Schippers. 2007.
- *We Are on Our Own.* Miriam Katin. 2006.
- Joe Sacco's Works: *The Fixer: A Story from Sarajevo; Footnotes in Gaza: A Graphic Novel; Palestine; Safe Area Gorazde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992–1995; War's End: Profiles from Bosnia 1995–1996.***

Conflict and Dealing with Conflict

- *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*. Sid Jacobson & Ernie Colon. 2006.
- *After 9/11: America's War on Terror*. Sid Jacobson & Ernie Colon. 2008.
- *Defiance: Resistance Book 2.* Carla Jablonski & Leland Purvis. 2010.*
- *Gettysburg: The Graphic Novel*. C. M. Butzer. 2009.
- *In the Shadows of No Towers*. Art Spiegelman. 2004
- *The Kite Runner: Graphic Novel*. Khaled Hosseini. 2011.
- *Macedonia: What Does It Take to Stop a War*. Harvey Pekar & Heather Roberson. 2007.
- *The Photographer: Into War-Torn Afghanistan with Doctors without Borders*. Emmanuel Guibert, Didier Lefvre, & Frederic Lemercier. 2006.
- *Pride of Baghdad*. Brian K. Vaughn. 2006.*/**
- *Resistance: Book 1*. Carla Jablonski & Leland Purvis. 2010.*
- *The Vietnam War: A Graphic History*. Dwight Zimmerman, Gen. Chuck Horner, & Wayne Vansant. 2009.

Social, Cultural, & Historical Issues and Events

- *A People's History of American Empire*. Howard Zinn. 2008.
- *A.D. New Orleans: After the Deluge*. Josh Neufeld. 2009.
- *Arab in America*. Toufic El Rassi. 2007.
- *The Beats: A Graphic History*. Harvey Pekar et al. 2009.
- *Edible Secrets: A Food Tour of Classified US History*. Michael Hoerger & Mia Partlow. 2010.
- *The Influencing Machine.* Brooke Gladstone & Josh Neufeld. 2011.
- *The Complete Persepolis*. Marjane Satrapi. 2004.
- *Students for a Democratic Society: A Graphic History.* Harvey Pekar. 2008.
- *The United States Constitution*. Jonathan Hennessey. 2008
- *Wobblies: A Graphic History of the Industrial Workers of the World*. Paul Buhle & Nicole Schulman. 2005.
- *Studs Terkel's Working: A Graphic Adaptation*. Harvey Pekar & Paul Buhle. 2009.
- Guy Delisle's Travelogues: *Burma Chronicles; Pyongyang: A Journey in North Korea; Shenzhen: A Travelogue from China.*

*Denotes a work of historical fiction.

**Denotes a work with content that may not be suitable for students.