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LITERATURE CIRCLES AND COMPREHENSION OF GRAPHIC AND NON-GRAPHIC NOVELS

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Abstract

This study explores how literature circles work to assist ESL students in comprehending a graphic novel compared to a non-graphic novel. It also aims to investigate the effectiveness of role sheets in enhancing the students' comprehension in literature circles. Six ESL students were selected in this study and data were gathered from field notes, observations and interviews. The findings of this study showed that the students developed in text comprehension, personal connections and interpretations. Role sheets were proved to be useful in guiding the students in literature circles. The findings also suggested that literature circles influenced the students emotionally and intellectually. In addition, literature circles also demonstrated interesting learning experience for the students to share their ideas and opinions of the graphic and non-graphic novels. Implementing literature circles in teaching graphic and non-graphic novels will not only enhance the students' comprehension but also make learning English Language fun and interesting.

Keywords: *Graphic and non-graphic novels, literature circles, comprehension.*

INTRODUCTION

Literature circles help us to see things that we cannot find while reading. We can see different things from different people.

- A Form Four student

The quote above is taken from a student who participated in the study. This was his first participation in literature circles. Daniels (1994) defines literature circles as small and temporary discussion groups which have decided to read the same story, poem, article or book. He adds that each group member takes specific responsibility in the upcoming discussion and everyone comes for the discussion with notes that help in performing the role assigned. Particularly, few studies have examined the effectiveness of literature circles in literacy and verbal interaction of L2 learners. There is little research on comprehension between graphic novel and non-graphic novel in literature circles. The study focuses on determining the effectiveness of literature circles in enhancing the students' comprehension in a graphic novel compared to a non-graphic novel. This study also explores the effectiveness of the using role sheets in literature circles and the students' perceptions of this approach.

METHODS

In this study, literature circles were conducted in a group of six Form Four students discussing the graphic and non-graphic novels of the story, *The Kite Runner*. This study was conducted in ten

meetings which lasted for about three hours in each session. In each meeting, the students gathered for an hour to discuss about the plot, characters and important events of the story. It was then continued with the students writing and completing the self-evaluation and group assessment forms. At the end of each session, the students were interviewed and they completed the writing tasks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: How effective are literature circles in enhancing students' comprehension of the story in a graphic novel compared to a non-graphic novel?

Three main themes were identified as they reflected the effectiveness of literature circles in enhancing the students' comprehension of the story in a graphic novel compared to a non-graphic novel.

Text comprehension

As mentioned by Pantaleo and Bomphray (2011), the benefit of using graphic novels in classrooms focuses on how the visual nature of the texts enhances comprehension. Schwarz (2006) highlights that graphic novel provides an interesting medium for students to analyse information in different ways. The attractive and vivid clear drawings in the graphic novel assist the students to understand the events as well as the feelings of the characters. One of the students, Pearly, reported that the non-graphic novel never stated about Amir's feeling when his father, Baba passed away. Li Ying added "*Yes, it is never mentioned in detail. But in the picture you can see a lot of expressions like he sad, he desperate, he cannot take the truth...a lot of feelings when you see in the picture. This is something that we cannot read in novel if the author never wrote anything about it.*" Another interesting part discussed by the students was the scene when Amir's father, Baba passed away. In the non-graphic novel, the scene was not mentioned in detail. When the students read the graphic novel, they realised that it was different compared to the non-graphic novel. The scene of the funeral in the graphic novel was described vividly with different kind of pictures. The examples show that graphic novel helped the students to see the real situation in the story.

Personal connections

When the students were discussing about the reading text, they would usually connect it to their values and experiences in lives (Kim, 2004). In literature circle, Jabez mentioned about the topic of marriage. He said "*I would like to ask if you were Amir's father, would you allow Amir to marry a lady like that...like Soraya?*" Zi Sheng replied "*I would respect my son's decision.*" Jabez, a conservative person didn't agree with Zi Sheng. He had his own principles and value as he was brought up in a strict family. He said "*If I am Amir's father, I will not agree with my son...because this girl is not so healthy...Maybe, if we have our child...then our child grown up already...she will also be like her mother...to prevent this happen... I will not let my son to marry her.*" The example shows that the students developed their personal responses based on their values and perspectives. In addition, it was easier for the students to identify interesting topics to discuss in graphic novel as they looked at the attractive drawings.

Interpretations

Kim (2004) stated that sometimes the readers would venture beyond the literal meaning to search for deeper or hidden meaning in the text. Certo, Moxley, Reffitt, and Miller (2010) mentioned in their study that readers made predictions and they modified them based on continued interpretations of the text. In this study, the students made predictions and shared their personal responses about the characters or events in graphic novel. In one of the literature circles, the students discussed about the character, Baba in the story. The group discussion leader, Pearly, asked the members about Baba's feeling when he knew that the doctor who treated him was a Russian. Li Ying replied "*I think Baba will feel very angry and I can understand why he wouldn't let him treat him because Afghanistan was invaded by Russia and Russian treated Afghan people very bad.*" Another student, Zi Sheng added "*It is his responsibility to take a very good care of the patient and the doctor is nothing wrong with him. It is just Baba perception of the doctor.*" This shows that the students made predictions for deeper understanding of the text.

Research Question 2: How effective are the use of role sheets during literature circles in enhancing students' comprehension of the stories in graphic and non-graphic novels?

In this study, six different roles were assigned to the students in literature circles. The roles were group discussion leader, summariser, vocabulary enricher, connector, passage master and travel tracer. The students carried out their roles when they gathered for the discussion. This study revealed that role sheets guided the students in literature circles. The students claimed that the role sheets gave them a direction on the right things to do. Jabez, stated *"I think it is very useful and it guide us during the discussion. It makes our discussion more lively and more smoothly."* Another student, Zi Sheng added *"It helps us a lot in understanding the novel. And such as the connector, it helps us to connect our life with the story."* Li Ying mentioned *"The role sheet gives us a direction to guide us throughout the literature circle. With the role sheet, we know what to do, what to discuss and what to think and won't be lost."* Peterson and Belizaire (2006) discovered that some of the students in their study requested for roles to make literature circles more worthwhile. Besides that, the students claimed that they had smooth, active and lively conversation as all of them performed their roles in literature circles. Through observation, it was found that the students engaged in active discussions. They talked about their personal experience, values and reality in life.

Research Question 3: What are the students' views on the effectiveness of literature circles in enhancing their comprehension of the stories in graphic and non-graphic novels?

Three themes were identified as they reflected the students' views on the effectiveness of literature circles.

Enjoyment

All of the students mentioned that they enjoyed taking part in literature circles. Li Ying stated that she enjoyed literature circles very much. She said *"I like the feeling of a bunch of people reading the same book and discuss about it and telling each other what they like and dislike and like giving suggestions about an idea. I find it very interesting."* She added *"I personally prefer to read novel so I share something that I like with my friends...that is something that makes me happy."* Pearly was feeling excited when she gathered in literature circles. She responded *"Everyone cooperate to do the job well. To let the literature circle successful, they have tried their best to complete the discussion."* What were new in the study were the students liked to work in group and they were delighted when they managed to carry out literature circles successfully. Latendresse (2004) states that by allowing the students to read the text at their own reading level and schedule, they are able to achieve success and self-esteem.

Engagement

All of the students agreed that literature circle is an interesting method in comprehending the graphic and non-graphic novels. Pearly mentioned *"It is an interesting section for people to discuss about their opinions and thoughts. We can exchange about our think of the story and let us to know more about the story."* She explained *"In literature circle, all the students can freely talk about their opinions. We can talk what we have in our mind during the discussion so that other people know what we are thinking about."* Jabez said *"I think it is a great chance to let others to learn to have chance to present their opinion and what they have read in the novel and share to others."* Li Ying reported *"I think it is very meaningful. We can share with other people the happiness of reading the book. Can also share many things about the book and also influence many people to love reading."* She added *"Literature circle allows a lot of people to read in group and inspires those who don't love reading to love reading."* Ali (1993) stated in her study that sharing responses helped the students to broaden their perspectives and enhanced the students' understanding of the text. It was interesting to find out in this study that literature circles motivated people who disliked reading. Jia Sheng mentioned *"I seldom read the English novel. When I take part in this literature circle, I read the English novel because I need to complete my assignment."*

Comprehension

The data showed that literature circles helped the students in comprehension. According to Burns (1998), the ability to discuss the content and listen to opinions and responses contribute to

comprehension in literature circles. Zi Sheng mentioned "It is a way to help us to understand the story in an enjoyable method." He explained "When we read the story...maybe just roughly we understand about 80%...but once we carry out the discussion...certain part that we miss it or didn't bother the minor part for example and we can think about it." He added "Because from this literature circle, we understand the story in a very special way. I can say as a unique way because all of us sit together and share our experience to others." Eeds and Wells (1989) pointed out that the responses and questions discussed by the participants indicated that they analysed the text. Besides, it revealed that the students helped one another when they encountered difficulties in understanding the story. Jia Jun mentioned "Our friends will be able to give further explanation. There are different roles in this literature circle and they can give out their opinion which I can learn things that I do not know about this novel."

CONCLUSION

Implementing literature circles for the students to discuss the graphic and non-graphic novels is an effective method as the students are exposed to the 21st century teaching and learning environment. There is no doubt that the teacher plays a significant role in facilitating the students in literature circles. However, the students have the opportunities to develop personal responses and share them in literature circles. Sharing ideas and talking together offer more benefits than reading alone.

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