PILGRIMAGE TO A FOREIGN LAND: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING WITH GRAPHIC NOVELS IN THE SECONDARY ENGLISH CLASSROOM

by

Dianne Patricia Laycock

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Sydney School of Education and Social Work

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ABSTRACT

In the context of a multimodal and multimediated textual landscape, a substantial body of research and literature endorses the value of graphic novels as a means to provide authentic literacy experiences for students. A less substantial body of discourse, however, submits that graphic novels have not been embraced as classroom texts to any great extent by teachers. To investigate this disjuncture between theory and practice, and to add to the small body of research on teachers’ practice with the graphic novel format of the comics medium, this study explores nine teachers’ experiences with graphic novels in the secondary English classroom.

A hermeneutic phenomenological approach informed by the work of Max van Manen frames this study. Data collected via semi-structured interviews were interpreted and are presented through individual participant stories and thematic considerations. Commensurate with the chosen methodology, literature, poetry, anecdote, images, and metaphor are employed to create an evocative text designed to bring the reader more directly into contact with the participants’ experiences. In particular, the notion of participants as pilgrims in a foreign land is considered.

The study revealed graphic novels being used in a variety of ways by teachers who varied significantly in their level of comics capital. That said, all participants struggled in one way or another to teach the graphic novel, a situation that reflected a lack of support from curriculum documents, a paucity of professional development opportunities, and their struggle to balance the needs and interests of their students against the pressures of a crowded and prescriptive curriculum that privileges traditional prose texts. In the face of such challenges, however, it was apparent that the positive outcomes of teaching with graphic novels far outweighed teachers being pedagogically destabilised and rendered vulnerable.

In light of the inclusion of graphic novels as recommended texts in the Australian Curriculum: English, it is hoped that teacher-readers of the research will be encouraged by this study’s findings to reflect on their use of graphic novels and that agencies who support teachers in their pedagogy will recognise the value of graphic novels as texts and support teachers’ efforts to use them accordingly.
DEDICATION

To my mum, Peggy, who, while failing to see my voyage to completion, provided the wind in my sails on my pilgrimage to Ithaka.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A pilgrim is one who journeys, who sets out with a goal in mind and yet is often unsure if he has the wherewithal to achieve his objective.


This thesis is the product of a dual pilgrimage. While my participants journeyed with graphic novels towards their chosen goals, I too journeyed towards my own. And just as my participants looked to others for support on their journey, I also sought counsel in the knowledge and wisdom of others.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my Chief Supervisor, Associate Professor Alyson Simpson for being a constant and caring guide on a long journey that at times I wondered if I would ever finish. Your probing questions that pushed me to deep reflection and your gentle encouragement to have me extend my field of vision were invaluable. My thanks also go to my Associate Supervisor, Dr Jon Callow, whose knowledge and attention to detail made a valuable contribution to this study. To you both, thank you for being a refuge on my journey and for providing the advice of pilgrims who have trodden the road before. In doing so, you ensured that while I walked by myself, I was never alone.

I am deeply indebted to the nine participants who made this study possible. As a teacher, I understand that time is a valuable commodity and I cannot thank you enough for giving it so willingly to reflect upon your practice and to share your stories. I have no doubt that in doing so, you will support many others who strive to be innovative and authentic in their pedagogy.

Thank you also to my family who never quite understood my passion and the need to travel, but nevertheless were supportive and kept a light shining to guide me towards the comfort of home. I look forward to sharing more time with you all.

My heartfelt thanks go to my friends and colleagues who continued to enquire as to what my weekends or holidays had been like, all the while knowing that the answer would be yet another iteration of, “I was studying.” Thank you for your encouragement and support and I look forward to making up for the many invitations I have declined over the course of this study.

Finally, thank you to my friend Dr Joy McGregor, who proofread this thesis. Your meticulous attention to detail was invaluable.
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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Comics: An art form or medium characterised by “juxtaposed pictorial and other images [including words] in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (McCloud, 1993, p. 9). The term “comics,” being singular in form, is used with a singular verb (McCloud, 1993, p. 20). For example, “Comics is a popular medium in the 21st century.”

Critical Literacy: The ability to recognise and engage in discourse about the ideological foundations of texts (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2002).

Digital Technologies: “Any technologies controlled using digital instructions, including computer hardware and software, digital media and media devices, digital toys and accessories, and contemporary and emerging communication technologies. These technologies are based on instructions given using binary (0 or 1) code…. Computers, smartphones, digital cameras, printers and robots are all examples of digital technologies” (Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards [BOSTES] NSW, 2015).


Hermeneutic Phenomenology: Both a philosophical tradition and a research methodology that draws on the tenets of phenomenology and hermeneutics to study lived experience and its meanings (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012).

Hermeneutics: The theory and practice of interpretation that recognises all human experience is “embedded in the world of language and social relationship, and the inescapable historicity of all understandings” (Finlay, 2009, p. 11).


Lived Experience: A fundamental concept of phenomenology whereby the phenomenon under study is experienced not only first-hand by a participant, but also in its prereflective and presuppositionless state (van Manen, 1997). That is, the meaning of an experience is sought “in-the-moment,” before it is reflected on and transformed by previous experiences or theoretical considerations.
Mode: A means for representation and communication that is “culturally and socially fashioned” (Kress, 2003, p. 45). For example, speech, writing, image, sound and gesture.

Multimodal Text: A text that combines two or more semiotic systems or modes of communication. Multimodal texts can be delivered via paper, electronic or live platforms. Examples of multimodal texts include graphic novels, picture books, webpages, songs, film, podcasts, play or music performances.

Multiliteracies: A pedagogical approach developed by the New London Group (1996) that recognises “the multiplicity of communications channels and media, and the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity” (New London Group, p. 4).

Phenomenology: Both a philosophical tradition and research approach concerned with the exploration of specific instances of the lived experience of phenomena in order to discover and describe the essence, or essential meaning, of that experience (van Manen, 1997). While the core concern of phenomenological research is the study of human experience in its presuppositionless state, there are numerous schools of phenomenology, each of which provides a variant on how a description of lived experience is achieved.

Popular Culture: “A set of cultural practices [taking] on an identity of its own which is capable of existing in different social and cultural contexts … a [popular] formation is an historical articulation, an accumulation or organisation of practices” (Grossberg, 1992, pp. 69-70).

Prose Text: A text in which words are the primary means of communication (Wolk, 2007). The term prose comes from the Latin prosa, meaning “straightforward.” Prose may be written or spoken, fiction or non-fiction. A prose text stands in contrast to visual texts in which images are the primary mode of communication.

Semiotics: The study of signs, which can include written or spoken language, and visual images (Callow, 2013).

Semiotic Systems: There are five recognised semiotic systems through which communication is enabled: Linguistic, visual, aural, oral and gestural (Anstey & Bull, 2010b).

Text: A collection of signs organised in a particular way to make meaning (Schirato & Webb, 2004). The term is a fluid one that has evolved over time and space to
reflect changing technologies and modes of communication. Texts can be print, screen-based, or a live presentation or performance (Callow, 2013).

**Visual Literacy:** In the absence of a generally agreed upon definition, this study draws on Avgerinou’s (2009) definition of *visual literacy*: “In the context of human, intentional visual communication, visual literacy refers to a group of largely acquired abilities, i.e., the abilities to understand (read) and use (write) images, as well as to think and learn in terms of images” (p. 29).

**Visual Text:** A text in which communication is primarily enabled through ideographic or pictographic, rather than alphabetic, signs (Mitchell, 2008).
Ithaka

As you set out for Ithaka
hope the voyage is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
angry Poseidon—don’t be afraid of them:
you’ll never find things like that on your way
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,
as long as a rare excitement
stirs your spirit and your body.
Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
wild Poseidon—you won’t encounter them
unless you bring them along inside your soul,
unless your soul sets them up in front of you.

Hope the voyage is a long one.
May there be many a summer morning when,
with what pleasure, what joy,
you come into harbors seen for the first time;
may you stop at Phoenician trading stations
to buy fine things,
mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
sensual perfume of every kind—
as many sensual perfumes as you can;
and may you visit many Egyptian cities
to gather stores of knowledge from their scholars.

Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you are destined for.
But do not hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,
so you are old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you have gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.
Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her you would not have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.
And if you find her poor, Ithaka won’t have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
you will have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.

(Ithaka by C.P. Cavafy, 1911/1992)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I’m a secondary school teacher librarian. I’ve just finished reading aloud a passage from one of our newest acquisitions in young adult fiction to a class of Year 8 boys in one of my regular fortnightly Boys and Books lessons in the library.

Me: Okay boys, it’s time to go and find yourselves a book to settle in with for the rest of the lesson.

The boys wander off to the shelves and return a few minutes later, a number of them with some of our ever-so-popular graphic novels. Shoes are kicked off as they plonk themselves into a comfy chair or snuggle into a beanbag to enjoy some time with a good book. It’s then that the boys’ English teacher, who until now has paid little heed to the lesson’s proceedings, looks up from her laptop, notices one of the boys is reading a graphic novel, frowns, stiffens, lifts herself from her chair, and approaches him.

Teacher: For goodness sake, put that graphic novel back and get yourself a REAL book to read!

There is a saying that it takes years to build a reputation and just seconds to bring it crashing down and I had just witnessed the wisdom of this adage first-hand. It had taken me some time to build a graphic novel collection in our school library and to convince my library colleagues, and even some of the students, that it was okay to be seen reading what they called comics or comic books. It had been a challenge. There had been one occasion, for example, where a boy had hidden his graphic novel between the covers of a “real” book thinking I would not approve of his choice. And now, with just a few words, my foundational work fell into ruin as the teacher not only damned the boy’s personal reading choice, but, by implication, slammed the notion that graphic novels are legitimate literature and have a place in schools as both recreational reading and curriculum texts.

My immediate response to the teacher’s instruction to the student to find a “real” book was silence, silence born of confusion. This teacher had sat through two presentations on graphic novels that I had delivered to her faculty and I could not understand her continued perception of them as, in her words, “not the stuff of English classrooms.” Since it was not the time or the place, however, for a debate with a colleague on the merits of graphic novels, I instead pondered long and hard as to how I might encourage this teacher, and others with a similar attitude, to revisit her attitude
towards graphic novels. Given my previous work with the teacher and her colleagues, I concluded that the didactic approach of using literature and research to demonstrate the educational benefits of graphic novels might not be the most effective method to convince those unfamiliar with, or resistant to, the format. I turned, therefore, to the notion of showing rather than telling what it is like to teach with graphic novels by highlighting the experiences of those who do.

Defining the Research Topic

Since the turn of the century, increasing attention has been paid to the capacity of graphic novels, a format of the comics medium, to facilitate students’ development of the multiliteracies considered necessary to enable the efficient and effective navigation of an increasingly visual textual landscape (Bakis, 2012; Beavis, 2013a; Carter, 2007, 2015; Connors, 2010; 2015; Hansen, 2012; Jacobs, 2007; Monnin, 2010; Pantaleo, 2011, 2015). Contra to the positive view ascribed graphic novels as educational tools, however, a review of the literature also suggests a degree of hesitancy in teachers to employ graphic novels as classroom texts (Annett, 2008; Carter, 2007; Hansen, 2012; Lapp, Wolsey, Frey & Fisher, 2012). Broadly speaking, the literature suggests that the marginalisation of graphic novels is indicative of the disjuncture between notions of literacy existing outside the context of schooling and those supported within educational circles. While the former focuses on the multimodal and multimediated nature of texts and the multiliteracies required to navigate and produce them (Kress, 2003; New London Group, 1996), “school literacy” continues to privilege a monomodal discourse and an associated set of skills that focus on the reading and writing of prose texts\(^1\) (Hull & Schultz, 2002; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Furthermore, findings from a small number of studies conducted at the classroom level suggest that teachers’ hesitancy to introduce graphic novels as texts is tied to a lack of familiarity with them and inadequate professional support for their use (Annett, 2008; Block, 2013; Callahan, 2009; Lapp et al., 2012).

As a result of the disconnect between the theory that suggests the educational value of graphic novels and what is happening with graphic novels in the classroom, Carter (2007) issued a call to arms for more research into “almost every aspect of using graphic novels for literacy” (p. 20). More specifically, to address the dearth of research into teachers’ practice with graphic novels, Carter called for “more success stories” (p.

\(^1\) As per the Glossary mention, the term “prose” is used throughout this study to denote written texts that use alphabetic language. They stand in contrast to visual texts that use ideographic or pictographic systems.
21) from teachers using them as classroom texts. This call to arms, fuelled by my own experience of the “reluctant teacher,” provided the impetus for this study into the nature of the experience of teaching with graphic novels.

As a teacher, I felt the idea of learning about the experience of teaching with graphic novels from those who “do” would be an effective “marketing strategy” to encourage teachers to reflect on their own practice with the format. Rogers (1995) notes that the dependence of people on the subjective evaluations of “near peers” has shown itself to be a significant influence on the diffusion of innovations through populations. Certainly, in my own experience, listening to the stories of colleagues in my professional learning network has had a significant impact on my decision to either pursue or reject new ideas and strategies for the classroom. By illuminating the little-researched phenomenon of teaching with graphic novels, therefore, I hoped to deepen my understanding of what it is like to teach with them, communicate that understanding in a way that resonates with readers of this research report, and contribute to the body of knowledge on teaching with graphic novels.

The Research Approach

In the field of education, qualitative research that investigates human experience in situ provides insight into the ways students and teachers interpret events from their own perspective and provides “culturally and contextually appropriate information assisting them to more effectively manage problems they confront in classrooms and schools” (Stringer, 2004, p. 15). The strength of qualitative data, gathered as words or images, lies in their potential to provide rich descriptions of experiences that are vivid and saturated and whose familiarity resonates with the reader (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Situated insight into the “messiness” of classrooms (Newkirk, 2009) offers a much sought-after alternative for teachers to the often generalized and external findings of quantitative research that are commonly imposed from above to inform educational policy and practice (Anderson, 2002; Borg, 2013; Cordingley, 2008; Crowther, 2016; Groundwater-Smith, 1998; Newkirk, 2009; Rogers, 1995). In particular, a qualitative research approach focusing on teachers’ experiences has the potential to heighten “self-belief and self-worth in the lives of our teacher professionals” (Crowther, 2016, p. 18), which, notes Crowther, have been suppressed through an institutional emphasis on “external imposition and remote-control direction” (p. 18). To this end, hermeneutic phenomenology offers an approach into the investigation of individual experience
within the unique context of its occurrence. When the experiences of a number of individuals experiencing the same phenomenon are investigated, respect for the individual experience is retained while the researcher also seeks a shared meaning of the experience across participants.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a research approach used to explore and illuminate relatively little-understood phenomena (van Manen, 1997). To this end, it is concerned with the collection of rich data regarding the phenomenon under study, the interpretation of that data to reveal the hidden meaning of participants’ experiences, and the creation of a phenomenological text in which the essential meaning of the experience is offered through the use of literary devices such as anecdote and metaphor, and through the consideration of both topic-related and seemingly unrelated literature that serves to cultivate insight. In this study, “insight cultivators” (van Manen, 2011d, para. 1) designed to be illuminating for both the researcher and reader included travel writings, journey poetry, and pilgrimage-themed literature, along with my own personal anecdotes relating to both travel and teaching. Further consideration of these devices is provided in Chapter Four.

The phenomenological demand that experiences of phenomena be “lived” required that my participants have first-hand experience of teaching with graphic novels and that the experience be explored in its presuppositionless state, that is, as it was experienced before participants “withdrew” from it by way of abstraction or theorisation. In my interviews with participants, I facilitated this close contact between experiences and description by encouraging them to describe recent and concrete examples of using graphic novels in the classroom. Furthermore, as the researcher, my efforts to achieve “proximal closeness” (van Manen, 2016a, p. 176) to the participants’ experiences was achieved through the enactment of the phenomenological reduction, the process whereby I reflected on and articulated my attitudes to and assumptions about the phenomenon of teaching with graphic novels in order to acknowledge their potential influence on my interpretation of the participants’ experiences.

The addition of a hermeneutic, or interpretive, perspective to my phenomenological approach, acknowledges the “situatedness” of both the participants’ experiences and my own position as researcher. To wit, my interpretation of the participants’ descriptions within the broader context of their experiences acknowledges my assumptions regarding the social constructedness and subjectivity of human experience (Finlay, 2009) by way of viewing human experience as being “embedded in
the world of language and social relationship, and the inescapable historicity of all understandings” (Finlay, 2009, p. 11).

The Research Questions

Phenomenological questions “ask for the meaning and significance of certain phenomena” (van Manen, 1997, p. 23). The principal question guiding this study, therefore, was: What is the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels in NSW secondary English classrooms?

Embedded within the principal research question are the sub-questions:

- How do teachers use graphic novels in their classrooms?
- What are teachers’ lifeworld experiences with graphic novels?
- What are teachers’ professional experiences with graphic novels?
- How does context influence the experience of teaching with graphic novels?

These sub-questions were designed to maintain the study’s focus on the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels and to tease out the participants’ reflection on, and understanding of, their experiences.

Context and Parameters of the Study

This study focuses on the pedagogy of nine secondary English teachers working within the New South Wales education system. The choice of English as the subject discipline in which the study was conducted was based on the significant role that English teachers continue to play in the development of students’ literacies and on the potential provided by the English curriculum for the inclusion of graphic novels as classroom texts. In order to ensure the richness of data and to optimise the proximal closeness between experience and description, participants were chosen on the basis of their imminent teaching of a unit of work using graphic novels as a primary, or focal, text.

Listed below in no particular order of priority are a number of assumptions that underpin this study. These assumptions have been formed through my general experience as a teacher and as a teacher librarian who has a particular interest in the educational use of graphic novels. Furthermore, they are a product of my exegetical reflection on the literature pertaining to the research topic:

- Graphic novels have educational potential to facilitate the multiliteracies required of students in order to effectively participate in the 21st century textual landscape (Bakis, 2012; Carter, 2007; Connors, 2015; Monnin, 2010; Sabeti,
Shared accounts of educational practice enrich understanding of educational activities (Bassey, 1983; Borg, 2013; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Freebody, 2003; O’Toole & Beckett, 2010; van Manen, 1997);

Teachers’ practice is influenced by the practice of their peers (Borg, 2013; Rogers, 1995; Schwarz, 2013);

The description and interpretation of the participants’ experiences will resonate with readers of the research and encourage them to engage in self-reflection regarding their pedagogy with graphic novels as classroom texts (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2008; van Manen, 1997);

Research that privileges a narrative format has more chance of impacting on the practice of teachers (Freebody, 2003; van Manen, 1997); and

The “success” of the research will be judged primarily on the extent to which readers of the research can relate the findings of the study to their own pedagogy (Bassey, 1983; van Manen, 1997).

**Significance of the Research**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological case study is to gain insight into and describe the phenomenon, teaching with graphic novels, as experienced by secondary English teachers. It is anticipated that achievement of deeper understanding of the phenomenon will add to the knowledge base of, and contribute to current practices in, the field of teacher pedagogy with graphic novels. Significantly, as Schwarz (2013) suggests:

> Intentional, rigorous teacher research can separate mere hopes from realities and build more nuanced and considered support for graphic novels…. support that can stand up to criticism or resistance and can make the classroom experience better and more meaningful for teachers and students. (p. 151).

The value of this research also lies in the heightened understanding achieved by the participants in regard to their experiences of the phenomenon, teaching with graphic novels. Hermeneutic phenomenology fosters self-reflection in participants and helps make explicit their understanding that might otherwise remain “intuitive and unarticulated” (Newkirk, 2009, pp. 28-29). In assisting participants to convert tacit to explicit knowledge and to move them from intuitive to thoughtful practice regarding their use of graphic novels in the classroom, phenomenological inquiry offers a “critical
philosophy of action” (van Manen, 1997, p. 154) that empowers teachers to uncover new meaning in their practice, to speak out about it, to challenge it, and to change it. For readers with whom the research resonates, it is hoped deeper understanding of the experience of teaching with graphic novels will be facilitated. Phenomenological texts “when well-crafted are spurs to the imagination, and, through our imaginative participation in the created worlds, empathetic forms of understanding are advanced” (Koch, 1999, p. 28). It is assumed, therefore, that while the findings of the study are not generalisable, they do have an element of transferability and thus provide a vicarious trial for potential adopters of graphic novels as classroom texts (Rogers, 1995; van Manen, 1997). Rogers notes, “When someone who is like us tells us of their positive evaluation of a new idea, we are often motivated to adopt it” (p. 169). As well, the findings will provide teachers with a stimulus for the discussion of classroom experiences with graphic novels and will also provide a means to reduce the uncertainty that can accompany the adoption of a new idea or practice (Rogers, 1995).

At the outset of this research in 2011, the first iterations (versions 1.0 – 1.1) of *Australian Curriculum: English K-10* (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2017) had been developed, but not implemented. Staggered implementation of the curriculum took place over the course of the study and was fully implemented in 2013. In what might be considered ground-breaking progress in regard to the recognition of changes to the textual landscape and associated notions of literacy, the curriculum places an emphasis on the development of multiliteracies as necessary for effective participation in the twenty-first textual landscape and was the first to explicitly acknowledge graphic novels as potential texts to facilitate the development of students’ multiliteracies. Hence, this exploration of teachers’ experiences with the format is considered timely in order to support both teachers currently using graphic novels as texts and those who will be guided by the regulative framework of the new national curriculum to include graphic novels in their practice. This study will also further efforts to “learn the problems and weaknesses as well as the positive outcomes in using graphic novels” (Schwarz, 2013, p. 152) such that stakeholders in teaching and learning can proceed thoughtfully.

The final contribution made by this study is a methodological one. With its focus on pedagogy as more than a technical or intellectual endeavour and its purpose to achieve pathic and reflective understanding, hermeneutic phenomenology has been increasingly used over the last two decades to gain insight into educational phenomena.
Hermeneutic phenomenological research helps address teachers’ need to expand and enrich their practice through findings that acknowledge the “everydayness” of teaching in terms of being “particularized, situated, child-specific, class-specific, day-specific [and] school specific” (Newkirk, 2009, p. 29). Hermeneutic phenomenology provides a different kind of knowledge to that achieved through “big” data and in doing so, helps alleviate the disconnect between what teachers might perceive as the theoretical research of academia and the everyday happenings of the classroom (Borg, 2013; Henriksson, 2012). Furthermore, hermeneutic phenomenology presents research in a way that is cognitively and affectively accessible to teachers through the use of language that discloses a world in which teachers can see themselves. In producing qualitative research that acknowledges the nuances of teachers’ pedagogy and their interactions with students, therefore, this study advances the use of hermeneutic phenomenology as a relevant and credible methodology through which to undertake educational research.

In undertaking my doctorate part-time there was always a danger that over the extended period of the study the body of research on my research topic would evolve to the extent that my study would contribute little to the existent body of knowledge. While an increasing educational interest in the use of graphic novels as texts to facilitate student’s multiliteracies gained momentum and more teachers were “talking the talk,” the disjuncture between talking and doing with graphic novels appeared not to be closing (Connors, 2010). Research by others during the period of my study indicated that teachers were willing to use graphic novels, but remained restrained in their implementation of them into their classrooms (Clark, 2013a; Lapp et al., 2012; Cheung, 2015).

Anecdotal evidence gathered over the course of the study also suggested that resistance and reluctance towards the use of graphic novels in the classroom was ongoing. In 2013, for example, Michael Cavna of the Washington Post reported an anecdote that replicated my own experience that was described in the introduction to this study. Closer to home, and one year later, the personal communication below suggests that teachers working within my own state education system were still reluctant to use graphic novels in their classrooms:
Dear Di,
I just wanted to thank you for the material you sent me on graphic novels. I had a look and discussed it with my KLA leader and some other English teachers, but no one is really wanting to venture forth to teach this genre. I had the same reaction at my previous school also. What a pity! No-one feels very confident with it. (Pat A., personal communication, 24 August, 2014)

While I am disheartened that over the period of this study the swelling body of literature and research on the educational value of graphic novels has not led to their universal acceptance as legitimate texts in twenty-first century classrooms, it is reassuring to know that this study of teachers’ experiences with the format is as relevant now as it was at the outset of this study.

**Limitations of the Study**

A hermeneutic phenomenological study focuses on the uniqueness of human experience at a particular moment in time. No matter how rich and comprehensive a phenomenological analysis might be, therefore, it is inevitably “incomplete, partial, tentative, emergent, open and uncertain” (Finlay, 2008, p. 6). This is the very nature of hermeneutic phenomenological research, however, and should not be considered a limitation in terms of “weakness,” but rather a boundary on what can be achieved through this research approach. The researcher's aim is to build non-propositional knowledge derived from practice, rather than to build scientific or theoretical knowledge that can be generalised (Higgs, 1997). This study, therefore, makes no claim to the generalisation or explanation of findings or to the generation of theory, nor does it aim to generate findings that enable systemic change in teacher pedagogy.

My situatedness as an “insider-researcher” (Costley, Elliott & Gibbs, 2013), while offering the advantage of “special knowledge” (Costley et al., p. 3), might also be considered a potential limitation of the study whereby special knowledge of the research context has the potential to impede the researcher’s impartiality and blur “a fresh and objective view of the data” (Costley et al., p. 7). In hermeneutic phenomenological research, however, impartiality is neither desired nor considered achievable (see Chapter Four, pages 34-36). Instead, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach places an emphasis on the transparency of the research process by way of clear statements from the researcher that indicate the way in which the researcher’s knowledge and understanding has been woven through the research process. The
manner in which my presence in the research was made transparent is detailed in Chapter Four: Maintaining a Strong and Oriented Relation.

The Researcher’s Position

As a child of the 1950s and 60s, I loved reading comics. On Sundays, I would wait impatiently for the paper to be hurled down the driveway and hope that my father, an ex-naval captain with a penchant for organisation and tidiness, would relax sufficiently to dismantle the paper and slip me the comics section. Beyond that, I was able to sneak the occasional read of my brother’s Superman comic books that he thought were well-hidden under his bed.

In retrospect, my access to comics was very limited. That, plus the fact that both my parents were voracious readers of prose texts and Saturday afternoons were occupied by family visits to the local library to borrow books, probably explains why comic books drifted quietly out of my life. And there they stayed for over forty years. My reading of books for recreational purposes diminished in high school as the laboured deconstruction of texts in English killed off any pleasure to be had in the act of reading. My subsequent tertiary studies to become a Geography teacher and then my employment as a full-time teacher while raising a family provided few opportunities for recreational reading.

In 2003, after some 25 years as a classroom teacher, I completed my training as a teacher librarian. In that same year, I attended a conference session on why graphic novels should be included in school libraries. Given two of my goals as a teacher librarian are to foster the enjoyment of reading in students and to support the curriculum by providing resources and services that enhance teaching and learning, my interest was piqued. Perhaps it was my own early experience with comics that resonated, or perhaps it was an understanding of how students feel when they have to read texts that disengage them that embraced me. Maybe it was the realisation that boys and comic books were a nice fit, or perhaps it was the evolution of comics that gave the medium educational value that now caught my attention. Or perhaps it was the opportunity for me to rock the literary boat of those English teachers who equated literature with “the classics” and who were partly responsible for my disengagement with reading that ignited my passion. Whatever the reason, I came home from that conference inspired to put graphic novels into my school library and to sell their value to students and teachers alike.
Having seen the potential of graphic novels to engage students in reading, I began advocating through presentations and publications for the inclusion of graphic novels into school libraries (Laycock, 2005). Over the next couple of years, as other teacher librarians took up the cause, graphic novels took hold in school libraries. Feeling that the tipping point for the inclusion of graphic novels in school libraries had been reached, I reviewed my campaign strategy to focus on extending the use of graphic novels from recreational reading to consideration of their use as classroom texts. Around this time, the basis for my advocacy for the inclusion of graphic novels as texts was strengthened by an opportunity to be a participant in the International Boys’ Schools Coalition Action Research Program wherein I conducted an action research project into the use of graphic novels to engage boys in school reading (Laycock, 2007). My subsequent articles in professional journals and my presentations at conferences for English teachers were well received, a reception which seemed to parallel the interest highlighted in the growing body of literature and research into the benefits of using graphic novels as texts. As Connors (2010) suggests, however, all was not as well as it seemed. Interest in graphic novels did not necessarily equate with the act of their implementation into classrooms.

As I continued to read comics-related literature and research, I continually encountered caveats regarding the use of graphic novels as texts, and it dawned on me that while those who attended my workshops and read my articles were probably already “hooked,” there were others out there who needed more information before taking the first step. My subsequent objective, therefore, was to illuminate Plato’s cave and unchain the prisoners. I entered this study wanting to understand what the experience of using graphic novels as texts was like for teachers and wanting to tell the participants’ stories to others so that they might reflect on their own practice and make informed decisions regarding their use of graphic novels as texts.

There were a number of benefits to be derived from engaging in work based research wherein I was a teacher researching teachers’ experiences. In this regard, Costley et al. (2010) note an “insider” is placed in “a unique position to study a particular issue in depth and with special knowledge about that issue” (p. 3). They add that the insider-researcher also holds a further advantage by having an understanding of the professional and organisational context of the study. For example, through my own experience as a teacher librarian I was aware of the issues surrounding the use of comics in the classroom, I had a sound knowledge of the requirements of the secondary English
curriculum, and I was aware of the tensions that can exist in schools between policy and teacher practice.

I set out on this research journey believing in the value of graphic novels as legitimate literature for study in classrooms, and in particular, English classrooms. Unlike some research methodologies that would view my proclivity for the educational use of graphic novels a conflict of interest, an interest in my phenomenon was a requirement of the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology I chose for this study. Notes van Manen (1997), “To truly question something is to interrogate something from the heart of our existence, from the center of our being” (p. 43). Rather than suppress the researcher’s passion and animation, hermeneutic phenomenology serves to celebrate them. Throughout this research report, therefore, and redolent of the postmodern literary devices of authorial intrusion and self-reflexivity, my voice is heard vis-à-vis writing in the first person and through the use of personal anecdote.

**Organisation of the Thesis**

The presentation of phenomenological research is “fluid [and] chameleon-like in that it adapts to its situation” (D. Smith, personal communication, October 17, 2013). The only requirements for presentation are that the research report be written in a style that is suitable to the purpose of the research and to its audience, and that there is consistency between the technical language of the report and the philosophical foundations underpinning the study (Smith, 2013a). My phenomenological approach to this study, therefore, called into question the traditional academic reporting structure of sequential and separate chapters for a literature review, methodology, research design, findings and conclusions and prompted me to instead structure this report largely around the research purpose and audience. Hence, the organisation of the chapters in this research report has been guided by the overarching theme of the study, *pilgrimage to a foreign land*. To provide the reader with a “heads-up” regarding the manner in which the study was undertaken and is reported, the two chapters that explicate my research approach are presented early in this report.

In Chapter One, an overview of the study is provided through an introduction to the rationale for the study, consideration of the most appropriate methodology to meet the study’s purpose, considerations regarding the reach and significance of the study, and an outline of the structural organisation of this thesis. Given the contentious nature of definitions pertaining to various aspects of the comics medium, Chapter Two
attempts to provide clarity on the nature of graphic novels and articulates and expands the definitions of comics-related terms employed in this study.

In Chapter Three, the philosophical and methodological foundations of the study are teased open, while Chapter Four attends to the set of research activities employed to investigate the participants' lived experiences. In particular, Chapter Four provides details of the methods through which the data were analysed and interpreted.

In Chapter Five consideration is given to the changing nature of the textual landscape and the subsequent demand for traditional notions of literacy to be re-visited. In particular, the shift from use of the written word to the use of visual texts, such as those of the comics medium, as the primary mode of communication is considered and the need for individuals to be literate across multiple modes and media highlighted.

Having established the broad context for the study in Chapter Five, the discussion in Chapter Six is focused on the way in which the changed textual landscape and the need for a re-visioned literacy have been interpreted in education. These interpretations are considered at the institutional, programmatic and classroom levels.

Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine reveal the findings of this study. In Chapter Seven, I outline the development of the pilgrim metaphor that is woven throughout the three chapters in order to help render as familiar what may be for some the unfamiliar experience of teaching with graphic novels. My use of metaphor is also designed to help deliver the description of lived experience in an evocative manner. Also offered in Chapter Seven are nine narratives that introduce this study’s participants and which offer insight into their individual experiences of teaching with graphic novels.

In Chapters Eight and Nine, the graphic novel experiences of participants are considered holistically in order to reveal the essential meaning of the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels. The discussion in Chapter Eight is focused on the way in which teachers prepared for their journey with graphic novels in the classroom, while in Chapter Nine, consideration is given to both the challenges faced by teachers when graphic novels are used as texts and to the positive outcomes of such use.

In the final chapter of this thesis, Chapter Ten, the study’s major findings are summarised and the implications of the research are considered. Commensurate with the hermeneutic phenomenological approach to this study, definitive conclusions are not drawn regarding teachers’ experiences with graphic novels, nor are attempts made to theorise or generalise.
CHAPTER TWO: GRAPHIC NOVELS EXPLORED

This short chapter provides a close examination of the terms “comics” and “graphic novels,” the latter being a format of the former. Both terms are contentious amongst comics creators, readers and scholars, and it is considered necessary, therefore, to clarify their use in regard to this study.

Comics Defined

According to Groensteen (2007), “so great is the diversity of what has been claimed as comics … that it has become almost impossible to retain any definitive criteria that is universally held to be true” (p. 14). Consequently, confusion abounds when the term “comics” is used in various, and sometimes incompatible ways, across an expanding body of literature on comics to describe a format, genre, graphic medium, art form, or language. These variations in definition, note Christiansen and Magnussen (2000), reflect differing perspectives on the relative importance of content, function, production and aesthetics in the comics medium. For other comics scholars, the debate is purely theoretical; the definition of graphic novels being axiomatic. Wolk (2007) for example, notes that most people would “already pretty much know what comics are [sic], and ‘pretty much’ is good enough” (p. 17). Wolk further highlights that too tight a definition of comics implicitly conveys a political perspective and will fail to adequately describe the ever-evolving nature of the medium. That said, a definition of comics is considered necessary in this study to minimise confusion between my use of the term and the reader’s interpretation of it.

The most favoured definition of comics in contemporary Anglo-American comics culture (Fingeroth, 2008) and the definition used in this study, is provided by comics creator and educator, Scott McCloud. McCloud's (1993) seminal work *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, itself published as a graphic novel, is described as "the most important book of comics theory published in English so far" (Horrocks, 2001, p. 1). According to McCloud (1993), comics\(^2\) is an art form, or medium, characterised by “juxtaposed pictorial and other images [including words] in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (p. 9). Comics art is generally delivered through panels comprising narratives created through images, or images and words together, which are separated by gutters (the spaces between panels), and employs codes such as speech and thought balloons,

\(^2\) Comics is a singular noun and therefore used in conjunction with a singular verb.
motion lines and onomatopoeia to convey information to the reader. Reading comics, however, not only involves reading the seen, but also the unseen. No other medium, advocates McCloud (1993), requires as much of its audience as does comics in terms of asking readers to make meaning of the empty spaces outside and between the panels. The comics reader is thus described by McCloud as a “silent accomplice” (p. 68) in meaning-making.

McCloud’s (1993) move to separate the comics form from comics content is strategic, political (Horrocks, 2001) and, in the European comics arena at least, controversial (Sabin, 2000). In defining the medium through minimal formal characteristics and by excluding mention of the function or content of comics, McCloud's broad definition is implicitly inclusive of digital comics. This definition also gives to comics a degree of respectability by enabling the history of the medium to be traced to the walls of Egyptian pyramids, pre-Columbian manuscripts, ancient decorated Roman columns, and the Bayeux Tapestry (McCloud, 1993). Moreover, in divorcing form from content, McCloud attempts to divest comics of a checkered history that continues to haunt the medium’s quest to gain cultural legitimacy (Horrocks, 2001). States Horrocks (2001):

In one fell swoop he [McCloud] has removed all other considerations - genre, style, publishing formats; in short, the whole embarrassing history of comics - and focused our attention on their [sic] pure, shiny form. Which, as you can see, is an equal sister to such respected media as the written word, music and visual art (p. 2).

Despite the debate in the literature regarding a definition of comics, Magnussen (2000) highlights that some degree of commonality does exist among the varied definitions in terms of the sequencing of images to provide “global coherence” (p. 196), the diversity in the type of images included, and the non-essential nature of written text. Insomuch as these commonalities can be found in McCloud's definition of comics and, since McCloud's definition is well supported in the field of Anglo-American comics (Fingeroth, 2008), it is the definition used to guide this study.

**Graphic Novels Defined**

What are graphic novels? You might think they are easy to define, but the term has become distorted with prejudices and preconceptions, riddled with confusion among the media and public, and a topic of
dispute among ‘graphic novelists’ themselves, some of whom reject the label outright. (Gravett, 2005, p. 8)

Amongst readers, creators, and scholars of comics, it is generally accepted that the comics medium comprises, at the very least, the formats of comic strips and comic books. While both employ “sequential art as a means of creative expression … to narrate a story or dramatize an idea” (Eisner, 2008, p. xi), a comic book is considered to be lengthier and of more intellectual and artistic substance than the comic strip. A comic strip commonly comprises 3 to 5 panels or frames that communicate a simple story, which may be complete or serialised and is usually published within the context of a larger text, such as a newspaper or magazine. A comic book, on the other hand, is a lengthier stand-alone text that most often, but not always, conveys a serialised narrative. For many of us, there is also an inherent association between comic books and particular genres, such as superheroes.

Within the context of Anglo-American comics, the format of comic books has been further centrifuged, but not without debate, to separate graphic novels as a third format of the comics medium. A graphic novel, according to Carter (2007) is an extended and complete work that can be defined as:

A book-length sequential art narrative featuring an anthology-style collection of comic art, a collection of reprinted comic book issues comprising a single story line (or arc), or an original stand-alone graphic narrative. (p. 1)

The term “graphic novel” first acquired gravitas with the publication in 1978 of Will Eisner’s, *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories*. While it is generally recognised that Eisner did not coin the term “graphic novel,” his deliberate and overt inclusion of the term on the cover of *A Contract with God* is considered the first attempt in the history of modern comics to inform publishers and readers alike that this was no typical comic book (Fingeroth, 2008). Furthermore, according to Fingeroth, Eisner’s combination in *A Contract with God* of “the depth and subtlety of great fiction with the visual storytelling at which comics excelled” (p. 102) was significantly different in “substance and style” (p. 102) to set it apart from its comic book predecessors. Specifically, Eisner rendered his graphic novel a complex and sophisticated work through his movement away from the stereotypical “hero and villain” superhero story or the humorous content of popular comic books to re-present the lives of struggling Jewish migrants in the slums of New York during the Great Depression. Through *A
"Contract with God," Eisner’s desire for his work to attain elevated status over comic books was achieved not only through the presentation to readers of new and serious subject content, but also through his evocative and playful use of artistic style in the composition of panels and the detailed portrayal of characters and settings (Weiner, 2003).

At first glance, Eisner’s emphasis on the sophistication of theme and style as the defining characteristic of a graphic novel appears somewhat at odds with Carter’s (2007) technically focused definition of a graphic novel. The two descriptions, however, are inextricably linked; the affordances of an extended narrative increasing the potential for the graphic novelist to pursue “wide-ranging and worthwhile themes [and] the continuing innovation of exposition” (Eisner, 2008, p. 149). Furthermore, through its economy of detail, Carter’s definition of graphic novels provides the latitude to include within the format examples of fiction and non-fiction works covering a broad range of genres. For the reasons discussed above, I endorse Carter’s definition of a graphic novel and use it as the reference point for the discussion of graphic novels in this study.

While the delineation of graphic novels as a separate format of the comics medium has generally been embraced by the comics community (Fingeroth, 2008), the comment by Gravett (2005) that opens this discussion of graphic novels suggests, the term “graphic novel” has been somewhat contentious and, in some cases, rejected. Many of those rejecting the term do so on the grounds that the attempt to elevate graphic novels above comic books by divorcing them from their historical and cultural roots is a marketing ploy designed to sanitise the medium and move comic books into the realm of mainstream literature (Campbell, cited in MacDonald, 2010). Campbell (cited in MacDonald), for example, suggests that, “Graphic novelists would never think of using the term graphic novel when speaking among their fellows…. [But] publishers may use the term over and over until it means less than the nothing it means already” (para. 11). Also of note here, is that the term “graphic novelist” used by Campbell to describe the work of those who create comics is also a bone of contention. As a case in point, Neil Gaiman (cited in Erickson, 1995) recounts the time he was described as a graphic novelist and felt “very much like a hooker who had just been told she was a lady of the evening” para. 4).

Contra to those who reject the term “graphic novel,” I am a strong supporter of the claim that graphic novels are not merely comic books presented in disguise to enhance the reputation of comics, but that they are “qualitatively different from a comic book
story arc in that they are characterized by complexity and thematic unity” (Sabin, as cited in MacDonald, 2010, para. 1). Fingeroth (2008) notes that the term “graphic novels” has encouraged potential readers of comics to view the medium afresh and to “see its potential as a serious, grown up art form, as capable of conveying challenging ideas as are great literature and film” (p. 6). For these reasons, graphic novels offer academic substantiveness and integrity that render them worthy of study to facilitate the teaching and learning of disciplinary content and critical and cultural literacies.

Graphic novels have enabled the educational use of comics to evolve beyond a tool to encourage and engage the struggling reader. In addition to their affordances to facilitate higher-order thinking, which are considered in detail in Chapter Five, the dissociation of graphic novels from the edgy reputation of some comic books and the common perception that comic books are humorous texts created for children or struggling readers (Fingeroth, 2008) must also be considered advantageous in encouraging their uptake as classroom texts. Furthermore, despite all the inaccuracies that surround the term “novel” and the misconceptions surrounding “graphic,” (Brenner, 2010; Fingeroth, 2008), the ability to promote comics as texts to curriculum designers, teachers, students and parents is enhanced when examples of the medium are labelled with a literary term that connotes substance and academic potential.

The discussion above provides a strong argument for the recognition of graphic novels as one of three formats that sit under the banner of the Western comics medium. In using the term “format,” recognition is made that comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels all employ sequential art, but differing means and complexity of delivery are sufficient to warrant a distinction between the three groupings of comics. A review of the literature, however, indicates that not all commentators of comics defer to the description of graphic novels as a format. Thus, another layer of confusion overlays the discussion of graphic novels as educational texts.

The argument by Frey and Fisher (as cited in Gledhill, 1985) for the holistic description of graphic novels as a “genre” is based on the etymological origins of the term, which define “genre” broadly and as a flexible classification not bound by rigid rules. They note further, that use of the term can be tailored to meet a particular situation or need. To this end, they defend the use of “genre” to describe graphic novels as a literary grouping on the grounds that it is a term familiar to English teachers and thereby might encourage them to embrace graphic novels as classroom texts.
While Frey and Fisher provide a rationale for their labelling of graphic novels as a genre, it is not uncommon in the literature to find graphic novels referred to as a genre without explanation. In these circumstances, notes Carter (2008a), “genre” can not only be misleading because it is commonly used to describe the thematic content of literature, but also reductionist, given graphic novels are created within multiple genres (Carter, 2008a; Fletcher-Spear, Jenson-Benjamin & Copeland, 2007; Wolk, 2007). In his attempt to “rid the world of the notion that the graphic novels are best thought of as a genre” (Carter, 2008a, p. 15), Carter notes that the term is tied closely to prose texts and, therefore, suppresses acknowledgement of a unique comics metalanguage as the defining characteristic that gives graphic novels literary form.

Not unconnected to Carter’s (2008a) explanation that the use of “genre” to describe graphic novels is tied to the hegemonic discourse of prose texts, Wolk (2007) attributes the “common mistake” (p. 11) in describing the comics medium, and by association, graphic novels, as a genre to “ignorance” (p. 12). Wolk suggests use of the term is historically based and rests on the fact that, until the late twentieth century, “the way people experienced the medium was intimately tied to a handful of genres ... superhero stuff, mostly, but sometimes horror or romance or science fiction or crime comics” (pp. 11-12). Despite subsequent expansion of these genres in quantity and quality, notes Wolk, the term “genre” has “stuck” in many instances to describe all texts that can be defined as graphic novels.

In this study, my use of the term “format” to describe graphic novels avoids having to wade deeper into the issues surrounding the use of “genre” to describe graphic novels as a recognisable entity. More importantly, however, it endorses Carter’s (2008a) argument that it is inappropriate and confusing to transfer terms such as “genre” that are inextricably tied to prose texts to describe texts that are image-dominant and unique.

To complete this brief overview of comics and graphic novels, mention must also be made of manga, or Japanese comic books and graphic novels, whose characteristics make them difficult to situate within the previously identified formats of Anglo-American comics. While a tendency for the narrative to be serialised places manga in the realm of comic books, the fact that these narratives are often book-length aligns manga more with graphic novels. The difficulty in locating manga within the range of Western comics’ formats is further exacerbated by the stylised artwork in manga, its target audiences, and its use of non-Western codes and reading conventions.
that set manga apart from Anglo American comic books and graphic novels (Fingeroth, 2008; Wolk, 2007). That said, in some instances the distinction between manga and Western graphic novels has been blurred by publishers as they blend manga and Western reading codes and conventions. While this study confines itself to teachers’ experiences with Anglo-American graphic novels, a parameter discussed further in Chapter Five, references are made to the use of manga, given its positioning both as popular culture and as an outlier format of the comics medium.

**Chapter Summary**

In the first instance, this overview of the comics medium and graphic novel format is designed to provide clarity for the reader who may be unfamiliar with the terminology and nomenclature of the comics medium. Possibly, however, “the semantic soup we dip our spoons into when dealing with comics, genre, and format” (Smagorinski, as cited in Carter, 2008a, p. 20) may well have served to confound rather than clarify. In doing so, therein lies an imperative to heed the call by Carter (2008a) to develop a visual grammar that respects the unique nature of the comics metalanguage. In educational circles, teachers are required to be competent and confident in their disciplinary knowledge; something that is difficult in the absence of a clear and shareable language with which to discuss graphic novels.

A further intention of this chapter is to inform the reader of my own understanding of the comics medium such that they might gain insight into my interpretation of both the topic-related literature and the experiences of my participants. A more detailed consideration of the social and educational value afforded graphic novels, along with a short history of comics as educational tools, is provided in Chapter Five. Prior to that, however, in Chapters Three and Four this study’s research methodology and methods are explored respectively.
CHAPTER THREE
THE PATH CHOSEN: PHILOSOPHICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL BEGINNINGS

This study employs a qualitative research design to frame a hermeneutic phenomenological study of the lived experience of nine secondary English teachers, each of whom taught a unit of work in which graphic novels were employed as primary texts. In this chapter, the philosophical and methodological considerations of the study are explored.

A research design details “the entire process of research from conceptualizing a problem to writing research questions, and on to data collection, analysis, interpretation, and report writing” (Creswell, 2012, p. 25). At a conceptual level, the design represents the intersection of the researcher’s worldview, or general philosophical orientation to life and view of knowledge; a methodology that provides the foundational logic behind the study and its research question; and the research methods that guide the generation, analysis and interpretation of data to address the research question (Creswell, 2012). Each of these elements brings to the design its own philosophical and/or pragmatic considerations that are symbiotic in nature and provide the logic and logistics of the study (Yin, 2009); they connect “the empirical data to a study’s initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions.” (Yin, 2009, p. 26).

We might think about the research design as serving a function similar to that achieved by comics creators and film directors through use of a technique known as “staying on the same-side-of-the-line” (Mateu-Mestre, 2010) or the “180-degree rule” (Morton, 2014). This technique is used to maintain a consistent spatial relationship between the components of a panel or scene; for example, between the characters, and between the characters and the setting. To illustrate, in Figure 1 the line indicating the position of the character on the right is maintained even when the viewing perspective or camera position is changed. If the character on the right suddenly appeared in the next panel on the left, the spatial relationship between the characters would be lost. As a result, “the illusion that all of the shots are pieces of the same whole will be lost. This inconsistency can confuse and disorient the audience” (Morton, 2014, Ch. 1). Mateu-Mestre (2010) notes of the “same-line” technique:

Our audience is here to follow a story…. They shouldn’t have to, on top of that, start worrying about stuff that might get in their way when it comes to
following the story properly, such as “where is what” in the shot…. We need to make sure the geography of the location we are in and the position of the characters within it is clear enough so that any action they may take there, or from there, is easily understood by the audience. (p. 090)


In a manner similar to the function of the “same-line” technique, the research design provides logic to the study; no matter where the reader of the research is positioned there should be consistency between the “characters” (the research processes), and between the processes and the “geography of the location,” (the philosophical underpinnings of the research). The literature notes that articulating the geographical location of a study is particularly crucial for the phenomenological researcher confronted with myriad phenomenological philosophical notions and their associated practical applications (Finlay, 2012; Moran, 2000; Patton, 2015; Spiegelberg, 1982). Failure to ground a phenomenological study in its particular philosophical assumptions, theoretical procedures and research methods has the potential to render a research study “ambiguous in its purposes, structure and findings” (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 726).

Choosing the Right Path

More often than not, the determination of a study’s design emanates not from our philosophical orientation in the world, but from “a real-life issue that needs to be addressed, a problem that needs to be solved, a question that needs to be answered” (Crotty, 1998, p. 13). The origin of this study was no exception. Born of an issue that arose in just one of the thousands of classes I have taught over a career spanning forty years, a spark of curiosity was ignited that has been fuelled over the course of this study to become a brightly burning flame. That one lesson, where a teacher publicly rejected graphic novels as legitimate literature, prompted me to wonder why she had questioned
the value of graphic novels and what her particular experience with graphic novels had been.

In my early excursions into the literature, I made a number of general observations regarding the use of graphic novels for teaching and learning. Firstly, from the perspective of student learning outcomes, there were sound grounds for the inclusion of graphic novels as classroom texts (Carter, 2007; Cary 2004; Gravett, 2005; Thompson, 2008). Second, publications for teachers suggesting strategies that might be used to teach with graphic novels as texts were on the increase. Finally, there were few studies beyond those focused on teaching strategies with graphic novels that addressed the primarily theoretical proposition that teachers were reluctant to include graphic novels as texts in their practice. I was curious, therefore, as to what the experience of graphic novels was like? Was there something in that experience that has deterred others from following?

My desire to understand teachers’ practice with graphic novels led me to consider a phenomenological approach as the appropriate path for my research. Phenomenology, at its most basic, is the study of phenomena as they are lived in their natural or prereflective state. It is an approach that “examines taken-for-granted human situations as they are experienced in everyday life but which go typically unquestioned” (Finlay, 2016, p. 173) and therefore seemed particularly suited to address the shortfall of research into teachers’ experiences of graphic novels as texts. Furthermore, the task of the phenomenological researcher to reach beyond participants’ words and their figural meaning to apprehend the embedded meaning of the lived experience and to offer such meaning through rich description (Finlay, 2016) appeared well-matched with my desire to discover what lay beyond teachers’ practical strategies with graphic novels.

As will be discussed later in this chapter, there are many branches of phenomenology. Of particular appeal and appropriate to my desire to find out more about teachers’ experiences with graphic novels was the hermeneutic phenomenological approach of Max Van Manen (2016b), which he terms a phenomenology of practice. The use of van Manen’s approach as a research methodology provided me with the means to access “the private and inner lives of individuals so that we may know what and how they feel and experience in a particular situation and at a particular time” (van Manen, 2016b, p. 239). In other words, I was able to look beyond what teachers were doing with graphic novels to consider the influences on their practice and the pathic dimension of their work, and also to consider those influences and feelings within the
context of time and space.

A hermeneutic phenomenological approach moved my study beyond a purely gnostic, or cognitive, search for understanding to include a pathic dimension. Van Manen and Li (2002) note that the pathic dimension of teacher pedagogy attends to non-cognitive characteristics, such as “the teacher’s personal presence, relational perceptiveness, tact for knowing what to say and do in contingent situations, thoughtful routines and practices, and other aspects of knowledge that are in part pre-reflective, pre-theoretic, pre-linguistic” (p. 217). The appeal here was not only that I considered the pathic dimension a vital aspect of teaching, but also that providing a description of teaching with graphic novels from the personal perspective of teachers would resonate with those reading the research (Freebody, 2003; Rogers, 1995; Schwarz, 2013).

Given hermeneutic phenomenology is firmly grounded in a qualitative approach to inquiry and thereby underpinned by certain philosophical traditions, and in light of the imperative that all aspects of a research study be concordant with such traditions, consideration of the philosophical foundations of hermeneutic phenomenology provides the starting point for a discussion of this study’s research design.

**Philosophical Foundations of the Study**

The term “qualitative” is “a ‘slippery term’ put to a variety of uses, and carrying a variety of conceptual associations” (Freebody, 2003, p. 34). At a philosophical level, however, it signposts a way of knowing the world that generally involves the study of everyday, naturally occurring phenomena in order to make sense of how people ascribe meaning to their world and the experiences they have in it (Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Mason, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2015). In more pragmatic terms, Patton (2015) notes:

Stuff happens everywhere. Qualitative inquiry documents the stuff that happens among real people in the real world in their own words, from their own perspectives, and within their own contexts; it then makes sense of the stuff that happens by finding patterns and themes among the seeming chaos and idiosyncrasies of lots of stuff.” (pp. 11-12)

In choosing a qualitative design for this study, I recognised that a qualitative approach does not present as “a single, monolithic approach to research and evaluation” (Patton, 2015, p. 96). Similarly, it does not explicitly privilege one methodology over another (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) or provide an invariant framework on which to base
the research process (Mason, 2002; Morse, 2003; Neuman, 2004). Decisions in regard to those aspects of the study were determined in the first instance by my alignment with particular research paradigms that encompass the “logically related assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and research” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1988, p. 22). Thereafter, the particular philosophical tenets of my chosen methodology guided the specific manner in which the research topic was approached. In this case, the constructivist and interpretivist paradigms provided the “outer circle” of influence on my hermeneutic phenomenological approach to the investigation of teachers’ experiences with graphic novels, while the philosophical tenets of both phenomenology and hermeneutics formed the inner circle. A brief overview of each of these four key constructs that underpin my methodology follows.

The constructivist and interpretivist paradigms provide the broad theoretical framework for this study and represent my general view of how individuals and groups interact with their lifeworlds, and how they and others make meaning of their experiences within the context of those worlds. Specifically, the constructivist and interpretivist approaches concede the unique constructedness of people’s meaning-making and recognise the role of interpretation in the meaning-making process. By implication, research conducted within the constructivist and interpretivist paradigms relies respectively on the “participants’ views of the situation being studied (Creswell, 2014) and acknowledges the influence of the researcher’s own life situation on the interpretation of participants’ experiences (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

**Constructivism**

The constructivist paradigm, wherein “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (Creswell, 2014, p. 39), assumes a phenomenological perspective that focuses on concrete experience as opposed to abstracted or imagined experience, and exhibits a relativist ontology whereby individuals' meanings of their experiences or phenomena are considered varied and multiple (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Epistemologically, constructivism assumes a position wherein the meanings of human action are constructed through individuals' conscious engagement with objects in their lifeworlds and through negotiation with others (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Furthermore, a constructivist approach acknowledges

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3 Some authors consider the constructivist and interpretivist paradigms as being one in the same (see Creswell, 2013; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Given the particular hermeneutic interpretivist approach taken in this study, the two paradigms, while inextricably linked and overlapping, are considered separately.
the interconnectedness between human action and the site of that action, whereby the meanings of human actions are constructed through the interactions of individuals with their social, historical and cultural contexts (Creswell, 2014). Implicit in this recognition of context as inextricably linked to the human action being investigated is the notion that the perspective brought to an inquiry by the researcher is contextualised (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 2015).

**Interpretivism**

Conjoined with a constructivist perspective in this study are the assumptions encapsulated in the interpretivist paradigm that focus on the manner in which understanding of human action is attained (Schwandt, 2000). In a vein similar to those working from a constructivist perspective, researchers working within an interpretivist paradigm “are interested in the various ways that people understand human phenomena, acknowledging that there are many ways of viewing these phenomena” (Paterson & Higgs, 2005, p. 342).

An interpretivist approach draws on the thinking of nineteenth-century historians and sociologists, such as Kant, Dilthey, and Weber, and the notion of *Verstehen*, or understanding (Schwandt, 2000). Dilthey (cited in van Manen, 1997) notes that in the natural sciences we explain nature, but in the human sciences we seek understanding. To illuminate the notion of *Verstehen*, we might consider the advice of Atticus Finch to his daughter, Scout, in the novel by Harper Lee (1960/2002), *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

> “First of all,” he said, “if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view…. Until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.” (p. 33)

From an interpretivist stance, understanding is achieved by seeing things from the perspective of those experiencing the phenomenon of interest; it is to get “inside the head of an actor to understand what he or she is up to in terms of motives, beliefs, desires, thoughts, and so on” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 194). Moreover, what is inside the actor’s head needs to be considered within the context of both the actor and the interpreter; that is, the historicity of both the researcher’s and participant’s meaning-making must be attended to.

Within both the constructivist and interpretivist paradigms, there exists a range of philosophical approaches regarding the way in which the meaning of human experience is uncovered and interpreted (Schwandt, 2000). To this end, the discussion
now turns to the philosophical tenets of phenomenology and hermeneutics, which are foundational to the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology employed in this study.

**Phenomenology**

Derived from the Greek term, *phainomenon*, meaning "what shows itself" (Heidegger, 1978/2010, p. 185), phenomenology is primarily “a philosophic method for questioning” (van Manen, 2016c, p. 28) that encourages insight into and understanding of lived experiences or phenomena⁴; it is a quest to understand “when and in what way do things appear as things” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 179). As suggested by Moffitt (2003) in his poem, *To Look at Anything*, to look at something in phenomenological terms means exploring beneath the surface to seek the hidden or concealed nature of an experience:

To look at anything,
If you would know that thing,
You must look at it long:
To look at this green and say,
“I have seen spring in these
Woods,” will not do – you must
Be the thing you see:
You must be the dark snakes of
Stems and ferny plumes of leaves,
You must enter in
To the silences between
The leaves,
You must take your time
And touch the very peace
They issue from.
*(To Look at Anything, Moffitt, 2003)*

Phenomenology is far from a homogenous philosophical tradition. From its origins in the first half of the twentieth century in Germany, phenomenology has since spread and morphed its way across Europe, Asia, North America and Australasia. Today, phenomenology presents as a complex and entangled body of approaches that

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⁴ van Manen uses the terms experience and phenomenon interchangeably.
tend to be strongly linked to renowned scholars of phenomenology (Michael van Manen & Adams, 2010).

While Edmund Husserl (1838-1959) was not the first to coin the term *phenomenology*, he is acknowledged as the first to formally announce it in the early twentieth century as a way of "doing philosophy" (Moran, 2000, p. 1) in the social sciences. Drawing on Brentano’s work in descriptive psychology and its focus on “the supposedly *apriori* science of the fundamental laws of our mental lives” (Glendinning, 2009, p. 35), Husserl’s descriptive, or transcendental, branch of phenomenology is a “pure” phenomenology that concerns itself with the study of *essences*—the ideal, or pure structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person perspective (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012). According to Husserl, the meaning of phenomena can only be accessed through the transcendental ego, which is “in some sense abstracted from the perception of the experiential world” (van Manen & Adams, 2010, p. 450).

As enigmatic as the notion of essences may sound, the essence of a phenomenon should not be considered “some kind of mysterious entity or discovery, nor some ultimate core or residue of meaning” (van Manen, 1997, p. 64). On the contrary, as Husserl (cited in Dahlberg, 2006) notes, when we see something, we are seeing its essence. Although we might tend to think of “seeing” as a fairly simple act, the meaning of the term runs deeper when we consider the etymological root of “see” within the Old English word *seon*, meaning to “observe, perceive, understand” (Harper, 2017). To see something, therefore, is to firstly to bring something that is already present to our consciousness, and to understand that something is to recognise the essential meaning or “general form of the phenomenon” (Dahlberg, 2006, p. 13). Take away the essential meaning and the thing becomes a different phenomenon. As Dahlberg notes, however, the peculiarities of each “something,” be it a horse, an apple or a table, are not lost within the essential meaning. To illustrate, Merleau-Ponty (2004) considered Husserl’s philosophical analysis of essences from an empirical perspective by way of his explanation of a phenomenon as the totality of its particulars:

When I perceive a table, I do not withdraw my interest from the particular *way* it has performed its function as a table: how is the top supported, for this is different with every table? What interests me is the unique movement from the feet to the table top with which it resists gravity; this is what makes each table different from the next. No detail is insignificant: the grain, the shape of the feet, the colour and age of the
wood, as well as the scratches or graffiti which show the age. The meaning ‘table’, will only interest me insofar as it arises out of all the ‘details’ which embody its present mode of being. (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p. 94-95)

Husserl’s basic assumption in phenomenology was that the way we see, conceptualise, or understand the object of our consciousness provides its meaning in the context of our current experience (Smith, 2016). Inherent in Husserl’s rejection of the Cartesian notion of mind-body dualism, in which the world is separate from the individual (Laverty, 2003), is Brentano’s notion of intentionality, whereby every experiential mental action has an object and every mental action has meaning (Moran, 2000). By extension, “free-floating constructions [or] accidental findings” (Heidegger, 1978/2010, p. 74) that do not attract conscious thought are excluded from the notion of lived experience.

Also foundational to Husserl’s strongly epistemological branch of phenomenology, wherein experience is regarded as the fundamental source of knowledge, is an adherence to the notion that in order to achieve understanding of human consciousness and experience, the phenomenon must be accessed in its natural, or prereflective and presuppositionless state. To “wander” from this state is to increase the abstraction of one’s understanding. To explain in a fairly down-to-earth way this notion that distance and time can diffuse understanding, Jefferson, a character in the young adult novel The Young World (Weitz, 2015) explains:

I have a theory, which I call the Bullshit Radius Theory. That is, the accuracy of somebody’s account of the truth is in inverse proportion to its distance in space and time. So if somebody tells you something yesterday, it’ll be more accurate than if they tell you about something that happened a week ago. And if they tell you about something that happened two miles away, it is bound to be less accurate than if it happened next door…. It’s nobody’s fault. It’s just human nature. (pp. 145-146)

To return to the natural state of an experience, Husserl devised the notion of the phenomenological reduction. While the reduction is often considered a single process, it comprises two “methodical opposing moves that complement each other” (van Manen, 2016c, p. 266). Husserl termed these two moves the epoché and the reduction. The epoché, a term of Greek origin meaning the suspension of judgement, involves the
researcher’s acknowledgement of their preconceptions and presuppositions regarding the phenomena under study, and the subsequent *bracketing*, or setting aside, of these pre-reflections. This bracketing then leads to the reduction, whereby we are taken back to the essence of the experience, the Latin term *reducere* meaning to “lead” or “bring back.” We first go backwards, therefore, to divest ourselves of our reflections and judgements on an experience in order to move forward to a new and “pure” understanding of that experience.

Of such significance is the notion of the phenomenological reduction to the quest for the undiluted meaning of experience as it was lived and prior to being reflected on and transformed by previous experiences or theoretical considerations, that it underpins the catch-cry of all phenomenologists: “To the things themselves!” (Husserl cited in van Manen, 2016c, p. 56). What is not agreed upon by phenomenologists, however, is the manner in which the phenomenological reduction is enacted. Over time and space, the notion of the phenomenological reduction has acquired “interpretative, linguistic, and material complexity and significance” (van Manen, 2016b, p. 230) that has expanded and recast Husserl's philosophical discipline into "the story of deviations from Husserl" (Ricoeur cited in Moran, 2000, p.3). Through re-engineering, the term *phenomenology* has come to describe a variety of philosophical phenomenological perspectives located in various paradigms. Husserl’s descriptive phenomenology, for example, is grounded in the positivist paradigm, while Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology, the philosophical approach underpinning this study, is located within the interpretivist paradigm.

A one-time student and colleague of Husserl’s, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) came to reject his mentor’s focus on the bracketed description of the pure structures of consciousness and the subsequent invariant meaning, or *eidos*, of phenomena. Instead, Heidegger (2010) shaped an ontological and hermeneutic perspective of phenomenology that concerned itself with understanding the nature of human existence from a position of being an insider within that existence. Heidegger posited that humans and the phenomena they experience are inseparable, and that consciousness of an experience cannot be separated from the world of that experience. By extension, Heidegger argued that any description of the experiencing of a phenomenon is inherently an interpretation of that experience, thus rendering the phenomenological approach sponsored by Heidegger, a hermeneutic one. Heidegger considered life as a text and to understand that text requires interpretation.
Heidegger (2010) encapsulated the notion of the various modes of human existence through his concept of *Dasein*, a German word that translates as *there-Being*. To describe our *Dasein*, or “oneness” with the world, Heidegger employed the term *Being-in-the-world* to emphasise the interconnectedness between our existence and the world in which we live: The world constructs the individual while the individual is constructing the world (Laverty, 2003). Every mode of *Being-in-the-world*, noted Heidegger, whether it be as a teacher, a parent, a student, or friend, brings with it a unique way of understanding that world (van Manen & Adams, 2010). This mutual and multiple constructedness of reality is the foundation of the constructivist ontology underpinning Heidegger’s approach (Koch, 1999).

In applying Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenological approach to the understanding of human experience we must look to the “transaction between an individual and a situation” (Munhall, 2012, p. 124). This recognition of context as being essential to the understanding of experience is a point of significant departure between the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger. Heidegger (2010) argued that any description of *Being-in-the-world* must involve interpretation in order to call forth the often-unnoticed background practices in which our experiences are embedded. To highlight the difference between Heidegger’s focus on the source of meaning of experience “in the world” and Husserl’s search for meaning “outside the world,” van Manen (2016b), quoting Heidegger, offers the following illustration:

In contrast with Husserl’s explication of the temporality of tone and music, Heidegger emphasizes the *meaning* of the sound we hear: “We never really first perceive a throng of sensations, e.g. tones and noises, in the appearance of things…rather we hear the storm whistling in the chimney, we hear the three-motored plane, we hear the Mercedes in immediate distinction from the Volkswagen…. We hear the door shut in the house and never hear acoustical sensations or even mere sounds. (p. 99)

Given the inability to separate human experience from its context, Heidegger rejected Husserl’s notion of the phenomenological reduction as the situation whereby an individual suppresses any connection of the experiencing of a phenomenon to the world in which it was experienced in order to access the world of the phenomenon in their

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5 Laverty (2003) notes that Heidegger used hyphens to connect the words in this phrase to emphasise that human existence cannot be separated from the world in which it takes place.
consciousness. This point of difference between the two phenomenological approaches to describe the lived experience of a phenomenon has significant implications for the way in which the researcher inquires into the experience of human action.

While all qualitative research approaches are underpinned to varying degrees by the key philosophical tenets of phenomenology (Finlay, 2012; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2015) and may employ some phenomenological terminology (van Manen & Adams, 2010), the distinction must be made between a research design that is phenomenologically “inspired” as opposed to that which labels itself a phenomenological study (Dowling, 2007; Finlay, 2012, 2016). Finlay (2016) suggests, “The line being contested is the extent a study goes beyond subjectivity and into the broader realm of lifeworld experience” (p. 172).

The phenomenologist acknowledges that each individual has a unique set of experiences that are treated as reality (the constructivist perspective) and recognises a shared meaning when these experiences are considered together (the phenomenological perspective), (Patton, 2015). All qualitative researchers will acknowledge the first of these perspectives, but not necessarily the second. In this study, therefore, the uniqueness of the participants’ experiences of teaching with graphic novels are presented as individual stories, while the shared meaning of their experiences is presented through thematic considerations garnered from the holistic analysis of the participants’ data.

Another feature that distinguishes the phenomenological study from that which is phenomenologically inspired is that goal of the former is to describe the prereflective, prepredicative, and pretheoretical dimensions of a phenomenon and offer plausible insights into its nature, rather than to explain it, generalise from it, or theorise about it, which may be the goal of studies that claim only a phenomenological leaning (van Manen, 1997). Hence my focus in this study is on the illumination of the participants’ lived experience and the search for the concealed meaning of that experience, rather than on efforts to theorise about or explain the phenomenon of teaching with graphic novels, or to apply my findings to other instances of the phenomenon.

Finally, researchers declaring a phenomenological approach should ensure consistency in the logic and terminology of their chosen phenomenological perspective. There must be continuity between the explication of the study’s underpinning philosophy or theoretical framework and the use of research methods that are “responsive to both the phenomenon and subjective interconnection between the
researcher and the researched” (p. 16). To this end, I used van Manen’s (1997) set of six research activities, which are considered more fully in Chapter Four, to underpin my investigation of teachers’ experiences with graphic novels. These activities guided the way in which I approached my research topic; developed the research question; collected, analysed, and interpreted the data; and presented my findings. In particular, the addition of a hermeneutic lens to a phenomenological approach influenced my degree of visibility in the research, my relationship with participants, and the incorporation of an “artistic dimension” (Finlay, 2016, p. 191) in the interpretation and presentation of the study’s findings.

**Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics is the theory and practice of interpretation (Higgs, Paterson & Kinsella, 2012; Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Schwandt, 2000; van Manen, 1997). The term *hermeneutics* is derived from the name of the ancient Greek god, *Hermes*, who held the responsibility to carry messages between the divine world and the world of mortals. Originally associated with the interpretation of biblical texts in the 17th century, the scope of hermeneutics was broadened by philosophers such as Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur to include human experience within the notion of what constitutes a *text* for interpretation (Higgs et al. 2012). Ricoeur (1984), for example, successfully argued his hypothesis, “To what extent may we use the methodology of text-interpretation as a paradigm for interpretation in the field of human sciences?” (p. 186) by establishing the similarities between text and human action.

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900 – 2002), a one-time student of Heidegger, continued and extended the development of Heidegger’s philosophical hermeneutic phenomenology through three key philosophical assumptions or constructs: a *fusion of horizons*, a *dialogue of questions and answers*, and the *hermeneutic circle* (Higgs et al., 2012). Gadamer’s emphasis in hermeneutic inquiry focused on the historicity of understanding and the linguistic character of human experience (Higgs, et al., 2012). Language, noted Gadamer (1988/2013), “is the universal medium in which understanding occurs” (p. 446).

Like Heidegger, Gadamer (1988/2013) rejected the Husserlian notion of reduction that posits texts can be approached in a neutral state “with respect to content [or] the extinction of one’s self” (p. 321). Instead, Gadamer proposed that texts be approached with openness and sensitivity through the inquirer’s acknowledgement of their “fore-meanings and prejudices” (p. 322). Gadamer’s use of the term “prejudices”
in this context is not intended as we might use it in the modern sense to suggest something unreasonable or negative, but rather to describe pre-judgements that are deeply embedded in the historical authority that we call tradition (van Manen, 2016b).

The attainment of understanding of the human experience, according to Gadamer (1988/2013), involves the inquirer moving between their own fore-meanings and prejudices and the text of inquiry, whether that text be written or living. The outcome is an understanding of an experience that has been co-created through the input of meaning from both the inquirer and the object of inquiry. To describe the manner in which this shared reality is achieved, Gadamer employed the metaphor, *a fusion of horizons*, wherein “a horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point” (Gadamer, 1988/2013, p. 352).

Central to the attainment of understanding through a fusion of horizons is dialogue vis-à-vis *question and answer* (Higgs et al., 2012). My exploration of the literature on the research topic illustrates these two notions in operation. As I engaged with the literature, there was a constant to-ing and fro-ing between my own understanding and the new or alternate perspectives offered through the work of others. As a result, with each volley of questions and answers, my understanding of the research topic was extended. Given that my review of the literature was ongoing throughout the study and that each time I asked a question of the literature I did so from a position of new understanding, the process of meaning-making through a fusion of horizons was an iterative process. This same pattern of progressive understanding characterised my interviews with participants. As each of us brought to the table an understanding of the phenomenon that was shaped by our social, cultural and historical circumstances, the sharing of these perspectives furthered our respective understandings, and so the process continued.

Gadamer’s (1988/2013) focus on the movement of the inquirer between the historicity of their background and the present of the experience extended Heidegger’s notion of the *hermeneutic circle*, which Heidegger had already progressed from the nineteenth-century notion in which the interpreter moved in a circular manner between the parts and whole of the text until everything unfamiliar is perfectly resolved. Heidegger’s imposition of a hermeneutic perspective on this notion took it to a position where understanding can never be perfectly determined because the interpreter’s understanding changes as understanding progresses (Gadamer, 1988/2013). Gadamer explains:
A person trying to understand is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as some initial meaning [a part] emerges in the text. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there. (Gadamer, 1988/2013, p. 318)

Gadamer’s contribution to Heidegger’s notion of this process of “projecting” was one of recognising the historicity of context; that the projecting is “the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter” (Gadamer, 1988/2013, p. 343). By extension, understanding must be considered “temporal, processive and always coming into being in the specific occasion of understanding” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 195). There can never be, therefore, just one interpretation of an experience.

While the concern of Heidegger’s approach to hermeneutic phenomenology lay primarily with philosophically challenging Husserl’s notion of how understanding of the lived experience is achieved, Gadamer’s focus extended Heidegger’s work into practical application by focusing on the conditions under which understanding is attained (Laverty, 2003). The ensuing discussion continues this forward movement of the translation of the philosophical intent of hermeneutic phenomenology into practice through consideration of hermeneutic phenomenology as the research methodology employed in this study.

**Hermeneutic Phenomenology as the Research Methodology**

[The research methodology is] theory about the research methods that will be used. It’s theory which underpins the decisions made about the researcher’s range of choices of – for example – what to study; who to study; where to study; which research tradition to work within; what knowledges to draw on; what to include and exclude, foreground and background and the consequences of this decision; what counts as data and why; relational and ethical concerns; and how to represent the findings/how to write the research. (Thomson, 2013, para. 9)

Underpinning Thomson’s (2013) description of the “research methodology” is the notion that the methodology must carry forward the philosophical intent behind the research, such that the intent infuses all decisions and choices made over the course of the study. That said, while there is “no such thing as the one phenomenology” (Heidegger, 1927, cited in Moran, 2000, p. 3),
there is a level of consensus amongst phenomenologists regarding the core concerns of phenomenology when enacted as a research methodology. Finlay (2016) suggests these core concerns manifest as five “mutually dependent and dynamically iterative processes” (p. 172) to form the essence of a phenomenological research methodology. When enacted in this study, these processes can be identified in the manner in which I: approached my research topic with passion and curiosity about teachers’ experiences with graphic novels and maintained an open attitude to those experiences throughout the study (the phenomenological attitude); sought detailed descriptions from participants of their concrete experiences with graphic novels as texts and recognised the contextuality of those experiences (entering the lifeworld); reflected on the data and sought to apprehend implicit meanings within them (dwelling with horizons of implicit meaning); interpreted and articulated the totality of the participants’ descriptions (explicating the phenomenon holistically); and considered the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels in the context of the literature so as to enrich my understanding of the phenomenon (integrating frames of reference).

The point of phenomenological research “is to ‘borrow’ other people’s experiences in order to be able to come to a better understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience” (van Manen, 2016c, p. 91). With a focus on the systematic attempt to discover and describe the internal meaning structures, or essence, of our everyday, or lived, experiences (Finlay, 2012, 2016; Henriksson & Friesen, 2012; van Manen, 1997), any experience of which people are conscious, or which can be brought to consciousness through reflection, whether it be “real or imagined, empirically measurable or subjectively felt” (Van Manen, 1997, p. 9), renders it suitable for phenomenological study. A lived experience, therefore, might present as an emotion, a relationship, an event, or, as is the case in this study of teachers’ practice with graphic novels, an action. Within the context of the classroom, Michael van Manen and Adams (2010) note that phenomenology is particularly suited to explore the meaning of educational phenomena, or experiences, such as:

What it is like to have a classroom conversation, how students experience difficulty in learning certain concepts, what it is like to read and write poetry, how tests and examinations are experienced, how digital media technologies such as PowerPoint shape the teaching-learning relation and
the knowledge students learn, how young people encounter success and failure, how students experience recognition and respect (or the lack of it) in schools, and so forth. (Michael van Manen & Adams, 2010, p. 449)

Phenomenologists also share the objective of seeking the prereflective and presuppositionless meaning of experience, and agree on the need for enactment of the phenomenological reduction in order to achieve direct access to the experience of phenomena. That said, the manner in which these tenets are perceived and operationalised in the research process lies at the foundation of divergent phenomenological approaches.

The particular methodology framing this study and underpinning its research methods is informed by the work of Max van Manen, a contemporary Canadian phenomenologist and advocate of the Dutch, or Utrecht, school of phenomenology. According to van Manen (2016c):

To do hermeneutic phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal. (p. 40)

Van Manen’s hermeneutic phenomenological approach, otherwise known as pedagogical phenomenology or phenomenology of practice, is situated in the phenomenological tradition of experiential phenomenology, whereby “phenomenology is the description of the experiential meanings we live as we live them” (van Manen, 2016c, p. 31). It is an approach that can be described as “explicitly and emphatically hermeneutic, and also as having a focus which is primarily educational” (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012, p. 4). Furthermore, it is an approach that sits fairly central on the continuum of hermeneutic phenomenological perspectives between those that discard idiographic details of participant experiences to seek holistic understanding of a phenomenon (see Giorgi in Finlay, 2012) and those that focus heavily on individual meaning (see Ashworth in Finlay, 2012). Similar to Merleau-Ponty (2004), van Manen seeks fidelity to both the totality, or essence of a phenomenon, while retaining respect for its particulars. In a hermeneutic phenomenological project sponsored by van Manen’s approach, such fidelity and respect is manifest in a concern with the participants’ individual experiences and the lived experience of the phenomenon across all participants.
In the attachment of a hermeneutic lens to a phenomenological inquiry, the three key notions of hermeneutics are operationalised in the researcher’s study of the lived experience of others: the fusion of horizons, a dialogue of question and answer, and the hermeneutic circle (Paterson & Higgs, 2005). To illustrate, I offer an example of how a hermeneutic phenomenological researcher might approach a description of lived experience, albeit in this case a visual and fictional description of an experience articulated in a comic strip. The example offered (Figure 2) is a sequence of comics panels by Mateu-Mestre (2010) that provides an innovative, yet possibly familiar,

![Figure 2. The use of perspective. Reprinted from Framed ink: Drawing and composition for visual storytellers (p. 025), by M. Mateu-Mestre (2010), Culver City CA: Design Studio Press. Copyright [2010] by Design Studio Press. Reprinted with permission.]

means to convey the complex philosophical notions of hermeneutic phenomenology in action. I chose this particular example because of the alignment between the illustrator’s explanation of the way in which specific visual techniques convey meaning and a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective on meaning-making.

For the sake of the discussion, the comics panels are referred to as Panel 1, Panel 2 etc., starting with Panel 1 at the top. Panel 1, in which Mateu-Mestre (2010) employs
a long, or distant, shot to establish the “context, or surrounding circumstances” of the action, is illustrative of Heidegger’s (1978/2010) phenomenological notion of Being-in-the-world, a notion whereby the attainment of understanding is only possible through consideration of the experience within the context of the world of that experience. As the reader, or interpreter, my sense of wonder is sparked in my first pass of the panel: What is this person doing? Why are they here? Where are they? I then bring to my reading acknowledgement of my own fore-structures of understanding (Heidegger, 2010; Gadamer, 1988/2013) that have been shaped by “mediations, conversations, day dreams, inspirations and other interpretive acts” (Van Manen, 1997, p. 37). My initial interpretation of the panel thus becomes one of, “This is a person lost in a barren landscape bounded by rugged mountains.”

Panel 2 is a reminder that we should not be distracted by our pre-conceptions and should focus instead on the experience that is offered to us by the text. While Mateu-Mestre (2010) illustrates more of a Husserlian approach to the phenomenological reduction in noting that “elements that otherwise would interfere with the message of the shot are cropped out” (p. 025), I instead take the hermeneutic phenomenological approach and acknowledge my “prejudices,” and compare and “fuse” my interpretation with what the illustrator offers me in the panel. Schwandt (2000) notes the benefit for the researcher in risking, or testing, their preconceptions in a “dialogical encounter” (p. 195) with the participant regarding what is not understood. With the text’s offer of a closer view of the person, my interpretation is now that the figure is walking, perhaps with his hands in his pockets or holding something. I say “his” because I have enacted the hermeneutic circle by stepping back from the panel (a part of the text) to the entire sequence of panels that comprise the comic strip (the whole of the text) and conclude that the character is male, which I also acknowledge as a prejudice based on the appearance of the character.

Returning to Panel 2, my earlier assumption that the man is lost now seems inconsistent with my cultural understanding of being lost, which is that one is usually distressed in that situation. My enhanced interpretation of the text, gleaned from the fusion of my horizon with that of the illustrator’s is now that the man, walking with his hands in his pockets, is comfortable and confident. Through the process, therefore, of moving between my cultural understanding and the present of the action, and between my fore-structures and those of the illustrator, I have enacted the notions of the phenomenological reduction, the hermeneutic circle and the fusion of horizons.
In Panel 3, where Mateu-Mestre (2010) uses a close up of the character’s face to provide “a better feel for the features and the reaction of the character to a situation” (p. 025), we are reminded that the hermeneutic phenomenological researcher, while seeking the common structures of participants' experiences, also maintains interest in the idiographic meaning of those experiences (Merleau-Ponty, 2004; van Manen, 1997). Van Manen notes that this duality of concern can be described as a “philosophy of the personal … which we pursue against the evasive background of the logos, the whole, the communal, or the social” (p. 7).

Through the extreme-close up in Panel 4, designed by Mateu-Mestre (2010) to have the reader become “one with the person” (p. 025), we are reminded that the phenomenological researcher’s objective is to explore a phenomenon from the perspective of those who have lived it. Moreover, van Manen (2016a) notes that hermeneutic phenomenologists interpret and describe other people’s experiences so that the reader may vicariously live that experience and learn from it. When I read this panel, the closeness of the character encourages me to empathise with him. I understand his feelings and share his experience. I am now certain the man is not lost. His eyes convey focus and determination.

The “product” of phenomenological inquiry is a description of the phenomenon of inquiry, most often in writing. It is a reflective piece in which the researcher attempts to go beyond the appearance of the phenomenon to seek its hidden and essential meaning. While the act of writing inherently distances us from the lived experience, it can, however, also “concretize the experience of the world more pithily it seems, more shaking to the core… than the world experienced” (van Manen, 1997, p. 129). Bearing in mind this advice, my description of the lived experience garnered from Mateu-Mestre’s (2010) text is:

Revenge. Once you’ve lost everything you have nothing more to lose. You’re prepared to walk to the ends of the earth to get it. There is no hurry, you have all the time in the world. There is no anxiety, just a calmness and confidence driven by hatred and the knowledge that in the end you will get what you want.

But of course, this is just my interpretation of Mateu-Mestre’s (2010) comics sequence. And that is the point of hermeneutic phenomenological research: Understanding is ephemeral, subjective, and unique. No matter how rich and comprehensive an interpretation this study may offer of teachers’
experiences with graphic novels, I am attentive to the notion that “no text is ever perfect, no interpretation is ever complete, no explication of meaning is ever final, no insight is beyond challenge” (van Manen, 2011a, para 5). My adherence to a hermeneutic phenomenological research methodology means there are no definitive conclusions drawn here, and my interpretation of the experience of teaching with graphic novels is not presented as the ultimate meaning of the investigated phenomenon. There cannot be such a thing, given the experience and its interpretation will continue to change over time. In accordance with a hermeneutic perspective, however, this study does provide one interpretation of teachers’ experiences with graphic novels; an interpretation that honours and illuminates my individual participants' understandings of their experience and maintains a fidelity to the context of those experiences.

**Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Teaching**

Since its development in North America during the 1970s, Max van Manen’s experiential approach to hermeneutic phenomenological research has gained ground as praxis for professionals in the fields of education and healthcare, especially nursing. While the attentiveness of this approach to the pathic dimension of pedagogy (van Manen & Li, 2002) holds appeal to those working within “caring” professions, so too does van Manen’s (1997) offer of a set of six research activities to guide the conduct of hermeneutic phenomenological research. Given the similarities between the teaching and nursing professions in terms of their reliance on specialised craft knowledge, the need to understand unique individuals in complex environments (Lopez & Willis, 2004), and the pathic dimension that characterises both professions, I looked, therefore, to examples of hermeneutic phenomenological research and related literature in the fields of both education and nursing to inform the practicalities of conducting my investigation.

My study adds to the small, but growing body of experiential hermeneutic phenomenological research conducted in education to explore students' and teachers' experiences in areas such as: the use of PowerPoint as a presentation tool (Adams, 2008); teacher mentoring programs (Armstrong, 2009); teacher’s perceptions of safe schools (Atkinson, 2012); views of science teaching (Baird, 1998); teaching advanced placement English in public high school (Borenzweig, 2009); school leaders’ and their personal learning networks (Bernay, 2014; Brauer, 2014); online education (De Cagne & Walters, 2010); storytelling (Dougherty, 2012); distance learning (Flax-Archer,
student transition to high school (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009); teacher induction programs (Greenebaum, 2009); authenticity in teaching (Ramezanzadeh, Adel & Zareian, 2016); teaching with technology (Whitesel, 2009); teaching under the “No Child Left Behind” legislation in the United States (Woodward, 2011); and inclusion (Wounded Head Van Osdel 2005).

With its pragmatic concern with the “everydayness” of experience, I considered hermeneutic phenomenological methodology an appropriate research approach to address a growing interest in the field of education in “our mundane, thoroughly recognizable but unremarked daily practice” (Freebody, 2003, p. 3). Such interest has evolved from teachers’ rejection of silver-bullet research structured around quantification that offers “stripped down portrayals that seriously limit the potential for application to professional practice” (Freebody, 2003, p. 35). Instead, hermeneutic phenomenology offers a response to the call from educators who seek research into pedagogical practices that acknowledges the complexity of their professional world and which presents insights that are recognisable and accessible. (Freebody, 2003; O’Toole & Beckett, 2010). Teachers want research that acknowledges teaching as “particularized, situated, child-specific, class-specific, day-specific [and] school specific” (Newkirk, 2009, p. 29). To this end, the aim of hermeneutic phenomenology to explore everyday lived experience and to frame the research question in terms of, “What is this phenomenon like?” rendered it an appropriate framework in which to pursue my interest in teachers’ experiences with graphic novels as classroom texts.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is often employed by researchers who have “strong roots in their own discipline” (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012, p. 3); it is a methodology that accommodates the articulation of the researcher’s interest in, and knowledge of, the research topic through the co-creation with participants of the meaning of participants’ experiences. To this end, given my long-term and ongoing interest in the educational value of graphic novels, the adoption of a methodology that recognises this interest and facilitates my involvement in the deepening of understanding of an experience was appropriate.

A hermeneutic phenomenological approach to educational practice also fosters self-reflection in participants (van Manen, 2016b) and helps make explicit, or brings to consciousness, craft knowledge that might otherwise remain “intuitive and unarticulated” (Newkirk, 2009, pp. 28-29). Furthermore, it is an approach that “honour[s] the agency of the participants and position[s] them as experts rather than
merely as a source of data for analysis” (O’Toole & Beckett, 2010, p. 59). By encouraging self-reflection in the participants, hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry offers a critical philosophy of action that can empower teachers to uncover new meaning in their practice and speak out about it, challenge it, and change it through independent and informed decisions (van Manen, 1997). Such empowerment is potentially available not only to those directly involved in the research, but also to the researcher, and to readers of the research who might vicariously live an experience via phenomenological descriptions that spur the imagination and encourage “empathetic forms of understanding” (Koch, 1999, p. 28). According to Flyvbjerg (2006), such narratives “give meaningful form to experiences we have already lived through but also provide us a forward glance, helping us to anticipate situations even before we encounter them, allowing us to envision alternative futures” (p.240).

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a discussion of the phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophical and methodological considerations that underpin this study of the lived experience, teaching with graphic novels. In doing so, it provides the rationale for my choice of hermeneutic phenomenology as the research methodology for the study. Not only is hermeneutic phenomenology considered particularly suited to the study of teachers’ everyday practice, but it is also a methodology that sits comfortably with my own background, experiences and view of the world.

In the following chapter, the discussion turns to the means by which the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels was explored and illuminated. Central to the discussion is consideration of the six research activities, or methodological themes, offered by van Manen (1997) as a guide for the conduct of hermeneutic phenomenological research. Included within this discussion is consideration of the means by which the quality of the research was maintained. Furthermore, details of the process I followed in the analysis of my data and the ethical considerations of the study are considered.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE PATH CHOSEN: RESEARCH METHODS

At a broad level, a concern with human experience provided the driving force behind my research approach. More specifically, my decision to explore the phenomenon of teaching with graphic novels from the perspective of those using the format as classroom texts determined my alliance with a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology. This methodology provided the broad scope within which decisions were made regarding the key components of the design: the research question/s, selection of participants, choice of research methods, and the reporting of the research. In this chapter those details are fleshed out within the context of a set of six research activities proffered by van Manen (1997) as a guide to the conduct of hermeneutic phenomenological research.

A hermeneutic phenomenological research design fashioned around the work of van Manen places considerably less emphasis than other phenomenological approaches on the use of an explicit research method (Vagle, 2016). According to van Manen (1997), “the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics is that there is no method” (pp. 29-30); any procedural method will inevitably objectify the phenomenon under study and thus tend to overlook the unique, subtle, and pathic meanings of the lived experience. This is not to say that hermeneutic phenomenological research is conducted in an *ad hoc* manner, but instead suggests that the research process should be “open, malleable [and] responsive” (Vagle, 2016, p.71) in order to acknowledge the underpinning hermeneutic phenomenological assumption of the dynamic nature of the lifeworld and human experience.

According to van Manen (1997), a hermeneutic phenomenological investigation represents the dynamic interplay of six research activities:

- Turning to the lived experience
- Investigating experience as we live it
- Reflecting on the essential themes which characterise the phenomenon
- Describing the phenomenon: The art of writing and rewriting
- Maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon
- Balancing the research context by considering the parts and the whole

(van Manen, 1997)
In my review of a selection of hermeneutic phenomenological studies, a number of researchers describe the above set of research activities as the “six-steps” of van Manen (see Hollywood & Hollywood, 2011; Spaten, Byrialsen & Langdrisge, 2012; Williamson, 2005; Zambas, Smythe & Koziol-McLain, 2016). Use of the term “steps,” is misleading, however, given van Manen’s (1997) emphasis that the activities are not intended as a “mechanistic set of procedures” (p. 30), nor are they intended to proceed in a linear fashion. Instead, van Manen’s labelling of these activities as “methodological themes” (p. 31) highlights their intended use at a broader level to guide the inquiry in a manner that ensures the fidelity of the research to the philosophical assumptions of hermeneutic phenomenology.

In the following discussion, the manner in which van Manen’s methodological themes guided my investigation of the phenomenon, teaching with graphic novels, is illuminated. Furthermore, the way in which the methodological themes positioned me as the researcher within the study are discussed.

**Turning to the Lived Experience**

The hermeneutic phenomenological researcher must not only be able to live with their research topic for an extended time, they must be able to live in it (Vagle, 2016; van Manen, 1997). Like a knight in search of the Holy Grail, we must turn to the phenomenon of interest with commitment, passion, and a great sense of wonder. In pragmatic terms, our chosen phenomenon of interest must not only be something we really care about, but it must be something about which we are desperate to know more.

I wear my passion for the phenomenon of teaching with graphic novels on my sleeve. It is manifest in the articles I have published about the educational use of graphic novels and in the many conference presentations I have made over the last decade. Affirmation that my advocacy stems from a strong commitment to teachers’ practice with graphic novels can be found in the way others view my relationship with my chosen phenomenon for study. My colleagues consider me a point of reference on the use of graphic novels in the classroom and recognise my willingness to share my thoughts and resources. Moreover, they acknowledge my desire to know more by often sending me information they encounter on graphic novels and their use in the classroom.

The desire of the hermeneutic phenomenological researcher to conduct a study into a phenomenon of interest with a quest-like passion is a reminder that the phenomenological project “is always a project of someone: a real person, who, in the
context of particular individual, social and historical life circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence” (van Manen, 1997, p.31). Explicit reference to, and utilisation of, the researcher’s personal knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation, therefore, is not only useful, but fundamental to a hermeneutic phenomenological study (Finlay, 2012; Lopez & Williams, 2004; Patton, 2015). In this regard, my voice is heard throughout this phenomenological description of teaching with graphic novels. It is heard explicitly in my use of the first-person to describe my conduct of research activities and implicitly vis-à-vis the selection of literature, literary devices, and personal stories used to provide both insight into the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels and to enhance the interpretation of that experience.

**Investigating Experience as We Live it**

The exploration of lived experience characteristically begins with the generation and collection of participants’ first-hand accounts of their experiences of the phenomenon under study. These accounts are firstly interpreted by the researcher at the levels of individual and collective experience, then holistically shaped by the researcher into a linguistic description of the lived experience of the phenomenon. This description employs themes recovered from the data to bring forth the essential features, or essence of the phenomenon (Finlay, 2012). Underpinning all aspects of this process is the notion that the meaning of all human experience is “embedded in the world of language and social relationship, and the inescapable historicity of all understandings” (Finlay, 2012, p. 21). Hence, the participants’ descriptions are conveyed through language, the researcher’s understanding is achieved through language, and the researcher’s interpretation of the lived experience is communicated through language; all within the social and historical context of the participants’ experiences and the researcher’s background.

**Coming to the Research Question**

To guide the investigation of lived experience, phenomenological researchers ask the question, “What is it like to experience this phenomenon?” (van Manen, 1997). As was discussed in Chapter Three, a question such as this can arise from any experience that might cause us to pause and reflect upon it. Given the focus of hermeneutic phenomenology on *lived* experience, the intent of the research question is to focus interest on the “concreteness” of an experience before it is elevated to cognitive abstraction. The question, therefore, is not a “why” question, but a “what” or “how”
question designed to foster a description\textsuperscript{6} of experience, rather than an explanation of it. The central concern of the question is to call forth our understanding of “how phenomena are lived day-to-day, moment-to-moment in the natural attitude” (Vagle, 2016, p. 73). While phenomenological questions might appear simplistic in their focus on what a phenomenon is “like,” they endeavour to look beneath the surface of a phenomenon to recover its hidden meaning. Questions are deliberately open-ended to encourage reflection in participants and to garner as broad a description of the experience as possible.

In Chapter Three, reference was made to the intellectual puzzle that served as the catalyst for my quest to find out more about the everyday experiences of teachers who use graphic novels as classroom texts. Based on this quest, the central or “grand tour” question guiding this study was \textit{What is the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels?} Underpinning the study’s overarching research question are a number of sub-questions that provide focus and direction for the exploration and illumination of the participants’ experiences:

- How do teachers use graphic novels in their classrooms?
- What are teachers’ lifeworld experiences with graphic novels?
- What are teachers’ professional experiences with graphic novels?
- How does context influence the experience of teaching with graphic novels?

Both the central research question and sub-questions reflect the core tenet of all phenomenological research, the search for a description of lived experience. Furthermore, the sub-questions indicate a hermeneutic concern with the individual’s experience of phenomena and the context of that experience.

The research questions highlight the hermeneutic phenomenological concern with first-hand accounts of the experiencing of phenomena. Certain parameters, therefore, were imposed on the way in which my study was conducted. In the first instance, the phenomenological objective to establish “a renewed contact with original experience” (van Manen, 1997, p. 32) set down certain criteria for the selection of the study’s research context and participants.

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{6} van Manen (2016b) notes the “awkwardness” of having to use both “description” and “interpretation” to describe the objective of hermeneutic phenomenological research. Since they are inseparable processes, van Manen advocates the use of “description” to cover both acts. Use of “description” from this point on in the study, therefore, is inclusive of the notion of interpretation.
\end{footnotesize}
Choosing the Research Context

Practical considerations of time and distance established the boundedness of the geographical area in which I sought participants. My position as a full-time teacher librarian, my inability to take time off from work to generate and collect data, and my desire to work face-to-face with my participants required that I restrict my study to the large metropolitan area in which I resided and worked. Furthermore, my previous experience as a secondary English teacher and my collaborative experiences as a teacher librarian with English teachers wanting to use graphic novels in their classrooms, firmed my decision to focus on the experiences of secondary English teachers. In the first instance, this decision reflected my phenomenological attitude in terms of caring about my research topic. Beyond that, however, I felt my background would enable me to build a rapport with my participants, encourage them to share their experiences with me in our hermeneutic conversations, help me to empathise with their experiences, and enhance my interpretation of their descriptions of those experiences.

Although the educational value of graphic novels has been demonstrated across a range of subject disciplines and grade levels (Boerman-Connell, 2015; Cromer & Clark, 2007; Chun, 2009; Frey & Noys, 2010), I narrowed the lens on my study to concentrate on the graphic novel experiences of English teachers. In the first instance, this decision was made on the basis that much of the literature and research on the educational use of graphic novels takes a literacy focus (Beavis, 2013a, 2013b; Carter, 2007; Dellacqua, 2012; Gillenwater, 2009; May, 2013; Monnin, 2010; Schiebel, 2011) and English is where different approaches to literacy pedagogy and “other disciplinary approaches to text” (Howie, 2002, p. 55) are drawn together. Furthermore, given the seeming reluctance of English teachers to adopt graphic novels as texts despite the increased visibility of multimodal texts and multiliteracies in English curricula (Annett, 2008; Carter, 2007; Hansen, 2012), it seemed appropriate to “borrow” the experiences of English teachers who use graphic novels in order to enhance others’ understanding of the experience (van Manen, 1997). I also considered subject English an appropriate context for my study, given the explicit inclusion of graphic novels in the Australian Curriculum: English (ACARA, 2017), which was being developed at the outset of my study and was subsequently implemented in NSW schools in 2014.
Choosing Participants

The nine participants for this study were selected through purposive sampling, a method of selection especially suited to exploratory research in which deep understanding of a phenomenon is sought from a specialised population (Neuman, 2006). Purposive sampling ensured that the participants met the requirements of phenomenological research, whereby participants must have first-hand experience of the phenomenon being studied, and are able to provide rich descriptions of that experience to facilitate meaningful interpretation (Polkinghorne, 1989).

To ensure proximity between the participants’ experiences of teaching with graphic novels and their description of those experiences, and thereby reducing the degree to which participants might intellectualise their experience or call on distant memories of it (van Manen, 1997), I focused my data generation and collection around a particular instance in which the participants taught with graphic novels. In my approach to potential participants, which was made in the first term of the school year, I sought participants who would be teaching with graphic novels in that same year. Furthermore, to ensure there was potentially sufficient detail and richness in the participants’ descriptions of their experiences, I sought participants who would be using graphic novels as a primary, but not necessarily exclusive, text over the course of a particular topic or unit of work.

After ethics approval for the study was granted (See Appendix A), the Call for Participants (see Appendix B) to participate in the study was made through a posting to an online forum for teacher librarians in which members were asked to forward my request to their respective English Departments. I also emailed my request for participants to all English teachers in my own school who I knew met the study’s general selection criteria, and to a teacher librarian colleague who indicated that her colleagues might be interested.

Respondents were provided with more detailed selection criteria and a Participant Information Statement (see Appendix C). Those who replied and indicated a willingness to be a participant in the study were then provided with a Participant Consent Form (see Appendix D). The Heads of School of potential participants were also sent an information sheet (see Appendix E) along with a request that they give approval for a member of their staff to participate in the study. On receipt of consent from the two participants working in a government school, ethics approval for their participation was also sought and granted from the relevant state education authority.
The decision concerning the number of participants for my study was guided by a combination of methodological and practical considerations. From a methodological perspective, while Vagle (2016) suggests that there is no “magic” number of participants for a phenomenological study, he does indicate that “contextual variation” (Vagle, 2010, p. 143) around the phenomenon of interest is desirable. A further consideration for the phenomenological researcher lies in the recognition that each description of an experience is unique and ephemeral and thus the generation of abstract theory is not a research objective. Such recognition, therefore, negates the necessity for the researcher to strive for data saturation (van Manen, 2016c). This lack of concern with data saturation stands contrary to the suggestion by Fusch and Ness (2015) that the failure to achieve data saturation can have a negative impact on the validity of qualitative research. Their use of a broad brush across methodical decisions highlights the necessity for researchers to be au fait with, and loyal to, the philosophical intent of their study.

Van Manen (1997) suggests that phenomenological researchers should be guided by the work of other researchers in the field. To this end, I accessed a selection of phenomenological studies in education and nursing and noted that the “popular” number of participants for a study fell within the range of ten to fifteen. Given the temporal and spatial constraints of my study, I felt that illuminating the experiences of approximately a dozen teachers across different contexts would be manageable. Furthermore, this number of participants would provide contextual variation (Vagle, 2010) of the investigated phenomenon, which I felt might enhance the likelihood that others might see something of themselves in the experiences of the participants (van Manen, 1997).

Of the fourteen teachers who initially indicated a willingness to participate in the study, two were precluded on the grounds of their remote geographical location and another two were excluded after further communication with them revealed their use of graphic novels would not be sufficiently in-depth to provide a detailed account of teaching with graphic novels. The study began, therefore, with ten participants. After the first series of interviews, however, the employment circumstances of one participant changed and they were no longer able to continue. The study continued and concluded with nine participants from six schools (see Table 1). To preserve the confidentiality of participants, the names shown are pseudonyms.
Table 1. Participant demographics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Experience as a permanent teacher</th>
<th>School type by gender and public/independent status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18 years</td>
<td>Boys/ Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>&lt;2 years</td>
<td>Co-Ed/ Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>&lt;1 year</td>
<td>Co-Ed/ Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>Boys/ Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25+ years</td>
<td>Boys/ Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Boys/ Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>Boys/ Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2 years⁷</td>
<td>Co-Ed/ Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22 years</td>
<td>Girls/ Private</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Generating data

In phenomenological human science the interview first of all serves the very specific purpose of exploring and gathering experiential narrative material, stories or anecdotes that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon. (van Manen, 2011e, para. 1)

**Interviews.** Participant descriptions of their first-hand experiences are the data with which the researcher works to produce an interpretive phenomenological description, or textual expression, of a phenomenon (van Manen, 1997). To this end, multiple and unstructured in-depth interviews with participants were considered the most effective means to gather such descriptions and provide sufficient data from which to create a phenomenological text that would encourage the reader to “connect to the experience, learn how it is constituted, and deepen their understanding” (Seidman, 2006, p. 51). My reliance on the data generated through interview was ontological acknowledgement that the participants’ descriptions were “meaningful realities” (Mason, 2002, p. 63) of their experiences of teaching with graphic novels.

Epistemologically, the conducting of unstructured interviews to generate data acknowledged the value of language and stories in people’s lives as a means of knowing

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⁷ Prior to taking up a permanent teaching appointment, Lisa had completed various stints in the previous eight years as a casual teacher. Despite that, she was considered an Early Career Teacher by her employer.

While interviewing is often described as a form of “data collection,” the term “data generation” is preferred to emphasise that phenomenologists “do not tend to believe that humans construct a phenomenological experience” (Vagle, 2016). Instead, they find the human experience by way of reflecting upon it, and by bringing that meaning to the surface through linguistic description. The description represents the product of a participant’s meaning-making and is illustrative of the phenomenological notion of intentionality, whereby the meaning of a phenomenon is achieved by becoming conscious of it (McIntyre & Smith, 1989). Moreover, the meaning participants make of their experience as they reflect on it is subjective by way of the particular events of the experience that participants choose to describe, the priority they give to these events, and the language through which they communicate them (Seidman, 2006).

Hermeneutic phenomenological interviews are best described as hermeneutic conversations between the researcher and participant (van Manen, 1997); the notion of a conversation giving recognition to the relationship between the researcher and participant as one of give-give rather than give-and-take. Unstructured interviews, therefore, are most appropriate in phenomenological research as they tend to be “dialogic, open, and conversational” (Vagle, 2016, p. 102). Unstructured interviews also enable the interviewer to be attentive and responsive to meanings as they emerge (Friesen et al., 2012). Moreover, there is no need for the questions asked of multiple participants to be the same, given there is no objective in phenomenological research to make comparisons between participants’ data (Vagle, 2016; Whitehead, 2004). Instead, the goal of the research is to find out as much as one can from each participant about their experience of the phenomenon under study.

The labelling of a hermeneutic conversation as unstructured is, in some ways, a misnomer. While it is vital that the researcher keep the interview open to encourage participant responsiveness, it is also important that the researcher be responsive to the research question that prompted the interview in the first place (Vagle, 2016). To achieve and maintain the focus of my interviews, therefore, I was mindful of the areas of interest articulated in my research sub-questions and used them to guide the participants’ responses if they did not cover these areas of their own accord. While some interview guidelines (see Appendix G) were intended to ensure sufficient concreteness of the data, others, which had been developed through my reflection on the
literature, were designed to tease out the details of the participants’ experiences or to have participants reflect on their experience from a different perspective.

My open-ended interview questions were designed to provide a frame of reference for participants’ responses, without restricting those responses. To clarify or encourage a greater depth of response, I used “navigational nudges” (Seidman, 2006, p. 79), such as, “Can you tell me more about that?” and “How did you feel about that?” As well, and commensurate with the hermeneutic phenomenological notion of meaning-making as a co-creation of the researcher and participant through a fusion of horizons, I used my own knowledge of the research topic to encourage and tease out participant’s descriptions of their experiences.

My original intention had been to use the three-interview series suggested by Seidman (2006) to gather data on the participant’s life history (first interview), details of their lived experience within the context of its occurrence (second interview), and a reflection on the meaning the experience held for them (third interview). The purpose of conducting more than one interview was not only to elicit a detailed description from participants of their experiences and to provide an opportunity to follow up their first-interview responses, but also to “pluck the experience and to place it in context” (Seidman, 2006, p. 17). Due to the difficulties that I encountered in trying to find a mutually convenient time to meet with participants for our first interview, however, I decided to compress the focus of the second and third interviews into one and conduct just two interviews with each participant.

My first interview with participants took place prior to them teaching their graphic novel unit of work. During this interview, the participants’ plans for their forthcoming experience were explored within the context of their previous professional and lifeworld experiences with graphic novels. The participants’ definitions of graphic novels and their perceptions regarding the educational value of the format were also pursued at this time. The second interview took place after participants had taught their graphic novel unit of work and focused on the concrete details of their experiences. These details included: the sources of participants’ content knowledge, their feelings about the unit, influences on their teaching of the unit, and student responses to the unit. Participants were also asked in the second interview to reflect on the meaning of their experience and its implications for their future practice.

All interviews, bar one, were conducted at the participants’ workplaces. The one exception was conducted in my workplace to accommodate a participant’s request to
look at my school’s graphic novel collection. This participant’s enthusiasm for graphic novels was a detail that later helped inform my analysis of their data. Eight interviews were conducted during the school day, nine after school, and one during school holidays. Cognisant of the time pressures imposed by participants’ professional responsibilities, I ensured each interview ran no more than 60 minutes. The interview data were collected via audio recording on my laptop using the program, Audacity. A back-up recording was made on my smartphone using iTalk.

My position as researcher during my interviews with participants was undoubtedly influenced by my status as a teacher working within the same school system as my participants. My teaching experience provided me with “insider” knowledge of the organisational structures that characterise schools in New South Wales and granted me access to the professional jargon used by my participants. For example, in organising interviews I understood the notion of “free periods” and appreciated that interviews scheduled during such periods could not afford to run over time. Moreover, when participants spoke about “timetables,” “the BOS” (Board of Studies), “teaching programs,” “assessment tasks,” PD (professional development), and “curriculum,” I understood these terms and did not require explanation or clarification.

Proving also advantageous in my interviews with participants were my previous experiences and knowledge relating to the research topic. These enabled me to take participants further into the details of their own experiences and enhanced my thoughtfulness when reflecting on participants’ descriptions of them. Our common ground helped me establish an early rapport with participants; their body language and friendly approach suggesting they were comfortable and confident talking with one of “their own.” A number of participants reinforced my perception of being accepted by way of comments such as, “As you would know,” or, “You know what it’s like,” when describing their experiences. Adding further weight to my feeling of acceptance was the eagerness of some to discuss the teaching strategies they used with graphic novels. As part of ensuing discussions with participants in this regard, I shared resources on graphic novels with several of them, while at the end of the study I also shared a folder of online resources with all participants.
**Writing activity.** To access participants’ experiences, phenomenological researchers might also ask participants to write about them (Vagle, 2016, van Manen, 1997). The idea that a writing activity would enable participants to generate considered descriptions of their experiences at their convenience, prompted me to ask participants to write a reflection on their experiences during the duration of the graphic novel unit of work. It was intended that the post-experience interview would allow me to follow-up and build on my interpretation of these written responses. Participants were provided with writing prompts to guide their reflections (Appendix H), which were informed by van Manen’s (1997) writing protocol for producing a lived experience description. The prompts encouraged participants to avoid generalisations and abstractions, and to refrain from intellectually and linguistically embellishing their reflections. Instead, participants were encouraged to focus on the concrete details of their experiences and the influences that shaped them. The prompts also sought participants’ feelings about their experiences. Unfortunately, despite the willingness of all participants at the outset to provide a written reflection, only two completed the activity; the other participants claiming a lack of time as their reason for not doing so. Thomas’ written reflection of his graphic novel experience is provided in Appendix I.

**Field notes.** Data were also generated by way of field notes taken at the conclusion of each interview (and throughout the entire research process). These were then transferred to a private blog that I kept as my online journal. Since I already had a recording of the interview content, my field notes from the interviews focused on aspects such as the body language of participants and the manner in which they approached the interview. As well, these notes served as a means for self-reflection on my thoughts and feelings regarding the interviews and the circumstances of the participants (see Appendix J). To illustrate, the following excerpt from my field notes taken after my first interview with Andy reminded me how important it was to listen carefully to participants and provided me with “food for thought” to be followed up with the participant when next we met:

I felt relaxed about interviewing Andy. However, the fact that he said he had brought a “cheat sheet” suggested to me that he possibly felt under some pressure to be knowledgeable about teaching with graphic novels…. During the interview, I found it fairly difficult to follow Andy’s line of thought at times. He’d often start a sentence and not finish it, instead moving to another line of thought. I really had to listen carefully to what he was
saying. Many of Andy’s comments focused on assessment, giving me the impression that teaching for assessment outcomes is an important factor in Andy’s teaching approach…. I felt that Andy struggled at times to find the words he wanted to use when talking about graphic novels and comics in general.

**Teaching programs.** Participants were also asked to provide copies of the teaching programs for their graphic novel units of study. One such program is provided in Appendix K. The programs provided me with insight into the participants’ teaching strategies, the resources used, and the anticipated learning outcomes for the units. Although the programs were not descriptions of the lived experience of the participants per se, they helped me to clarify the context of the participants’ experiences and to extend my interpretation of the participants’ descriptions gathered through our interviews.

**Research-related literature.** Consideration of the topic-related literature served to extend my horizon (Gadamer, 1988/2013) of the historical and cultural context of the teachers’ experiences of graphic novels as classroom texts by providing background information, insight and new understandings (van Manen, 2011c).

**Insight cultivators.** Through consideration of other experiential descriptions, the “horizons of [my] normal experiential landscape” (van Manen, 1997, p. 71) were broadened and my understanding of the phenomenon under study was enhanced. Similar to the way in which I used the participants’ teaching programs and topic-related literature to expand my horizon of understanding of the participants’ experiences, I also used literature, poetry and other artistic works as “insight cultivators” (van Manen, 2011d, para. 1) to further my understanding of the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels. These works, which, at first glance are seemingly unrelated to my topic, helped bring me to that epiphanic moment of, “Now I see.” As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, travel writings, in particular, were significant in furthering my understanding of the participants’ experiences and in providing a frame within which to write a description of the lived experience, teaching with graphic novels.

Further insight was also achieved through my attentiveness to the language of participants and other sources of data. In particular, throughout this study I pursued the etymology of various words in the hope that a return to their original meaning might break new ground in my interpretation of the participants’ experiences. With the intention that directing attention to language might serve the same purpose for readers
of my research, the etymology of various terms is articulated throughout this research report.

A final source of insight was provided by my own personal stories that bore relevance to the experience being explored. These stories not only helped me understand why some things resonated and others did not, but also, by working within the familiar, I was able to access the unfamiliar. As a case in point, my reflection on my travel experiences in South Africa enhanced my understanding of the notion that the reality of our experiences does not always match the mental image of an experience that we create in isolation from the context of the experience. It was also a reminder that as a phenomenological researcher, my objective was to seek the presuppositionless experiences of my participants.

**Reflecting on the Essential Themes of the Phenomenon**

The thematic analysis of data was one of two methods of analysis employed in this study, the other being idiographic analysis. While both methods of analysis are discussed in a later section of this chapter, the notion and importance of themes in a phenomenological study are considered here as part of the discussion of van Manen’s research activities (1997).

To achieve a phenomenological description of the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels required that I reflectively grasp, clarify and make explicit the essential nature, or essence, of the participants’ individual life stories of their experiences (van Manen, 1997). To do so, van Manen suggests it is helpful to think of the phenomenon of interest “in terms of meaning units, structures of meaning, or themes” (p. 78). Themes, in a phenomenological sense, represent the experiential structures, or form, of lived experience, and their explication is the means by which the essential meaning of participants’ descriptions is delivered. Themes, therefore, have heuristic value. Viewed more pragmatically, themes can also provide a means for the organisation of one’s research analysis, interpretation, and writing by providing the framework around which the story of a phenomenon is built (van Manen, 1997).

Metaphorically, themes might be considered "the stars that make up the universes of meaning we live through" (van Manen, 1997, p. 90). They provide the light by which we can navigate and explore the complexity of participants' lifeworlds and proceed with a description of their experience within those worlds. That said, it should be recognised that the development of themes is an exercise in simplification and will always be a less than adequate summary of the meaning of lived experience: “No
conceptual formulation or single statement can possibly capture the full mystery of an experience…. A thematic phrase only serves to point to, to allude to, or to hint at, an aspect of the phenomenon” (van Manen, 1997, p. 92).

Van Manen (1997) suggests a number of ways in which the phenomenological researcher may deliver the themes of a lived experience in the research text. A text might be organised thematically, whereby emerging themes guide the division of the research text into sections, each of which elaborates on an aspect of the phenomenon. Alternatively, the research text may be organised analytically around methodological themes such as those offered by van Manen’s (1997) six research activities. In this approach, themes that emerge from a set of reconstructed life stories of the participants, for example, may be analysed with reference to “etymological and idiomatic sources, experiential descriptions, and literary and phenomenological material, and so forth” (van Manen, 1997, p. 17). Yet another means of presenting themes is exemplificatively, whereby themes are presented and then explicated by way of examples from the participants’ experiences. Presenting themes exegetically involves the discussion of themes around previously-identified themes in the writings of other phenomenological authors. Lastly, the presentation of themes in a phenomenological description may proceed existentially within the context of the four existentials of human experience identified by van Manen (1997): temporality (lived time), spatiality (lived space), corporeality (lived body) and sociality (lived relationship to others).

In proposing the above five ways in which the themes, or essence, of a lived experience may be presented, van Manen (1997) is emphatic that we must “guard against the temptation to follow any of these suggestions in a mindless, slavish, or mechanistic manner” (p. 172). Nothing will come of a study, he notes, that is not thoughtful and strongly oriented to the topic of study. Furthermore, the five modes of presentation do not represent the range of possibilities for presentation, nor are they mutually exclusive. Instead the approach to thematic analysis should largely be determined by the nature of the phenomenon and how the researchers chooses to investigate it.

My approach to the presentation of themes in this study incorporated, both explicitly and implicitly, a number of the modes suggested by van Manen (1997). In my phenomenological description of the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels, sections of the text are arranged thematically within the guise of the pilgrim metaphor, while an analytical approach is evident in the presentation of the participants’ individual
stories. The presentation of the phenomenological description within the context of the pilgrimage metaphor is exemplificative by way of the inclusion of metaphorical narratives that are then teased open with various examples of participant experiences. Finally, while the existentials of human existence are not explicitly referenced in this study, their role as guides in the writing of the text is evident through my attentiveness to the situation of participants in terms of: their pathic responses to the phenomenon (corporeality), the physical space of their environment (spatiality), their relationships with colleagues and students (sociality), and the historical agenda of the educational setting in which their experiences took place (temporality).

The Art of Writing and Rewriting

The use of writing as the means to mediate reflection throughout a study is a feature that sets phenomenological research apart from many other qualitative research approaches where writing is generally something done at the end of a study to report the research (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012; Healey-Ogden & Austin, 2011; Vagle, 2016; van Manen, 1997). Writing is the means by which the phenomenological researcher reflects on the essence of a phenomenon and also the means by which the researcher shares the lived experience of a phenomenon with others. In this way, writing is both a process and a product of phenomenological research (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012).

Throughout this study, I wrote my way to understanding as I reflected on the data, committed my interpretation of the data to language, reflected again on the data within the context of relevant literature, re-interpreted, re-wrote, and so on. Hence writing was a continuous and iterative process (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007) throughout this study to bring forth the essential themes of the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels. Thus, the phenomenological description presented in this research report is not merely the original description of the phenomenon offered by participants (Finlay, 2016).

In producing the phenomenological text, it was not my aim to generate a text that presents the reader with a universal and “determinate set of ideas, essences or insights” (van Manen, 1997, p. 367). On the contrary, my objective was to produce a text that highlights the complexity and ambiguity of participants’ experiences, and leaves the drawing of any conclusions to the reader, not the researcher (Finlay, 2009, 2016). Phenomenological writing, therefore, requires a “responsive reading” (van Manen, 1997, p. 130). To achieve this, not only did I rely heavily on the participants’ voices to describe their experiences, but I also employed literature and literary devices.
to render my phenomenological description an evocative one.

Approaching the lived experience as a “poetizing project” (van Manen, 1997, p. 13), whereby I have tried to bring the experience to life, is intended to encourage the reader to “be attentive to what is said in the words and through the words” (van Manen, 1997, pp. 130-131). In particular, I drew on the rhetorical power of metaphor to facilitate the reader’s understanding of the possibly unfamiliar aspects of the lived experience by comparing them to something familiar (Dexter & LaMagdeleine, 2002; Edwards & Potts, 2008; Kelly, 2011). Metaphor, notes Kelly, is a way of “cooking together disparate things” (p. 429) to enable scholars to conceptualise their research by drawing on resources beyond the academic context to place their individual and cultural stamp on the text. To this end, I drew on the metaphor of teaching as a form of travel. In particular, I endowed participants with the status of pilgrim, a particular type of traveller. Furthermore, given the data revealed the participants’ experiences as largely unfamiliar or foreign, I determined that the overarching metaphor of a pilgrimage in a foreign land as being an appropriate context within which the essential themes of teaching with graphic novels could be articulated. A more detailed description of the evolution and appropriateness of this metaphor is provided in Chapter Seven.

**Maintaining a Strong and Oriented Relation**

Van Manen (2016c) notes that when phenomenological researchers immerse themselves in their participants' descriptions of lived experiences, the potential to become distracted, lost, or side-tracked into theoretical abstractions may render their findings "wishy washy speculations" (p. 58). Similarly, the researcher should not get caught up in their own preconceptions and experiences such that their openness and sensitivity to their participants’ experiences are compromised. The researcher, therefore, must take measures to ensure the integrity and quality of the study.

In qualitative research, notions such as credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability have been mooted as replacements for the criteria used to judge the quality of quantitative research: reliability, validity, and generalisability (Noble & Smith, 2015). The suggested qualitative criteria, however, do not go far enough to honour the hermeneutic phenomenological notions of multiple and subjective truths, the fusion of horizons, and the temporality and uniqueness of the researcher’s interpretation of the lived experience of a phenomenon. Considerable attention, therefore, has been given to the manner by which phenomenological researchers can ensure the quality of their efforts by looking to other dimensions of research “rigour” that are compatible.
with the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology (de Witt & Ploeg, 2006; Finlay, 2016; Koch, 2006; Polkinghorne, 1983; Vagle, 2016; van Manen, 1997; Whitehead, 2003). Polkinghorne, for example offers criteria that address the artistic dimensions of phenomenology by way of the vividness, accuracy, richness, and elegance of the phenomenological description. To illustrate how these criteria might be applied, Finlay (2006) poses the questions:

Is the research vivid in the sense that it generates a sense of reality and draws the reader in? Are readers able to recognise the phenomenon from their own experience or from imagining the situation vicariously? In terms of richness, can readers enter the account emotionally? Finally, has the phenomenon been described in a graceful, clear, poignant way? (Finlay, 2006, p. 196)

Amidst the diverse, but overlapping, criteria posed to evaluate phenomenological research, the imperative is to honour the epistemological tenets of the particular approach employed (Finlay, 2006). The criteria on which the quality of this study was maintained, therefore, are based on the work of van Manen (1997). According to van Manen, hermeneutic phenomenological “signification” (2016b, p. 28), whereby fidelity of the research to the methodical procedures and philosophical assumptions of hermeneutic phenomenology is maintained, is achieved by way of the researcher’s orientation to the research question, the strength of the researcher’s interpretation, the richness and concreteness of the phenomenological description, and the depth to which the research teases open individual experience to expose the essential meaning of the lived experience under study.

To ensure the ethical and procedural quality of this research, I focused on the manner in which the research methods were implemented and was thoughtful towards my role as researcher. To ensure a strong and oriented relation to the research topic, a number of strategies were used during the generation, interpretation, and reporting of the data. Firstly, data were gathered through unstructured interviews with participants who had first-hand experience of teaching with graphic novels. Two interviews were conducted with each participant to ensure the collection of sufficient and rich data about the lived experience in its context. Second, participants were asked to read the transcripts of my interviews with them for accuracy. They were not, however, asked to validate my interpretation of their data as this would be inconsistent with the hermeneutic principle that interpretation is a product of the researcher’s historicity.
(Gadamer, 1988/2103). Third, I drew on literature during my data analysis and interpretation “because the data or method seem[ed] to invite it” (Finlay, 2016, p. 193) and not vice versa. The literature was used to enhance my understanding of the experience of teaching with graphic novels and to enrich my reporting of the phenomenon by locating it within a broader context; it was not used to help explain the phenomenon. Finally, in this research report I provide a detailed and transparent account of the decisions and procedures that guided the generation, collection, analysis and interpretation of data.

In the creation of the phenomenological text, I drew on literature, poetry and narrative to help provide a rich and vivid description of the phenomenon under study. As part of this process, I teased open the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels through the use of the pilgrimage metaphor. To ensure the appropriateness of my inventive approach (van Manen, 1997), I continually moved between the metaphor and the data to ensure the metaphor supported, rather than forced, my interpretation of the data. I also maintained a strong reliance on participant voices in the phenomenological text to allow the reader to determine the closeness between the participants’ experiences and my interpretation of them (Koch, 1999).

To ensure my role as researcher was strong and oriented to the research topic, I adopted the phenomenological attitude, a stance whereby the researcher “strives to be open to the ‘other’ and [attempts] to see the world freshly, in a different way” (Finlay, 2012, p.24). This attitude was achieved in the first instance by engaging in the phenomenological reduction. Through self-reflexivity, or hermeneutic alertness, I reflected on my own assumptions about teaching with graphic novels in an effort to avoid “premature, wishful or one-sided understandings of an experience” (van Manen, 2011b, para. 1) that might restrict my understanding of the experience from a participant’s perspective. Having brought these assumptions to consciousness, they were then incorporated into the process of data generation through my fusion of horizons with participants, wherein the process of comparing and contrasting our respective interpretations of the participants’ experiences achieved a co-created understanding of those experiences. As I interpreted the data, I operationalised the notion of the hermeneutic circle by constantly stepping out of, and back from, the data in order to reflect on the participants’ descriptions rather than accept the participants’ “pre-conceptions and interpretations at face value” (Ajwai & Higgs, 2007, p. 620).

Through the maintenance of a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon of
interest and to the methodological tenets of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, I believe I have produced a phenomenological text that generates a sense of reality through its vividness, describes the phenomenon clearly and accurately, and allows readers to see themselves in the descriptions of others. Testimony that it is a “good” phenomenological description in terms of it being plausible and one that resonates with readers has been provided via the phenomenological nod (van Manen, 1997) from both participants and colleagues consulted during the research period.

**Balancing the Research Context by Considering the Parts and the Whole**

The metaphor of the hermeneutic circle represents the hermeneutic phenomenologist’s concern with retaining the specificity of participants’ experiences while simultaneously seeking a sense of commonality amongst those experiences so as to identify the essence of the experience (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). In this study, my operationalisation of the hermeneutic circle involved moving between the individual participant’s descriptions of their experiences and the data set for all participants, as well as moving between the data, the literature, my own background and experiences, and the research questions. As I moved between: the participants’ individual descriptions (the parts) and the context of those descriptions (the whole); the individual participants’ descriptions and all the participants’ descriptions (the whole); and the participants’ descriptions (the parts) and my evolving understanding of the phenomenon (the whole), each gave meaning to the other, such that the development of my understanding was circular and iterative (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

The notion of the hermeneutic circle is also reflected in the organisation of my phenomenological text. To retain the “experiential and contextual integrity” (Higgs, 1997, p. 7) of the parts of the phenomenon, individual participant’s descriptions of their experiences are presented as stand-alone narratives. The “whole” of the phenomenon is then considered via thematic consideration of the participants’ descriptions within a metaphorical context, and through reference to other research and literature on the research topic. Underwriting all aspects of the process is the research question: What is the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels?

**Data Analysis**

Raw data, note Miles & Huberman (1994), are “not usually immediately accessible for analysis” (p. 9), but require processing that involves “consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read–it is the process of making meaning” (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). In this study,
whereby a hermeneutic phenomenological lens was applied to the analysis of data, meaning-making was achieved through idiographic analysis, where individual participant’s descriptions of their experiences with graphic novels were reflected on, interpreted, and made explicit through the crafting of participant stories. As well, data were considered holistically to identify thematic connections that revealed the essence, or essential meaning, of the phenomenon. Through the development of themes, the personal experiences of participants were thus transformed into disciplinary understanding of the lived experience, teaching with graphic novels.

**Transcribing Interviews**

After each of my interviews with participants, eighteen in all, I listened to their audio recordings and used a “free association” approach (Dey, 1993, p. 91) to make handwritten notes, or memos, on anything that came to mind: an interest in a particular response, a thought linking a response to something in the literature, or a need to follow up a response with the participant. Dey (1993) notes that this process of memoing “should be a creative activity, relatively unencumbered by the rigours of logic and the requirements of corroborating evidence” (p. 93).

My next step was to transcribe the interview recordings in full (see Appendix J for exemplar) to prevent pre-judging what was, and what was not, an essential aspect of the participants’ descriptions in regard to the research topic. Bearing in mind the hermeneutic phenomenological concern with language (van Manen, 1997), I was sure to include any “fillers” such as, “You know,” which might have indicated the participant was pausing for reflection and intended to continue the conversation (Juan, 2006) I was also attendant to the participants’ use of “placeholders,” such as, “Whatever you call it,” or, “You know what I mean,” that might have signified the speaker had temporarily forgotten, or did not know, the term to use.

In addition to writing down all spoken words and utterances, I was attentive to non-linguistic aspects of the participants’ descriptions (van Manen, 1997) by noting intonations (e.g. emphatic, hesitant), pauses and hesitations, and emotive actions such as laughing. The attention to these details reflects my hermeneutic fidelity to the role of language, including silences, in developing understanding of the participants’ experiences (van Manen, 1997). Although a time-consuming and demanding task, this detailed transcription process gave me the opportunity to immerse myself deeply in the data and facilitated insight and understanding.

After each interview, participants were emailed a copy of their transcript and
asked to verify them as an accurate account of their responses. They were also encouraged to comment on their responses, add to them, or ask further questions. All participants replied by email, stating they approved of my transcription. Only two participants offered comment, one expressing concern that some responses were not grammatically correct, and therefore unbefitting an English teacher, while another was concerned at their overuse of the term, “cool.” When I explained that the anomalies between spoken and written language would be taken into account in my crafting of their individual stories, both participants were happy to have their transcriptions stand without amendment. Such linguistic adjustments are appropriate, notes Seidman (2006) when “the claims for realism of the oral speech are balanced by the researcher’s obligation to maintain the dignity of the participant in presenting his or her oral speech in writing” (p. 122).

While the transcription of interviews was conducted in as close proximity as possible to the conduct of the interviews, I withheld my “formal” analysis of the data until all interviews were completed. Although it was inevitable that I was already interpreting the data as it was generated by participants and as I listened to the interviews and transcribed them, I felt that holding my thematic analysis in abeyance would minimise the influence of my pre-judgements on further interviews.

Acknowledging Individual Experience

Crafted stories that rely heavily on participants’ voices provide rich, condensed renditions of the participants’ experiences to provide the reader with an insight of what it is like to experience the phenomenon under study. Participant stories, or profiles, enable the researcher to “present the participant in context, to clarify his or her intentions, and to convey a sense of process and time” (Seidman, 2006, p. 119). The power of participant stories lies not only in their ability to bring participants and readers directly together, thus reducing researcher intrusion, but also lies in their potential to provide a more engaging and convincing account of an experience. Notes Seidman (2006), “creating a profile can bring an aesthetic component into reporting our research that makes both the researchers’ and readers’ work enriching, pleasurable, and at times touching to the spirit” (p. 120).

In this study, the crafting of individual participant stories from their descriptions involved the articulation and fusion of my own knowledge and experience with that of the participants. The stories, therefore, are the products of co-creation. To craft my participant stories, I applied van Manen’s (1997) selective and line-by-line approaches
to data analysis, which are explained in the following section on revealing themes, to the interview transcripts. Data were then culled to craft the participant’s account into a focused description of their experience. Seidman (2006) emphasises the importance of articulating the culling criteria used to enable the reader to understand the process and to provide an insight into the priorities of the researcher. To this end, data were culled from my participant descriptions if they were peripheral to the participant’s experiences with graphic novels, only vaguely conveyed a relevant aspect of the participant’s experiences, or were not the “best” representative of similarly highlighted passages. I then combined the participants’ voices with my own to craft individual phenomenological descriptions of teaching with graphic novels.

To improve the coherence of the participants’ stories, separate but related data were brought together. This “chronological insistence” (Spiegelman, 2011, p. 206) countered the back-and-forth manner in which the participants tended to recount their experiences. In making this adjustment, I was mindful to avoid the pitfall highlighted by Seidman (2006), wherein changing the context of data has the potential to alter their meaning. The resultant participant stories, written within the metaphor of pilgrim “tales,” are presented in Chapter Seven.

As mentioned previously, participants were emailed a copy of their story and invited to comment or pose questions. The aim was not an exercise in “member-checking,” a commonly employed technique in qualitative research to ensure validity of the research (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell & Walter, 2016), since the stories are my interpretation of the participants’ descriptions of their experiences. Rather, participants were asked to review their stories to see whether they recognised themselves in their story and whether they felt their story was readable. Some of the participants’ responses to their stories are offered below. Their descriptions of the stories as “readable,” “thoughtful,” “accurate,” and “enjoyable” can be considered a phenomenological nod (Vagle, 2016; van Manen, 1997) that indicates my interpretation was a plausible and faithful account of their experience.

I have just read Rob's story and wanted to let you know I am very impressed with the way it is presented. It certainly does reflect my experience accurately, whilst being quite “readable” ... so, well done!

(Rob)

Thank you so much for sharing this with me and your thoughtfulness. I do feel that I gave an accurate experience of GNs [graphic novels] and
their impact in the interviews, and you have done such a fantastic job at putting this together. Truly. (Thomas)

I enjoyed reading my “story.” I am happy with how you've put it all together. Must be such an enormous undertaking! Hope it all goes well for you as you begin putting it altogether. (Kate)

This looks enormously impressive … I must say I really enjoyed what I read this morning. You make me sound as though I know stuff! (David)

Revealing Themes

The notion and purpose of themes in hermeneutic phenomenological research were discussed earlier within consideration of the six research activities suggested by van Manen (1997). The discussion here focuses on the explicit process followed to recover or reveal the themes of the lived experience, teaching with graphic novels. Van Manen (1997) suggests three approaches to isolating thematic statements—the precursor to themes—in participant descriptions: the wholistic [sic] or sententious approach, the selective or highlighting approach, and the detailed line-by-line approach. In this study, I drew on all three approaches to facilitate the revealing of themes that describe the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels.

Using the wholistic or sententious approach, I read the participants’ descriptions with a view to finding or devising a phrase that captured the overall meaning of the text. To illustrate, in Thomas’ description of his experience, he was very focused on how teaching with graphic novels proved more difficult than he had expected. That said, he was totally committed to the use of graphic novels as texts and work extremely hard to ensure that his students were given every opportunity to engage with them. The sententious phrase that came to mind to describe Thomas’ experience was, “challenged, but committed.” Van Manen (2016a) notes that whatever the phrase chosen or created by the researcher as a broad interpretation of the text, it is very much a judgement call and is potentially only one of many possible interpretations that might be made.

Through a selective, or highlighting, approach I read the participants’ descriptions for phrases or sentences that served as thematic, or meaning, statements of their experience. Through a detailed, or line-by-line, approach, I read the text carefully to discern what each sentence or sentence cluster had to say about the participants experiences of teaching with graphic novels. Table 2 provides an excerpt from the transcript of my first interview with Megan, and illustrates my use of the selective and
detailed approaches to isolate, or recover, thematic statements. The selective approach
is indicated through the bolding of statements, while my line-by-line analysis is
indicated in the comments in the right-hand column of the table.

Table 2. Example of data analysis using van Manen’s selective and line-by-line approaches.

| MEGAN (2:00): [Shakes her head]. I’d never heard what a graphic novel was until when I was working on my accreditation in term 4 last year. My Head Teacher came to me and said, “We’ve just got all these books. For your accreditation put together a unit.” And I read a couple and I thought “Okay”. I made a unit, sent it off for my accreditation. It was a terrible unit and I’ve since put it in the bin, and I’m going to start a new one over the holidays. It’s the first time we’re going to be teaching it. The way that my Head Teacher wants it to be used is to engage Year 10 students after the School Certificate, because the way the programs worked previously is that they’ve just done any other unit. I think last year we were doing speeches and the kids were disengaged, they were bored, there was really poor attendance [next two seconds are inaudible due to announcement]. So yes, we want to find something that’s engaging, interactive and also literacy-based that helps keep them engaged, keep them at school, and also we can embed skills that they’ll need in the preliminary Course. So that’s kind of the purpose, but before that, no idea what a graphic novel was, no idea how to read one. I had to get my friend to teach me how to read one because I’d never read comics or anything as a kid. It was just all about the novel. So it was interesting. |
| -no personal experience or knowledge of GNs |
| -only recently introduced to the format |
| -Expectation of HT to devise unit without knowledge & skills |
| -Not deterred by failure |
| -Working in own time |
| -GNs used to engage students previously disengaged at this time of year |
| -students bored with traditional activities in English |
| -GNs engaging, interactive and literacy-based |
| -GNs prepare students for future skill development |
| -reiterates lack of familiarity with format |
| -reading GNs not natural |
| -engaged in exploration of new text type |

Within the reality of my analysis, the three approaches to the isolation of thematic statements were inseparable and non-linear. Reading the text for holistic meaning, for example, invariably brought my attention to particular phrases or sentences in the text, and vice versa. Similarly, as I paused to dwell on a particular phrase, I did so in the context of asking what a particular line or sentence might mean. The intertwining of approaches is another illustration of the hermeneutic circle in action, whereby I moved between the parts and the whole of the data, my interpretation of each advancing my understanding of the other.
The thematic analysis undertaken by Thome, Esbensen, Dykes and Hallberg (2004) in a hermeneutic phenomenological study of living with cancer in old age informed the way in which I recovered and wrote up thematic statements from individual participants’ descriptions of their lived experiences. To illustrate, examples of this approach to the data of two participants are offered in Table 3. Not all thematic statements have been included.

Table 3. The revealing of thematic statements in participants’ interview data.

**Participant:** Thomas  
**Theme:** It’s not easy

**Sententious statement revealed through holistic reading approach:**  
Challenged but committed.

**Selective and detailed reading approach:**

“I had such high expectations that I would really love it… but it was harder than I thought. I’d done units on them at uni and I’d read them of course. I’d been exposed to them. But when it actually comes to teaching them, the ball’s in your court and the students look to you as a model and a kind of wisdom.”

“When you teach something, you have to know it… By the end I thought, ‘I don’t have the knowledge.’”

“I don’t like the perception in the community that they’re a dumbed down text… I find that hard.”

“It is very frustrating when the media go on about the literacy crisis… and emphasise digital texts and multimodal texts.”

“I got alarmed that it was such a sophisticated, dense text.”

“Time is always a constraint… you’re always teaching to the test.”

“The curriculum is so narrow and prescriptive in some ways… graphic novels are either being shelved or are picked up by innovative teachers.”

“The whisper of the DET… I haven’t found any units that suggest teaching or using graphic novels…. I find it hard and I find it frustrating. It’s this self-perpetuating issue where by not putting in any resources or support in to it, teachers will be more hesitant to teach it.”

“[Bringing popular culture into the classroom] is a huge battle… there’s a real danger that if we go too far they’ll end up hating it.”

**Thematic statement:**

The challenges facing Thomas as he taught the graphic novel unit came from both outside his classroom and from within. From outside he faced the challenge of poor community perceptions towards graphic novels, which left him feeling angry that he must defend the use of graphic novels to his students. He also felt frustrated at the lack of recognition given graphic novels by educational authorities vis-à-vis a narrow and prescriptive curriculum and lack of supporting resources. From within the classroom, Thomas faced the challenge of his own lack of confidence in his ability to teach a type of text with which, in his personal world, he was very familiar. He also faced the challenge of trying to teach the graphic novel as a text without disengaging his students through its over analysis.
Participant: Kate  
Theme: Going it alone  

**Sententious statement revealed through holistic reading approach:**  
Support for teaching with graphic novels is largely self-driven and locally sourced.  

**Selective and detailed reading approach:**  
“In my early to mid-teens I was a big fan of superhero comics.”  
“In terms of my childhood comics and Mad Magazine were just always present in the household, but as a teacher I’ve just sort of dabbled in it by myself. Someone might have recommended something and then I’ve gone and done a big exploration.”  
“In my formative years as a teacher there wasn’t really any discussion about using them in the classroom. In a way, maybe the silence was a form of resistance. It just wasn’t being talked about as a text type.”  
“I’ve engaged with things like Watchmen and V for vendetta and those sorts of text which emerged in the Cold War period.”  
“I’ve gone online a fair bit and seen that there are communities there who engage [in comics] and I find some of the stuff that’s available.”  
“I’ve found a lot of material online that is increasingly reliable and good. I actually feel it’s not rubbish.”  
“I’ve been to a couple of workshops on visual literacy where they’ve been mentioned… your workshop last Friday was fantastic and I’ve been to another one on Maus.”  
“One of the librarians who worked here put me onto a lot of graphic novels.”  
“In our informal conversations and faculty meetings, there’s certainly interest.”  
“What it really made me do was investigate the form and availability of material… there’s not a lot of Australian-based things at all…. There’s not a lot in terms of high school strategies, and teaching and learning with them in the English classroom.”  
“The lack of resources has made me conscious that we need to do a lot to prepare for the Australian Curriculum if we’re going to do this in a meaningful way.”

**Thematic statement:**  
Kate’s lifeworld experience with, and interest in, comics made her feel extremely confident to teach with graphic novels. In her professional world, she had received little or no encouragement to teach with them during her teacher training or in her early years in the profession. Few of her colleagues, except for her school librarian, shared Kate’s passion for the use of graphic novels in the classroom. Kate had attended some professional development events sponsored by her professional association, but her quest for teaching strategies and resources was largely satisfied through her personal online activity. She was concerned that some of the online resources, however, were not tailored to teaching English in the secondary classroom, nor were they oriented towards the curriculum which guided her practice. As a member of the teaching profession, she was also concerned that the lack of support from educational authorities for her own graphic novel practice and that of others would leave teachers unprepared and vulnerable when the soon-to-be-implemented Australian Curriculum, which suggested graphic novels be used as texts, came into operation.
Once thematic statements were revealed through my interpretation of individual participants’ data, the statements for all participants were considered holistically. Those that I considered non-essential to the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels were set aside and like-thematic statements were amalgamated into essential themes that reflected the shared experience of participants. The resultant eight essential themes of the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels are presented in Table 4. These themes were then considered within the context of the pilgrimage metaphor. The corresponding pilgrimage theme is indicated.

Table 4. Essential themes of the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Pilgrimage Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In anticipation</td>
<td>Signs of the pilgrim: Backpack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some don’t understand</td>
<td>Signs of the pilgrim: Scallop shell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going it alone</td>
<td>Signs of the pilgrim: Boots and walking staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s not easy</td>
<td>Reality of the Road: Wet days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A foreign experience</td>
<td>Reality of the Road: Wild dogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The joy of relationships</td>
<td>Reality of the Road: Sunshine and surprises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A transfer of power</td>
<td>Reality of the Road: Sunshine and surprises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worth the risk</td>
<td>Reality of the Road: Sunshine and surprises</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Communicating Themes**

Through the uncovering of essential themes in the participants’ descriptions and considering which of these themes, if any, were shared across the participants’ data, the meaning of the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels was brought forth. In interpreting and writing my description of the lived experience, I expanded on these themes using the metaphor of the pilgrimage as the context for my discussion. Such was the strength across the participants’ data of the theme, A foreign experience, it was used as the overarching theme of this study and informed the title of this research report.

The themes, In anticipation, Some don’t understand, and Going it alone are considered within the metaphor, Signs of the pilgrim (Chapter Eight), to illuminate the participants’ pre-experience knowledges, understandings and contexts in regard to their use of graphic novels. I completed my phenomenological description with consideration of the remaining themes through the metaphorical lens of Reality of the road (Chapter Nine), which illuminates the experience of teaching with graphic novels by way of highlighting the challenges and celebrations that participants experienced during the
unit of work on which the study was focused.

**Ethical Considerations of the Study**

This study was conducted with the approval (see Appendix A) of the University of Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), and informed by the HREC guidelines designed to protect all stakeholders in the research: the participants, the researcher, and the university under whose auspices the study was conducted. Ethics approval for the study to be conducted in a NSW government school was also sought and received from the Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau NSW Department of Education & Communities (see Appendix F). The ethical concerns of this study focused on gaining *informed* consent from participants and on maintaining participant confidentiality.

**Informed Consent**

Too often in research the notion of “consent” is glossed over and considered as nothing more than having participants sign a consent form that indicates a willingness to participate in a research study. The *ethical* gaining of consent to participate, however, involves providing participants with sufficient information on which to make an *informed* decision to participate. Informed consent, according to Sims (in Sims & Wright, 2000), is “the voluntary and revocable agreement of a competent individual to participate in a therapeutic or research procedure, based on adequate understanding of its nature, purpose and implications” (p. 40). Broken down into its components, Sims’ and Wright’s definition of informed consent involves: disclosure of information about the study by the researcher, the comprehension of this information by the participant, the ability of the participant to make a rational decision based on the information, and the voluntariness of the participant’s decision to proceed or not proceed. These components informed the way in which information was communicated to, and consent obtained from, participants in this study.

In addition to receiving detailed information regarding my study and the voluntary nature of participation (see Appendices B, C & D), participants were also made aware by email of my position as a teacher librarian in a non-government school. The latter notification was designed to enable participants to judge whether a differential power relationship might exist between researcher and participant, and, if so, whether it might influence their decision to participate (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

Upon receipt of written consent from participants and their employers, I contacted each participant by telephone to arrange our first interview. During the
conversation, I explained the details of the interview process to the participant and answered any further questions they had about their participation in the study.

**Participant Confidentiality**

Interviewing teachers about their experiences with graphic novels did not potentially pose the risks that might be associated with more sensitive research, such as that focused on young children or those with serious illnesses (van Manen, 2016c; Thome et al., 2004). That said, asking teachers to describe their experiences and professional relationships with other teachers and with students, and to comment on the influence of educational authorities on their practice might have rendered them “vulnerable to embarrassment or loss of reputation” (Seidman, 2006, p. 61). Maintaining the confidentiality of participants was therefore a prime concern of this study.

In my description of participants, and in the rendering of the descriptions of their experiences, pseudonyms were used for participants to avoid their identification. This convention was also used in any publication or presentation associated with the study. As well, the identity of participants or their place of employment was not shared by me with other participants, nor with anyone not directly associated with the study.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, the research methods of the study were discussed within the context of the six research activities suggested by van Manen (1997) to be used as a guide for the conduct of hermeneutic phenomenological research. Highlighted throughout the discussion is my visible role as researcher, which reflects the recognition in hermeneutic phenomenological research of the researcher’s interest in the phenomenon under study and their potential contribution to the interpretation of participants’ lived experience of that phenomenon. Methods of data analysis and interpretation were considered in detail with reference to my creation of individual participant stories and the uncovering of essential themes of the lived experience, teaching with graphic novels. Furthermore, the strategies undertaken to ensure the quality of the study and its ethical undertaking were considered.

In the following two chapters, the context of this study’s exploration of teachers’ experience with graphic novels as classroom texts is prised open through an examination of topic-related literature. In Chapter Five, the changing nature of the textual landscape in the twenty-first century is considered in regard to the rise in popularity of multimodal texts and, in particular, graphic novels. Also considered is the
influence of the changing textual landscape on the notion of literacy and what it means to be literate within this landscape. In Chapter Six, the educational responses to the changed nature of the textual landscape and the associated demands of a re-visioned literacy are explored.
CHAPTER FIVE
EXPLORING LANDSCAPE AND LITERACY

My reflection on the literature in this chapter begins with consideration of the twenty-first century textual landscape at a broad societal level, wherein the shift from a textual landscape dominated by the printed word to one that is visually oriented is explored. Drilling downwards, the discussion narrows to consider the increased visibility of comics texts within this landscape. Finally, attention is turned to the re-visualization of traditional notions of literacy that is demanded by the increasingly visual terrain of the contemporary textual landscape.

In the spirit of hermeneutic phenomenology, this review of the literature is not a critical analysis enabling the construction of theories or abstractions to be tested, but rather a presentation of the knowledge horizons of others vis-à-vis descriptions and interpretations that help illuminate my phenomenon of interest. My scoping of topic-related literature situates the study within its socio-cultural and historical context, whereby “context” is defined as the circumstances that form the setting for an event and enhance understanding of it (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017). Locating the study thus is acknowledgement that the participants’ experiences of teaching with graphic novels occurred “within complex cultural, political and policy landscapes that ultimately determine the most intimate aspects of classroom life” (Gannon and Sawyer, 2007, p. 30). As well, the socio-cultural and historical orientation of this exploration is recognition that the notion of literacy is a social construct shaped by the societal demands of time and place in regard to the ways in which texts are managed (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Christie & Simpson, 2010; Freebody & Luke, 2003; Leu & Kinzer, 2000).

In deference to the relatively recent emergence of comics in education as a topic for scholarly research (Patrick, 2010) and due also to the use of a phenomenological lens on this study, the literature considered in this chapter is drawn from a range of sources. These sources include scholarly comment and research from academics, research and published anecdotes from teacher practitioners, and contributions from creators and advocates of comics considered expert in their field by the comics community. In regard to the latter, Carter (cited in Bakis, 2012) notes that authority to consider “the intersections of graphic and literacy” (p. ix) must include those who think about, and those who “do,” comics.
My reviewing lens on the literature has also been widened to include literature pertaining to multimodal texts other than graphic novels. In particular, the discourse around pedagogy focused on digital texts and their associated literacies has something to offer a discussion of teaching with graphic novels, given the similarities between the two formats in terms of their word-image synergy, visual design, non-linear reading paths and the potential for their reading to be a social act (Hassett & Curwood, 2009; Benzer & Kress, 2008; Kunkle, 2004; Serafini, 2012).

A final consideration within this reflection on the literature is geo-culturally imposed, whereby the selected research and literature on comics is primarily of Anglo-American origin. This focus not only reflects the strong link between the comics tradition in Australia and the United States (Patrick, 2010), but also acknowledges the paucity of scholarly literature on comics of Australian origin (Patrick, 2010; Possamai, 2003). An Anglo-American focus also acknowledges global differences in the nature and status of the comics medium that renders consideration of comics in Western Europe and Asia beyond the scope of this study. In contrast to comics’ struggle for legitimacy in Australia, North America and Britain (Patrick, 2010), for example, Franco-Belgian comics texts (bandes dessinées) are widely accepted in Western Europe as legitimate literature (Davey, 2011; Fingeroth, 2008). In both France and Belgium, such is the level of recognition afforded bandes dessinées that it is recognised as the “ninth art” and “accorded a gravity equal to that of cinema or poetry” (Fingeroth, p. 24). Within Asia, the diverse history, nature and status of the comics medium across countries not only renders as futile any attempt to discuss Asian comics as a homogenous body of literature (Lent, 2015), but generally places them culturally outside the parameters of this study. That said, research shaped around the use of manga, Japanese comics, is referred to in light of its increased popularity in Western culture.

Compartmentalisation of the discussion in this and the following chapter on the educational responses to changes in the textual landscape and literacy is purely for organisational purposes. As suggested by the etymological origin of “context” from the Latin, contextus, meaning, “a joining together” (Harper, 2017), the changing nature of the textual landscape, the associated reconceptualisation of literacy and literacy practices, and the resultant need to rethink literacy pedagogy are in reality, intricately interwoven. The nature of the textual landscape determines the literacies required to effectively navigate it, and, in turn, places a responsibility on educational systems to
ensure that the literacy demands of the landscape are acknowledged and enacted in the classroom.

**The Changing Textual Landscape**

In the twenty-first century, “We have opened up what counts as valued communication” (Kadjar, in Collier, 2007, p. 4) such that a text, in its broadest sense, can be considered “anything in the surrounding world of the literate person” (Carter, 2007, p. 12). The landscape of our “text-rich society” (Carrington, 2005, p. 20) is consistently described as multimodal, a post-typographic landscape characterised by a multiplicity of communicative “languages” or modes (Carrington, 2005; Felini, 2008; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). In more colourful terms, the textual landscape presents as a “mesmerising and kaleidoscopic world of representation, where sound, image and print are refracted by each other” (Millard, 2003, p. 3) in multimodal texts that combine two or more of the five semiotic systems, or modes of communication: the linguistic, visual, auditory, spatial, and gestural (Anstey & Bull, 2006; New London Group, 1996).

Examples of multimodal texts most often cited in discussions focused on the contemporary textual landscape include film, picture books, graphic novels, webpages, hypertexts, songs, podcasts, video games, and dramatic or music performances. There is strong support in the literature, however, for the recognition of various contemporary alphabetic, or prose, texts to also be labelled multimodal (Callow, 2010; Harris, 2005; Hassett & Curwood, 2010; Kress, 2003; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; McCloud, 1993; Wyatt-Smith & Kimber, 2009). This support is founded on the ontological structural changes to typesetting that differentiate postmodern prose texts from traditional prose texts that are characterised by static design features (Hassett & Curwood, 2010).

Proponents of the word-as-image perspective argue for the multimodality of prose texts that embrace and utilise visual design elements such as page layout, boldness of text, font size, colour and style to extend potential meaning-making by readers beyond the purely semantic interpretation of words.

While multimodal texts have long been residents of the textual landscape (Kress, 2003; Unsworth, 2014), those that are digitally facilitated and visual have provided the driving force behind the reshaping of the textual landscape’s terrain. The globalisation and democratisation of communication technologies have increased the range of work, socio-cultural, and educational contexts in which digital texts are consumed and produced, while simultaneously undermining the hegemonic privilege accorded print texts (Kress, 2003; Unsworth, 2008). Consequently, notes Kress (2004), the traditional
“constellation” of writing as the primary mode and paper as the primary platform for its delivery, has been superseded by a new constellation of image and screen.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the impact of “the visual” on the nature of the textual landscape was such that Mitchell (1995) challenged Rorty’s philosophical notion of the linguistic turn as the lingua franca through which to critically reflect on “the arts, media, and cultural forms” (Mitchell, 1995, para. 1). In its place, Mitchell offered the notion of the pictorial turn as the new vehicle through which “philosophers [can] talk about what is happening” (para. 2). Although Mitchell’s notion of the pictorial turn remains seminal in contemporary discussions of the textual landscape, it is Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (2001, 2006) focus on the “visualising effect” of digital technologies on twenty-first century texts that renders them the popular champions of multimodal texts. At the end of the twentieth century, noted Kress (1998), “The landscape of communication … is very different; it is irrefutably a multi-semiotic one: and the visual mode in particular has already taken on a central position” (p. 58).

The shifting power relationship between prose and visual texts in favour of the latter has increasingly and consistently rendered descriptions of the twenty-first century textual landscape, and Western culture in general, as visual in nature. At the turn of the century, Fuery and Mansfield (2000) noted, “The word has given way to the image as the fundamental process in the representation of the world” (p. 88), while Kress (2003) described the textual move from a “world-told” to a “world-shown” (p.1). In a similar vein, Harris (2005) describes the “visual culture” (p. 326) of the early twenty-first century and Jewitt (2008a) echoes Mitchell’s work by referring to a world characterised by the “visual turn” (p. 6). Moreover, Avgerinou (2009) has us immersed in a bain d’ images, a bath of images, while the “ocularcentric culture” (Grushka, 2011, p. 116) of the twenty-first century is considered by Callow (2013) as one in which images “pervade our waking hours and sometimes our sleep” (p. viii). Within this inarguably imaged textual landscape, the comics medium, having lain relatively dormant for decades, has gained buoyancy and ascended slowly to the surface.
As suggested by Yang (2008) in Figure 3, non-traditional visual texts such as graphic novels have ridden the crest of the visual wave in the multimodal and multimediated textual landscape of the twenty-first century. Aided by its adaptability to digital formats, the comics medium in particular has surged in popularity, while the affordances of digital image editing and manipulation software have also enhanced the possibilities for comics formats that continue to be delivered on paper.

Digital comic books and graphic novels have become a huge area of growth for the American comic book industry, “rising even faster than eBook sales for traditional publishing” (Asselin, 2014, para. 1). To a large extent, their success can be attributed to the popularity of tablet computers, such as the iPad, that offer a delivery platform well suited to the comics medium (ICv2, 2010). E-reading apps for mobile devices, such as Comixology, for example, reported over 77 million downloads over the course of 2011 (O’Leary, 2013).

While the literature has given considerable attention to the influence of digital technologies on the evolution and growth of visual texts delivered by screen, less attention has been accorded the role of digital technologies in providing optimal conditions for visual paper texts to flourish (Callow, 2013; Kress, 1998; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Unsworth, 2008). According to Peter Guitiérrez (in Bookshelf, 2015) the emergence of digital technologies as a delivery platform for texts has enhanced the status of the longstanding and low-tech comics medium delivered on paper, because “the strategies and skills through which we extract meaning from them map perfectly to the literacies required by more recent platforms” (para. 2). Similarly, Yang (cited in Engberg, 2007) suggests that as people increasingly read digital multimedia texts, “they prepare themselves to read comic books” (p. 75). Hughes and King (2010) make Yang’s point explicit through specific examples of the ways in which digital multimedia, especially social media, can render graphic novels a familiar and comfortable place for readers. To this end, they note, “MSN and Twitter require truncated words creating signs and symbols in the place of standard English; You Tube uses visual images in the form of videos; and Facebook allows users to mesh images, videos, words, signs, and links to external sites” (Hughes & King, 2010, pp. 65-66). In summary, the preponderance in digital technologies of images, layout, and design elements as a vehicle for communication, in conjunction with their non-linear reading paths, render the codes and conventions of paper-based comic books and graphic novels familiar to the reader.
Whereas familiarity with digital texts and the transferability of digital skills between screen and paper provide one possible explanation for the popularity of paper-based comics in the contemporary textual landscape, others credit the popularity of comics to its association with film (Beattie-Moss, 2015). To this end, Kaye (2015) notes, “Comic books have been called our modern mythology; Oscar-caliber actors clamber to put on spandex and masks, and writers who once slaved over dialogue bubbles in panels are currently put in charge of project development” (para. 18).

Lubin (2014) offers yet another perspective on the increased readership of comics. While acknowledging the influence of digital technologies and film, Lubin proposes that “most comics are simply better these days” (para. 8). Widespread support for Lubin’s claim can be found in the scholarly literature that points to “better” comics in terms of the ever-broadening range of genres and complexity of comics’ content and the increasing sophistication of production methods enabled by digital technologies (Carter, 2007; Gravett, 2005; Lopes, 2006; Nyberg, 1994; Schwarz, 2002; Wolk, 2007). The increased complexity of comics content is particularly evident in the evolution of intellectually substantive graphic novels such as Spiegelman’s (1991) *Maus*, Moore’s (1987) *Watchmen*, Yang’s (2006) *American Born Chinese* and Satrapi’s (2004) *Persepolis*. The suggestion that the content of comics is “better,” is also evidenced in the uptake of comics into mainstream media and academia. This extended reach of comics reflects recognition of the medium as having the potential to go beyond what is generally perceived as its original and primary function to entertain (Fingeroth, 2008; Wolk, 2007).

The broader use of comics is concomitant with Unsworth’s (2008) assertion that visual popular culture texts are “assuming greater prominence in ... professional, civic and social life, and in school curriculum and educational materials more generally” (p. 6). Comic books and graphic novels, for example, have been used as training materials in the business world (Gerde & Foster, 2007; Short & Reeves, 2009), professional resources in the medical field (Squier, 2008; Williams, 2017), the subject of scholarly discourse (Cohn, 2014; Groensteen, 2007, Meskin & Cook, 2014), and to address the political agendas of governments. As an example of the latter, in 2003 the Australian

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8 *Maus* began as a series of stories that were then collated and published in two volumes. Part 1, *Maus: My Father Bleeds* was published in 1986 and Part 2, *Maus: And Here My Troubles Began* was published in 1997. The parts are published separately or together as *The Complete Maus*.

9 Like *Maus*, *Persepolis* was originally published in English as two volumes: *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* and *Persepolis: The Story of a Return*. It is still published in two parts and also as *The Complete Persepolis*.  

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Customs and Border Protection Services published an anti-racism comic book to encourage young people to be accepting of refugees. Ironically, in 2014, the comics medium was again used by the Australian Government to communicate a refugee-related issue, this time to deter asylum seekers (MacFarlane, 2014).

While the utilitarian use of comics gained momentum during the first decade of the twenty-first century, the response to comics in academic circles was initially somewhat sluggish. In 2008, renowned North American comics scholar, James Bucky Carter noted, “I have found that there is still some resistance to considering someone who studies sequential art a true scholar” (Carter, 2008a, p. 20). Since that time, however, an increasing number of comics courses have appeared in universities around the globe and the scholarly study of comics has been promoted and showcased through numerous academically focused comics conferences, such as the International Comics Conference and Comics Medicine, and in academic journals, such as SANE Journal: Sequential Art Narratives in Education, Studies in Comics and the Journal of Comics and Graphic Novels.

In the literary domain, the acceptance of graphic novels as legitimate literature is reflected in their receipt of a number of high profile awards. Recognised generally as the most noteworthy of these, and as a significant legitimacy booster for the comics medium, is Spiegelman’s (1997) Pulitzer Prize winning graphic novel Maus: A Survivor’s Tale. In 1988, Moore’s (1986) Watchmen won a Hugo Award, the only graphic novel to date to have done so, and in 2005 Watchmen was listed by Time Magazine as one of the top 100 English language novels published since the magazine’s inception in 1923. More recently in the United States, Prinz Award winner for American Born Chinese, Gene Yang (2006), was named the 2016 National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature. Yang became the first graphic novelist in the United States to be tasked with the responsibility to promote reading and literacy in the country’s young people.

In Australia, Shaun Tan (2006) has received a number of major literary awards for his graphic novel, The Arrival, including: the 2011 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award (ALMA), the world’s largest award for children’s and young adult literature; the 2007 “Book of the Year” for the New South Wales Premier’s Literary Awards; and the 2007 Children’s Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Award for “Picture Book of the Year.” Nicki Greenberg’s (2010) graphic adaptation of Shakespeare’s Hamlet has also received the CBCA award for Picture Book of the Year.
By drawing attention to the graphic novel format and bestowing on it a degree of legitimacy, *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006) signalled the entry of graphic novels into Australian mainstream literature (Patrick, 2010). Patrick suggests that the simultaneous appearance of a number of other high profile Australian graphic novels around this time, including Greenberg’s (2007) *The Great Gatsby* and Mutard’s (2008) *The Sacrifice*, indicates that Australian publishers, journalists and readers were finally catching up with their overseas counterparts in recognising the literary legitimacy and merit of comics. Patrick’s claim is supported by evidence that midway through the first decade of the twenty-first century, graphic novels were being published in Australia by major publishing houses, and were appearing in mainstream bookshops and public libraries (Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2010). Also at this time, graphic novels were being accorded positive attention in the Australian mainstream media (Atkinson, 2008; Castles, 2007; Razer, 2005).

The improved reputation of comics in the general community and academic circles should not lull us into the false impression that graphic novels have achieved parity of status with traditional prose literature (Thomas, 2011). They continue to struggle to gain equal rank with traditional visual texts such as picture books, which have been a “valued, cherished and endearingly popular part of our culture for many generations” (Unsworth, 2014, p. 92). Thomas (2011) notes, “A case for comics is still fighting against a popular and academic perception that comics are for children, and comics are a weak cousin to both literature and visual art” (p. 192). Giving emphasis to Thomas’ claim, celebrated comics creator Harvey Pekar (in Lyga & Lyga, 2004) states, “We revere words; we devote libraries to them. We adore pictures; we build museums to house them. Somehow when we combine the two, we’re talking something for dunces and dunderheads” (p. 100). A similar sentiment is expressed graphically in Figure 4 by Watterson (1993), and also via comment by Groensteen (2000), who notes that the notion of hybridity, in this instance of words and images, which is valued elsewhere as a concept in postmodernism, has done little to legitimise the comics medium.
Many comics scholars suggest that the ongoing and relatively common-place perception of comics as puerile and a mere stepping-stone to “real” literature reflects the deep-seated historical attitudes that link comics with those who are illiterate (Hansen, 2012; McCloud, 1993; Squier, 2008; Versaci, 2001). By way of the “witch-hunt” initiated by Frederic Wertham against comics in the United States during the late 1940s, comics also came to be associated with “inappropriate” behaviours and attitudes. Wertham (cited in Sergi, 2012), for example, considered comic-book readers to be “abnormally sexually aggressive” (para. 6) and linked reading to juvenile delinquency. Fuelled literally by Wertham’s advocacy against comic-books, a spate of community comic-book burnings took place across the North American continent at the end of the 1940s. It is little wonder, therefore, that, as Hansen (2012) suggests, the comics legacy may serve to deter the better, self-conscious, or interested reader from engaging with the medium.

To complete this overview of the place of comics in the textual landscape, consideration must also be extended to include the relatively recent recognition of comic books and graphic novels as mainstream literature. A number of comics scholars submit that it is this “newness,” rather than considered critique of the medium, that underpins the criticism of comics (Hansen, 2012, p. 57). Gardner (2012), for example, draws on the work of Marshall McLuhan to posit that the negative response to comics replicates the reaction and anxiety associated firstly with the rise of the prose novel in the late eighteenth century, and later with the evolution of film in the early twentieth century. In both cases, suggests Gardner, “the popularity and accessibility of the new media was … central to the anxieties it inspired” (para. 1). Also for consideration is Baines’ (2008) claim that film also faced a negative response when it pushed for
consideration as a scholarly medium because its initial role in society was to entertain rather than educate. Given its similar “just for fun” beginnings (Bakis, 2012; Carter, 2007; Monnin, 2010; Wolk, 2007), resistance to the comics medium as it has vied for scholarly respectability is not surprising.

The Textual Landscape and a Re-Visioned Literacy

These are times of exciting change and history shows us that with changing social contexts, the nature of literacy learning is redefined. With the advent of new technologies, literacy and literacy practices are changing at a pace never experienced before…. In the process, the look and feel of learning environments are being transformed. (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2010, p. 2)

The symbiotic, or entangled, relationship between texts and the ability required to consume and create them, renders it impossible for one partner in the relationship to change without affecting the other. If the texts change, so too must the way in which we approach and manage them. Therefore, as the textual landscape has undergone change by way of the proliferation of multimodal and multimediated texts, so too has the notion of what it means to be literate changed, as have notions of what constitutes literacy practice.

On a global scale, the early 1990s marked the beginning of an era of significant disruption to the Western notion of literacy whereby the idea of “new literacies” was developed to articulate the changes to the way texts are produced, distributed, shared, and negotiated (Knobel & Lankshear, 2014). Replacing the traditional notion of literacy as a private, cognitive practice incorporating a fixed and unitary set of skills focused on the reading and writing of alphabetic text on paper (New London Group, 1996; Jewitt, 2008b; Kress, 2003;) was a more fluid and contextual paradigm of literacy that reconceived literacy as a “plurality of literacies” (Unsworth, 2001, p. 8) and as a socio-cultural practice (New London Group, 1996; Gee, 1992; Hassett & Schieble, 2007; Luke, 2000). Acknowledging the “new” literacy as a “moving target” (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro & Cammack, 2004, p. 1584), re-visioned notions of literacy that were open-ended were developed to accommodate the current and future changes:

The idea of “new literacies” focuses on the way in which meaning-making practices are evolving under contemporary conditions that include, but are in no way limited to, technological changes associated
with the rise and proliferation of digital electronics. (Lankshear & Knobel, 2014, p. 97)

Encapsulating the above elements of a re-visioned literacy, the *NSW English: K-10 Syllabus* (BOS, 2012) defines literacy as, “the ability to use a repertoire of knowledge and skills to communicate and comprehend effectively in a wide variety of contexts, modes and media (para. 16).

To illustrate the complexity of the changed textual landscape and associated notions of literacy, Sanders and Albers (2010) employ a visual metaphor in the form of James Sanders’ woodcut print, *Entangled* (Figure 5).


Sanders and Albers (2010) note that the layered and interwoven colours, shapes, and textures of *Entangled* combine to form a work where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In doing so, the work describes a communication environment in which “modes, media and language systems are in symbiotic relationship” (Sanders & Albers, p. 4), a relationship that offers innumerable ways in which to express ourselves. It is an
environment in which literacy, in comparison to a past dependence on the reading and writing of words, is “entangled, unable and unwilling” (Sanders & Albers, p. 4) to attach itself to any single mode or medium.

*Entangled* also serves as an appropriate metaphor for the new “business of literacy” (Freebody, 2013, p. 16), which involves the ability to not only see and understand the message, but also the ability to see *through* the message to the social and cultural practices in which it is embedded, and subsequently to understand the historical, ideological and moral contexts that shape it.

In an endorsement of the earlier work of the New London Group (1996), a cohort of ten renowned literacy educators10, Freebody (2013) assigns teachers a pivotal role in the facilitation of re-visioned literacy practices in young people. He argues, that such is the burden of teachers’ responsibility to fulfil this role, it might well be considered “the most far-reaching of schooling’s roles” (p. 9). The sentiment of Freebody’s remarks is reflected in numerous theoretical and practical considerations on the changing nature of literacy and how new literacies might be framed and implemented in classrooms (Anstey & Bull, 2010a, 2010b; Bomer, 2008; Callow, 2013; Cervetti, Damico & Pearson, 2006; Christie & Simpson, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Leander & Boldt, 2013; Mills, 2009; Ryan, Scott & Walsh, 2010; Simpson & Walsh, 2010; Simpson & White, 2012).

Within the discourse on changing literacy and literacy practices, increasing attention has been given to the potential of visual texts, such as comic books and graphic novels, to address the demands of the changing textual landscape and an associated re-visioned literacy. What follows is an overview of the way in which educational theories shaped around new literacies can specifically frame the practical use of comic books and graphic novels as classrooms texts. In practical terms the discussion offers a rationale for teachers’ use of graphic novels as classroom texts.

**Comics and a Re-Visioned Literacy**

The conceptualisation of contemporary literacy by educational theorists has revolved around two central themes: the multimodality of texts and the potential of their affordances, and the socio-cultural context in which such texts are consumed, created and distributed. A synthesis of literacy approaches shaped around these themes is

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10 The New London Group members: Courtney Cazden (USA), Bill Cope (Australia), Norman Fairclough (UK), James Gee (United States), Mary Kalantzis (Australia), Gunther Kress (UK), Allan Luke (Australia), Carmen Luke (Australia), Sarah Michaels (US), Martin Nakata (Australia).
offered by Simpson and Walsh (2010) via consideration of three key interrelated pedagogical perspectives: a multimodality perspective, a multiliteracies perspective, and a new literacies perspective. A multimodality perspective on literacy emphasises how various modes of communication within and across a broad range of texts contribute to meaning making (Jewitt, 2008b; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). A multiple literacies, or multiliteracies, perspective affords attention to the pedagogical use of multimodal and multimediated texts and acknowledges the contributions to meaning making offered by the socio-cultural contexts in which such texts are created and used (New London Group 1996). A new literacies perspective focuses particularly, but not exclusively, on digital technologies and the literacy practices they facilitate (Knobel & Lankshear, 2014). Jewitt (2008b) notes that although each perspective is shaped around “a range of traditions, disciplines, and histories” (p. 244), they share some assumptions about literacy learners and contexts. Each approach, however, affords different weight to the nature of texts and the context in which they are consumed, created, negotiated and distributed. What follows is a brief overview of the above three literacy perspectives, including examples of how graphic novels might be used within each approach.

A multimodal perspective. A “mode” can be defined as a “socially and culturally shaped resource for meaning making” (Bezemer & Kress, 2008, p.171). The theory of multimodality contributes to our understanding of how various modes, such as “image, gesture, gaze, body posture, sound, writing, music, speech and so on” (Jewitt, 2008b, p. 246), contribute to meaning making. The different resources of each mode allow different modes to do different semiotic work by way of what Bezemer and Kress describe as “different affordances–potentials and constraints for making meaning” (p. 171).

A multimodal perspective on literacy places emphasis on the semiotic features of the different modes of multimodal texts and focuses on the way in which the information from these modes is “taken up in the social construction of meaning in [readers’] own social spaces” (Hassett & Curwood, 2010, p. 272). A multimodal perspective on literacy, therefore, represents a significant shift in the way texts are viewed. Texts are no longer seen as containers of information passively received by the reader, but rather manifest as open vessels whose meaning is created through the “active negotiation, conversation, and communication of individual values and thoughts” (Hassett & Schieble, 2007, p. 63). Implicit in this act of negotiation around multimodal
texts is a reader’s ability to understand the “language” of the various modes, and to have the skills to communicate that understanding.

Hassett and Schieble (2007) provide two compelling examples from Marjane Satrapi’s (2004) *Persepolis: The story of a childhood*, and Art Spiegelman’s (1997) *Maus: A survivor’s tale/My father bleeds history* to illustrate the ways in which the semantic and syntactic cueing systems of both visual and print work in synergy in graphic novels to “require readers to negotiate multiple levels of meaning while constructing connections within and across various textual elements” (p. 67). They note not only the imperative to read both image and print together, but also highlight the power reversal in the status of print and image in the graphic novel: “much of the meaning is carried in the image itself. The print becomes a tool or a scaffold for making meaning of the image, versus the traditional notion of images illustrating print” (p. 65).

To illustrate this power dynamic, Hassett and Schieble (2007) provide the following detailed description of just one of the many powerful panels from *Maus* (see Figure 6):


In this frame, the couple is portrayed as small and in shadow, before a crossroads path that is configured as the Nazi swastika. The trees alongside the path are empty and dismal, emphasizing the desolate future ahead for Vladek and his wife. The layout of the path and the cold, empty landscape foreshadow the events that this couple face later in the novel: at this stage in the novel, the Nazis are so prolific in this region that any path the couple follows will lead to an eventual concentration camp (hence the swastika). Perhaps the leafless,
rail-thin trees symbolize the extreme hunger and fatigue that Vladek and Anja will face. On the horizon in this image lies an industrial-looking building with smoke rising from one of its stacks; the subtext of this particular part of the image may also foreshadow the gas chambers that await them in the camp. Syntactically, the spatial arrangement of this image carries almost the entire meaning in this frame. The smoke-billowing building is projected with distance from the couple, yet within sight, much like the actual events as the novel unfolds. (Hassett & Schieble, 2007, p. 65)

The print element of this panel from *Maus* consists of just two sentences, one located above the image: “ANJA AND I DIDN’T HAVE WHERE TO GO [sic],” the other at its base: “WE WALKED IN THE DIRECTION OF SOSNOWIEC – BUT WHERE TO GO?!?” As Hassett and Schieble (2007) note, “the print works as a scaffold for relaying that the couple have nowhere to go, but the power of this frightening truth lies in the image and its spatial arrangement” (p.66). Panel analysis such as this, suggests Carter (2015), assists students to “boost their metacognitive awareness of what they are studying” (p. 5) and assists them to develop “the intellectual stamina required in reading comics” (p. 4).

Also highlighted through an exploration of the same panel from *Maus* is the importance of the reader’s socio-cultural position in making meaning. To illustrate I draw on a conversation I had about *Maus* some years ago with a Year 7 student who had borrowed the graphic novel from the school library. Wondering how the student had coped with the complexity of the graphic novel’s dual narrative, heavy use of literary devices such as anthropomorphism and bricolage, and the gravity of the subject matter of the Holocaust, I asked him what he had thought of *Maus*. Somewhat to my surprise he answered, “I really enjoyed the story.” The boy went on, however, to add, “My father read it too, but he cried.” This response led me to surmise that the student had read *Maus* without the support of its historical context, and without a sound knowledge of the graphic novel metalanguage. It also served as a timely reminder of the polysemic nature of graphic novels: they can be read and interpreted at different levels depending on one’s experiences and ability to access modal resources.

**A multiliteracies perspective.** In 1996, the New London Group published a view of literacy that extended the semantic reach of traditional literacy to recognise both
the multiplicity of modes populating the textual landscape and the multiplicity of “social domains” (Kress, 2003, p. 65) in which texts are created and consumed. Specifically, the New London Group endeavoured to address the restraints of traditional approaches to literacy that were bound to strong historical, social and cultural meanings that rendered literacy a “formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed” project (New London Group, 1996, p. 61).

Whereas the recognition of literacy as a multimodal affair was not in itself ground-breaking (Gee, 2009a), the significance of the New London Group’s work lay in its recognition that literacy learning had largely been overlooked in previous discussions on the changing nature of literacy. To this end, the New London Group focused on the implications of a changed textual landscape for literacy pedagogy and practices:

Literacy pedagogy now must account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies. This includes understanding and competent control of representational forms that are becoming increasingly significant in the overall communications environment, such as visual images and their relationship to the written word. (New London Group, 1996, p. 61)

To address the “what,” and “how” of literacy pedagogy, the New London Group proposed a framework, A pedagogy of multiliteracies, which focused on notions of context and design, the latter term describing “any semiotic activity, including the use of language to produce or consume texts, as a matter of Design” (New London Group, 1996, p. 12). Ryan and Anstey (2003) note that the repertoire of practices required by a multiliterate person are the ability to make meaning and communicate in variety of modes and media, critically analyse texts in all representational forms, and “engage in the social responsibilities of interaction associated with texts” (p. 10).

Within A pedagogy of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), teaching and learning is shaped around four essential pedagogical practices in a multimodal environment:

- **Situated practice**, wherein teachers immerse students in multimodal textual experiences, especially with texts that represent students’ lifeworld interests;
- **Overt instruction**, whereby teachers equip students with the metalanguage to analyse and articulate the design of multimodal texts;
• **Critical framing**, through which teachers encourage students to consider the socio-cultural contexts in which meaning is shared and understood; and

• **Transformed practice**, whereby teachers and students use their understandings of a multimodal environment to re-situate meaning making in other contexts or cultural sites.

The imperative for the above practices to be explicitly attended to by teachers in the multimodal classroom is highlighted in the findings of an Australian study into student responses to picture books (Ryan and Anstey, 2003). In an investigation of ways in which students responded to *The Rabbits* (Marsden & Tan, 2010), the research revealed that in the absence of overt instruction, the majority of students’ time was spent on making meaning through immersion in the text and by drawing on prior knowledge. Critical readings of the text were virtually absent until facilitated through explicit teaching. The findings of the study bear relevance to the teaching of graphic novels as texts. Firstly, to encourage more strategic reading from students, teachers need to use specific pedagogies in order to tease out students’ existing literacy practices. Furthermore, teachers need to identify the knowledge and skills that students require in a multiliteracies approach to texts and provide overt instruction in this regard.

Criticisms of the New London Group’s (1996) multiliteracies pedagogy are largely directed, not at the framework per se, but rather at practitioners’ interpretation and enactment of it. Leander and Boldt (2013) suggest there has been “a great deal of slippage toward taking the work as empirical truth telling” (p. 24), while Mills (2009) notes that the application of the concept of multiliteracies to a broad range of academic disciplines has watered down the intent of the New London Group’s work and has pushed the focus onto the nature of literacy at the expense of literacy pedagogy. Mills notes that scholars andeducators are spending their time defining the scope of concepts such as “financial literacy,” “information literacy,” and “digital literacy,” at the expense of considering how these might be enacted in the classroom. From another perspective, Jacobs (2013/2014) suggests that the reification over time of the New London Group’s framework for literacy pedagogy has virtually precluded all other perspectives on contemporary literacy practices, and has elevated the framework to a position where it is largely untouchable through question or challenge.

Despite criticisms, which in comparison to expressions of support in the literature for the multiliteracies framework are small in number, the New London Group’s (1996) work on multiliteracies pedagogy continues to be acknowledged for its
ground-breaking work on the place and value of multimodal texts in a dynamic textual landscape and for championing the inclusion of multimodal texts in classrooms as recognition of students’ diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and interests.

The shaping of pedagogy around a multiliteracies framework, notes Jewitt (2008b), “encourages teachers to build classroom work on students’ knowledge, experiences, and interests” (p.254). The positioning of graphic novels as artefacts of popular culture, therefore, renders them an ideal multimodal format through which to enact a multiliteracies agenda. Given the format’s ability to flatten cultural and linguistic divides (Chun, 2009; Rycroft 2014), students can not only develop their knowledge and skills of the graphic novel metalanguage, but also move to critical discussions shaped around questions such as: Why was this text written? What is this text about? and Who is the audience for this text? (Chun, 2009).

To illustrate a multiliteracies approach using graphic novels with English Language Learners (ELL), Chun (2009) examined the potential of Spiegelman’s (1997) Maus, which Chun identifies as an “intellectually substantive” (p. 144) text that can encourage critical literacy in students via their resonation with the theme of racism. Chun suggests that ELL students are constantly exposed to racism and “immigrant otherness” (p. 144) through “the daily discourses and practices … that permeate society” (p. 148). In a study conducted with a secondary ESL (English as a Second Language) class in the United States, Chun reported how a “critical mediation” of the text engendered learner engagement.

In Australia, where the Tongan population is increasing and indications are that this minority group are socio-economically disadvantaged (Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2014), the graphic novel, The First King (Siuhengalu, n.d.), offers an example of a multimodal text that might be used by teachers to acknowledge cultural difference and diversity in their classrooms. Siuhengalu (2010) notes his very deliberate choice to use a graphic novel to convey something of the history of Pacific Island culture “in a way that speaks to the youth of the Tongan diaspora and to visually literate, multicultural youth more broadly” (p. 1). In particular, Siuhengalu (2010) explains that the comics convention of juxtaposed images to convey a story “can also help reclaim the rhythm and dynamism of oral traditions of storytelling” (p.1) that have been largely lost in attempts to record Tongan history in print. The First King, therefore, is designed to engage with young people on two levels;
on one level as an artefact of popular culture, and on the other as a means to connect young people with their cultural heritage.

**A new literacies perspective.** The notion of “new literacies” appears in many guises throughout the literature. On one hand, it has been used loosely as an umbrella term to describe the “new” knowledge, skills, and practices associated with the evolution of a multimodal and mediated textual landscape, while on the other it can describe a specific domain or technology-based set of knowledge and skills, such as financial literacy, numerical literacy, and computer literacy. The term also describes a distinct corpus of research and scholarly writing vis-à-vis *New Literacy Studies*, to articulate a new paradigm of literacy that focuses on literacy as a socially situated practice (Gee, 1998), and an approach to literacy that considers “new” in ontological terms and which focuses on “the changes that have occurred in the character and substance of literacies that are associated with larger changes in technology, institutions, media, and the economy” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 24). Of these interrelated perspectives on new literacies, the latter perspective has been especially prominent in the discourse surrounding literacy pedagogy.

According to Knobel and Lankshear (2006), “new” literacies differ ontologically from traditional literacy on two fronts, their “technical stuff” and their “ethos stuff.” “Technical stuff” refers to the technological advances that encourage new ways of accessing, creating, and publishing information facilitated through digital technologies. Post-typographic forms of texts, note the authors, might involve “screen and pixels, rather than paper and type, digital code rather than material print” (p. 25), and be seamlessly multimodal.

The “ethos stuff” of new literacies is concerned with new ways of thinking about, and acting towards, contemporary multimodal texts, and the development of new literacy practices that are “more participatory and collaborative, and less ‘published’ and ‘individual,’ than conventional literacies” (Knobel & Lankshear, 2014, p. 98). Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear and Leu (2009) suggest, for example, that blogs, wikis, social networking sites, music and video technologies, and online gaming all bring “new literacy forms and functions that are reshaped by social practices” (p. 5). The new literacies, note Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, & Robison (2009), “almost all involve social skills developed through collaboration and networking” (p. xiii).

In particular, new literacies have the potential to facilitate participatory cultures (Jenkins, et al., 2009) that are characterised by “relatively low barriers to artistic
expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship” (p. xi). As well, note Jenkins et al., participants feel a social connection with others in the community and also feel that their contributions are valued. It is this broad ethos focused on authorship and membership that distinguishes new literacies from traditional literacy practices (Lankshear & Knobel, 2014).

Given an emphasis in a new literacies approach on digital technologies and the social practices they facilitate, we might ask how the use of comics texts, especially those that are paper-based, can sponsor new notions of authorship and audience that are generally associated with digital texts. The literature, however, suggests comics texts have much to offer as “new,” both in terms of the technical and ethos “stuff” of new literacies.

In terms of the “technical stuff,” digital technologies have enabled comics creators and publishers to experiment with the ways in which stories are created and shared vis-à-vis new opportunities to play with the design elements of texts. As noted earlier, comics and digital texts share a number of design elements: an emphasis on the use of image, non-linearity of layout, interactivity, and synergy between modes. Texts that are paper-based might also include digital elements such as QR (Quick Response) codes and augmented reality (AR), which enhance the reader’s ability to make meaning by linking to additional online information via video clips, music, and websites. The Marvel AR App launched in 2012, for example, gives paper-based comic book readers access to behind the scenes information and interviews with the creators. Commenting on the app, the Vice President/ General Manager of Marvel indicated that “Marvel AR is a perfect example of how digital innovation not only gives added value to print comics, but also delivers an entirely new reading experience” (Marvel, 2012, para. 3).

Exemplifying the “ethos stuff” of new literacies, Carter (2011) notes how digital technologies have enhanced exchanges between the creators and readers of graphic novels. Citing Josh Neufeld’s (2009) graphic novel, A.D.: New Orleans After the Deluge as an example, Carter notes that the graphic novel was made available online some two years before its publication on paper. During this time, Neufeld invited readers to comment online on the draft of his graphic novel and then used readers’ responses to refine his work. Such creator/reader interactions highlight the changed relationship between authors and audiences facilitated by digital technologies and
provide a demonstration of how teachers might examine “textual authority and authorial control regarding the writing process” (Carter, 2011, p. 192) in texts.

Digital technologies have also facilitated the growth of participatory cultures around comics texts, both digital and paper-based, in the form of online comics forums, such as Comic Book Resources (2017), and social media sites, such as Facebook’s Shelfies: Finding the right graphic novels/comics for you. Such networks serve the interests of the comics community in much the same way that affinity spaces have developed around paper-based print texts (Curwood, 2013) and video games (Gee, 2009b).

The experiences of Von Vulte’s (2014) Grade 3-8 students in a Canadian after-school comics club illustrate how paper-based comics texts can combine with digital technologies to exemplify both the technical and ethos dimensions of new literacies. Von Vulte notes that although his students enthusiastically “played out scenarios in their minds and with their peers” (p. 76) and engaged in discussions about comic book characters and plot, “there was still a missing piece in this tremendous literacy experience … the design of a comic book” (p.76). While searching for online programs that would assist students to create their comic books, von Vulte discovered Dr Michael Bitz’s Comic Book Project/Comics Go Global initiative. What followed was von Vulte’s students’ involvement in a global project that included regular Skype sessions with mentors and students in other countries and the publication of their completed comic books in an online gallery. Reflecting on his students’ involvement, and, in doing so, describing the characteristics of participatory cultures (Jenkins et al., 2009), Von Vulte (2014) notes:

I witnessed collaborative efforts, peer-to-peer critique without negative emotion or reaction, and the genuine application of higher-order thinking skills – not in some teacher-led discussion and response sequence, but rather occurring in independent and unsupported student application and learning. (p. 78)

Thus far, the examples of comics texts that facilitate new literacies have been in some way linked to digital technologies. As Lankshear and Knobel (2006) note, however, literacies lacking new “technical stuff” might still be considered new if they exhibit new “ethos stuff.” Such instances, they suggest, represent peripheral rather than paradigmatic cases of new literacies, whereby literacies “have been reconsidered or reformulated in the light of new technologies, but could still apply to practices that
involve either no or older technologies” (Stordy, 2015, p. 459). As a case in point, Sabeti’s (2011) study of student comic book readers revealed a strong “sociability factor” (p. 143) when students shared the act of reading and participated in lively discussions of comics texts. Similarly, in a study of graphic novel use by students in higher education, Blanch and Mulvihill (2013) witnessed the formation of “mini communities” focused around graphic novels.

While the comics-based participatory cultures observed by Sabeti (2011) and Blanch and Mulvihill (2013) are representative of new literacies, Tilley (2014) argues that as far back as the 1940s in the United States, young people were using comic books as the basis for building networked communities. Notes Tilley, “comics’ ubiquity, low cost, and otherwise easy accessibility to young people made it an easy locus for participatory culture” (para. 9). As a result, comics-fuelled communities that revolved around the creation of fanzines, competitions, and opportunities to write reviews of comics were popular. While Tilley argues on these grounds that contemporary participatory cultures shaped around comics texts are far from new, it can also be argued that the expanded size and scope of such cultures made possible through digital technologies, combined with the expanded technical affordances of design in contemporary comics, is sufficient to warrant contemporary comics reading as exemplifying the character and substance of new literacies.

**Chapter Summary**

Freebody (2013) notes that every aspect of contemporary life in societies such as Australia is “shot through” (p. 8) with a need for individuals to be interpreters, managers, and producers of myriad multimodal texts that characterise the textual landscape. While Freebody suggests that such a need has existed for close to a century, the literature strongly suggests it is the “inversion of semiotic power” (Kress, 2003, p. 9) in the twenty-first century, whereby visual modes have been repositioned from the periphery to the centre of the textual landscape, that has created a high sense of interest in both the changing nature of literacy and its enactment (Callow, 2013; Kress, 2003; Moje, 2006; Wyatt-Smith & Kimber, 2009).

The dynamic nature of the twenty-first textual landscape and its impact on traditional notions of literacy have stimulated lively, complex, and ongoing discourse regarding the nature of literacy and what it means to be literate. To this end, the concept of literacy as a formal, static and private set of knowledge and skills shaped around alphabetic texts delivered on paper, has been replaced by a fluid, flexible, and multi-
faceted toolkit of practices, the nature of which reflect the socio-cultural milieu in which they are enacted. This changed paradigm of literacy recognises a broad range of texts that can be read in a broad range of circumstances by individuals with a broad range of backgrounds and experiences.

In this chapter, comment and research from academics, teachers, comics scholars, and those involved in the comics industry have been used to illustrate the changing nature of the textual landscape and the movement of comics texts from the periphery to a more central position within it. Attention has also been given to the re-visionsing of the literacies required by individuals to operate effectively in a landscape characterised by a diversity of multimodal and multimediated texts delivered in a range of social and cultural contexts.

To conclude the chapter, the implications of a re-visionsed literacy for educators have been explored by way of an examination of three key perspectives on new literacies that underpin new literacy pedagogy. Specifically, the potential of comics texts to facilitate the development of new literacies in students from each of these perspectives has been considered. Overall, the discussion is perhaps best summarized through the words of Michael Bitz (2010), educator and founder of a national after-school comics-based program in the United States:

> The increasing demand for a workforce and citizenry that is comfortable with multiple literacies, as opposed to one factory model of literacy, is at least one argument for why comics could have a place in an English language arts classroom. (p. 39)

It is the responsibility of educators to ensure that literacy practices match the paradigm of a re-visionsed literacy. In Chapter Six, the manner in which a re-visionsed literacy has been interpreted and enacted at various levels within education systems is explored. Consideration is given to the reception accorded multimodal texts, with an emphasis on graphic novels, and the associated notion of multiliteracies at the institutional level of policy-making; the programmatic level, where theory is translated into guidelines for teachers’ practice; and at the classroom level, where teachers interpret policy priorities and syllabus guidelines within the context of their own beliefs, knowledge, skills and experiences.
CHAPTER SIX
EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETATIONS OF A RE-VISIONED LITERACY

The ensemble of classroom English is complex – a bricolage of methods, a plurality of purposes and objectives. Moreover, it is one that is constructed and reconstructed, day after day, in the work of teachers, teaching in contexts over which they never have full control, which are subjects to the influence of policy, institution, department and students, and shaped also by a wider politics of education (Kress, Jewitt, Bourne, Hardcastle, Jines, & Reid, 2005, p. 15)

As the first decade of the twenty-first century drew to a close, the reconceptualisation of literacy as multimodal and multimediated had been realised at a broad societal level (Walsh, 2008). What was not yet a reality, suggested Walsh, was a fully supported educational response to the evolved textual landscape by way of a generally accepted definition of a re-visioned literacy and the associated development of educational polices and classroom pedagogy to acknowledge the change. In this chapter, the educational responses to the changing nature of texts and literacy are explored at the institutional, programmatic and classroom levels within the context of multimodal texts and a pedagogy of multiliteracies. As Kress et al. (2005) highlight in the opening quote to this chapter, the decisions, attitudes and actions at each of these levels are inextricably linked, thus rendering teachers' experiences with multimodal texts complex and, at times, confusing and contentious.

Since Walsh (2008) made her claim, it can be argued that the gap between literacy theory and practice in education has narrowed somewhat. In particular, curriculum documents have given increasing recognition to the value of multimodal texts that acknowledge the diversity of students’ backgrounds and interests and hold the potential to facilitate the development of students’ multiliteracies. That said, teachers’ uptake of multimodal texts such as graphic novels has been slow (Carter, 2007; Hansen, 2012), an indication there is still work to be done in regard to a fully supported educational interpretation of a re-visioned literacy at all levels of educational decision-making.

The interactions between teachers and students in classrooms constitute the enacted curriculum (Deng & Luke 2008), whereby teachers interpret theoretical
intentions articulated at the institutional and programmatic levels within the context of their classrooms. At the broad institutional level, policy statements, initiatives, and curricula reflect socio-cultural, historical and economic forces acting upon educational systems and provide a general vision of what education hopes to achieve (Luke, Weir & Woods, 2008; McDougall, 2007). At the programmatic level, educational bodies translate institutional curricula into subject-specific syllabuses that outline content and strategies intended to guide teachers’ practice. Luke, Weir and Woods (2008) note, however, that no curriculum or syllabus is enacted in the classroom without an injection of teachers’ personal and professional contributions. Such input comes in the guise of the skills, passions, personality traits and pedagogical styles, which Crowther (2016) describes as comprising teachers’ unique “pedagogical gifts.” It is these contributions that transform classroom pedagogy from a ubiquitous and craft-like set of content and skills into the personalised interactions between teachers and students that render teaching an art (Lupton, 2013).

Given the interdependence between teaching and learning in the classroom, the guidelines for what is taught in the classroom, and the policies and initiatives that shape those guidelines (Kress et al., 2005), any exploration of teachers’ classroom experiences with graphic novels to facilitate students’ development of multiliteracies must consider the educational interpretation and enactment of a re-visioned literacy at these various levels.

**Institutional Interpretations of a Re-Visioned Literacy**

Despite the immensity of cultural and technological advance in both social and commercial life, a stubborn conservatism remains in the habitus of educational practice, so that the organisation of schooling constantly rubs up against new patterns of learning, and works against the smooth coupling of the curriculum and the world. (Millard, 1999, p. 377)

Since the 1970s, the perception and status of literacy in Anglo-American education systems have undergone significant change (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). Prior to this, literacy was a concept most frequently used outside the context of formal schooling in reference to illiteracy in adults (Christie, 2010; Goodwyn & Findlay, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). Post 1970, however, the situation changed as developed capitalist nations came to recognise literacy standards as an indicator of the economic and social wellbeing of their citizens (Millard, 1999). Literacy subsequently became a
central concern of education systems and emerged as “the new ‘bottom line’ and the ‘centre of gravity’ for school education” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011, p. 29). The particular notion of literacy that was venerated can be aptly described as an “industrial metaphor” (Edwards & Potts, 2011, p. 129), whereby literacy was framed as a set of value-neutral tools or skills that bore no relation to either the context in which they were used or the circumstances of the user.

Despite the elevated status of literacy in the late twentieth century, governments and educational decision-making bodies at the institutional level, including those in Australia, did relatively little to recognise the evolving textual landscape or the acquisition of multiliteracies in young people as the lynch pin to the creation of an effective citizenry (Freebody, 2013). Instead, the dominant discourse on education reflected a prevailing neo-liberal concern for the development of measurable standards within a competitive global economic marketplace and promoted traditional alphabetic literacy as a prime indicator against which the effectiveness of schools, teachers, and educations systems could be judged (Comber & Nixon, 2009; Edwards & Potts, 2011; Kostogriz & Doecke, 2013; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). This focus on accountability has had significant implications for those endeavouring at the programmatic and classroom levels to honour the changing nature and demands of the textual landscape by acknowledging the semiotic richness of multimodal texts such as graphic novels (Christie & Simpson, 2010).

On the eve of the twenty-first century in Australia, literacy was identified as a priority area in pivotal national educational policy statements such as The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century\(^ {11}\) (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 1999). To a certain extent, the Adelaide Declaration supported the thrust of the New London Group’s (1996) perspective on multimodal texts and multiliteracies vis-a-vis broad acknowledgement of the need for Australian schools to facilitate development of an active and knowledgeable citizenry in a world “characterised by advances in information and communication technologies, population diversity … and complex environment and social changes” (Preamble). Rather than explicitly advocate a multiliteracies approach as the means to facilitate the development of literate and effective citizens, however, the Adelaide Declaration concerned itself more with the

\(^{11}\) The Adelaide Declaration committed State, Territory and Commonwealth governments of Australia to a national framework for schooling.
global trend for accountability in education and the need to develop “explicit and definable standards” (Preamble) against which the effectiveness of schools could be measured.

More explicit educational initiatives with a literacy focus, such as the National Literacy Plan detailed in *Literacy for All* (Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 1998) indicated the movement of education systems towards models based on “national- or state-level curricula and curriculum standards or outcome levels, and reporting based on student performance assessed on a regular basis, particularly in literacy and numeracy” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011, p. 25). While broad statements in the *National Literacy Plan* acknowledged the importance of literacy in developing a productive and informed citizenry, the conveyed notion of literacy continued to lean heavily on the traditional perspective of literacy as a set of skills related to the reading and writing of alphabetic text. For example, in *Literacy for All*, “listening,” “speaking” and “viewing” were recognised as required skills, yet visual texts as a means though which these skills might be acquired were overlooked. Instead the focus of *Literacy for All* was placed “clearly upon reading and writing print in a traditional sense” (Simpson & Hancock, 1999, p. 69). At the institutional level of policy making, therefore, multimodal texts such as graphic novels and the associated multiliteracies required to interpret and create them failed to be recognised.

Seven years after *Literacy for All*, the Australian Government maintained a tight rein on the institutional notion of literacy and literacy pedagogy via a *National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy* (Rowe, 2005). The title of the report presenting the outcomes of the Inquiry, *Teaching Reading* (Department of Education Science and Training, 2005), is in itself an indication of the Inquiry’s focus on the traditional notion of literacy as the reading and writing of alphabetic text. Furthermore, use of the terms literacy and reading interchangeably throughout the report indicates that at the institutional level, in 2005, “literacy has become reading” (Edwards & Potts, 2011, p. 134).

In 2008, the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA), which continues to serve as the umbrella for Australian educational policy, recognised the changing textual landscape and the implications for education by noting, “Rapid and continuing advances in information communication technologies (ICT) are changing the ways people share, use, develop and process information and technology” (p. 5). While the *Melbourne Declaration* adopted a “new
literacies” perspective, there was no explicit mention of multimodal environments or multiliteracies and the strong emphasis on reporting and accountability was sustained.

Explicit acknowledgement of the multimodal environment and the need for multiliterate students is more evident in national statements and policies specifically focused on subject English. The Statements of Learning for English (Curriculum Corporation, 2005) agreed upon by state and territory governments, for example, specifically recognised multimodal and multimediated texts and the associated need for students to develop the ability to make meaning and critically interpret and construct texts from diverse geographical and historical backgrounds and from youth and popular cultures.

Guided by the principles of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008), the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed the development of a national curriculum as part its commitment to the National Education Agreement (COAG, 2008). Subsequently, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), an independent statutory authority, was established to oversee the design and development of the Australian Curriculum. Acknowledging the disparity in the readiness of states and territories to implement the Australian Curriculum, ACARA determined that states and territories could either develop curricula based directly on the Australian Curriculum or could incorporate elements of the Australian Curriculum into existing curricula. In New South Wales, the governing educational body, the Board of Studies, chose the latter option.

On a subject-specific level, the Australian Curriculum: English (ACARA, 2017), the first version of which was released in 2010, took a significant step towards linking the theory of a re-visioned literacy to practice by affording significant attention to multimodal texts and visual literacy (Callow, 2013). Worthy of note is that for the first time, graphic novels were explicitly recognised as multimodal texts for study. It should be noted, however, that neither the Australian Curriculum nor the New South Wales English 7-10 Syllabus (BOS, 2012), the state curriculum through which the Australian Curriculum: English is enacted in NSW, were operational at the time the

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12 Over the course of this study the governing educational authority in New South Wales underwent several name changes. What was the Board of Studies (BOS) from 1990 until 2013 became the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) in 2014. In 2017, the name was changed again to The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA).
data for this study were collected. That said, the proposed content of the Australian Curriculum was available to participants and their “forward mapping” may well have had some impact on their classroom experiences with graphic novels.

Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015) note that policy produced at the institutional level focuses not only on input regulation through generally-cloaked plans and statements regarding what should be taught, but also includes parameters for output regulation. Such output regulation is performed by regulatory bodies and procedures that set educational targets and gather “big” data. Together, these two forms of regulation “help constitute the conditions within which and by means of which the curriculum is enacted” (p. 152).

While the ideological underpinnings of national literacy policies and initiatives continue to be cause for debate, so too do the diagnostic instruments designed to assess and report the effectiveness of their enactment in the classroom. The most recent of these, a battery of literacy and numeracy tests comprising the National Assessment Program–Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), was introduced nation-wide in 2008 for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. These tests mirror and replace literacy and numeracy tests previously undertaken at the state level in New South Wales.

Numerous claims have been made across the literature that institutional literacy testing has emphasised a traditional back-to-basics approach via a focus on the reading and writing of alphabetic texts (Comber & Nixon, 2009; Gannon & Sawyer, 2007; Howie, 2008; Unsworth, 2001; Unsworth & Chan, 2009). From the findings of their study into image-text relations in NAPLAN testing, for example, Unsworth and Chan (2009) concluded that “the re-conceptualisation of literacy beyond a focus on words alone to include the increasingly multimodal nature of contemporary paper and screen based texts needs to be reflected in national assessment programs” (p. 246).

While discussion of the merits of standardised assessment and testing is beyond the scope of this study, a robust body of research and scholarly writing indicates that standardised literacy tests that focus on the reading and writing of alphabetic text impose a reductivist, repressive and inequitable notion of literacy on teaching and learning in the classroom (Dreher, 2012; English Teachers Association NSW, 2011; Howie, 2002, 2008; Sawyer, 1999; Kostogriz, 2006; Kostogriz & Doecke, 2013). Specifically, Dreher (2012) notes that standardised testing “reduces literacy to a few simple skills, encourages passive transmission oriented classrooms, fails to engage students’ personal interests and cognitive abilities, and suffocates identities” (p. 336).
By association, until the assessment of literacy embraces the ever-evolving textual landscape and the notion of a re-visioned literacy, the negative implications of standardised assessment for teachers’ use of graphic novels as classroom texts cannot be discounted.

As noted earlier, institutional policies and initiatives reflect the prevailing social, cultural and economic forces operating in a society. To illustrate, Snyder (2008) notes that the persistence and passion with which the battle is fought over literacy, what it is and how it should be taught, is not exclusive to educators. The “literacy wars,” posits Snyder, involve everyone and extend beyond literacy to a much larger ideological battle, or “culture war,” wherein a deeply entrenched cultural attachment to traditional alphabetic literacy has dictated decision-making and policy creation. Within this context, conservatives have advocated for greater emphasis on “cultural literacy, the literature of the Western canon and traditional values” (Snyder, p. 8). From this cultural heritage perspective, literacy education is deemed successful “when students come to identify with dominant social and cultural discourses and knowledge rather than critiquing them” (Kostogriz, 2006, p. 3). The implication here is that conservative notions of literacy discredit the potential value of multimodal texts such as graphic novels and the multiliteracies required to effectively negotiate them.

It has been suggested that the Australian mainstream media has also played a major role as conservator of the literacy status quo through its support of a standards and assessment-based approach, and through the push for back-to-basics literacy (Gannon & Sawyer, 2007; Howie, 2008; Snyder, 2008). Exemplifying this perspective that is unwilling to give parity of status to visual texts, journalist Miranda Devine (2008) noted in her critique of proposed changes to the NSW Higher School Certificate English Syllabus:

> Written language is the highest form of expression, the purest way of communicating ideas, of pinning down the abstract, describing the concrete, explaining the world. While oral language and iconography - pictures - are important, it is the written word that has helped us most to think. To elevate pictures and sounds to equal status is to rewind human evolution and primitivise the brain. (Devine, 2008, p. 2, para, 6)

Comments such as Devine’s are indicative of, and served to aggravate, an existing sense of “moral panic” at the time regarding the perceived poor performance of Australian students in international literacy testing (Gannon & Sawyer, 2007; Howie,
Gannon and Sawyer note that such panic was maintained through attacks on various aspects of literacy pedagogy that included the teaching of critical literacy and postmodern theory, and the use of popular culture texts in English classrooms. As exemplars of popular culture texts, graphic novels were therefore fair game for critics who threatened “to derail significant advances in theoretical and practical understandings of the multifaceted nature of literacy development” (Gannon & Sawyer, 2007, p. 2).

By way of a compelling body of literature and research, academics and educators have highlighted past, and in some instances, ongoing inadequacies of the largely conservative and traditional institutional responses to both the dynamic textual landscape and associated re-visioned notions of literacy (Edwards & Potter, 2011; Honan, 2008; Kress, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2007; Warschauer, 2007). While a multiliteracies agenda has been acknowledged in national and state policy initiatives through broad statements on the need for students to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively participate in society, these statements have not been translated into progressive notions of literacy and literacy pedagogy. As will become evident in the ensuing discussion, institutional inflexibility regarding the changing nature of texts and literacy at the time of my data collection was reflected at the programmatic level in subject English and in English classrooms by way of the continued privileging of hegemonic literacy practices and an emphasis on the assessment of such.

**Programmatic Interpretations of a Re-Visioned Literacy**

At the programmatic level, subject syllabi reflect the interpretation of institutional policies and initiatives by educational authorities into specific content and practices intended to guide classroom pedagogy. A syllabus, note Luke et al. (2008), sets and shapes parameters of the official curriculum in time and space and offers “a defensible map of core skills, knowledges, competencies and capacities to be covered, with affiliated statements of standards” (p. 14). To this end, this study of secondary English teachers’ experiences with graphic novels as classroom texts was conducted within the context of the *English Years 7-10 Syllabus* (BOS, 2003).

Albright, Knezevic, and Farrell’s study (2013) of 119 Australian secondary English teachers’ perceptions of their everyday experiences confirmed the importance of curriculum and syllabus documents in guiding teachers’ everyday practice. Some three-quarters of participants indicated the use of such documents “often” in their long-term planning, while just under half of the participants relied on the documents in the
short-term. Similarly, Piccolo’s (2009) study into factors that guide the selection of
texts amongst NSW English teachers of Years 7-10 indicated that syllabus guidelines
were “extremely influential” (p. 246). Therefore, despite the fact that text choice in New
South Wales Stage 4 (Years 7 and 8) and Stage 5 (Years 9 and 10) English classrooms
is determined at the school, departmental, or individual teacher level, syllabus
guidelines cannot be discounted as being influential on teachers’ decisions to choose
graphic novels as texts.

In 2001, the Board of Studies New South Wales commissioned a review of the
literature related to subject English to illuminate the changing nature of the subject and
to inform the development of a future English syllabus (Sawyer and McFarlane, 2000).
Of import to this study of teachers’ experiences with graphic novels was the
recommendation by Sawyer and McFarlane for the re-positioning in any future syllabus
of visual texts, visual literacy, and representations of youth culture. The authors noted
the “importance of ‘visual literacy’ amidst our image-oriented culture” (p. 5) as a key
finding of their research, and recommended, “students should be able to apply multiple
semiotic modes in communicative processes” (p.5). As well, recommendations were
made that the new syllabus provide for the close study of visual texts and that the notion
of “what constitutes a valid ‘visual text’ ... be broadened beyond traditional media texts
and film” (p. 5). For all intent and purposes, it would seem that graphic novels would
soon be welcomed into the English classrooms of Year 7 to 10 students.

The English Years 7-10 Syllabus (BOS, 2003) developed subsequent to Sawyer
and McFarlane’s (2000) review was implemented in 2004. Concomitant with the
recommendations made by Sawyer and McFarlane, the syllabus’ opening statement
acknowledged the multimodal and multimediated nature of the textual landscape and
the role of multiliteracies as a path to meaning-making:

In Years 7 to 10, English is the study and use of the English language in its
various textual forms. These encompass spoken, written and visual texts of
varying complexity through which meaning is shaped, conveyed, interpreted
and reflected. (BOS, 2003, p. 7)

The English Years 7-10 Syllabus (BOS, 2003) required that students engage
with, respond to, and compose a variety of texts that span modes and media. It also
recommended the use of complex visual and written examples of the prescribed text
types that would be “both challenging and enjoyable” (p.1) in achieving the course
outcomes. At each year level, spoken texts, print texts, visual texts and multimedia were
mandated for study. Furthermore, in each of Stages 4 and 5 students were required to study at least two works of fiction, a variety of poetry, at least two films, and at least two works of non-fiction and drama. In addition, the texts selected by teachers were required to provide students with experience of:

- A widely defined Australian literature, and other Australian texts including those that give insights into Aboriginal experiences and multicultural experiences in Australia
- Literature from other countries and times
- Cultural heritages, popular culture and youth cultures
- Picture books
- Everyday and workplace texts
- A range of social, gender and cultural perspectives

(BOS, 2003, p. 19)

Contrary to previous English syllabi that explicitly aligned themselves with particular models of literacy theory (Ludwig, 2003), the 2003 English Years 7-10 Syllabus (BOS) took a broad church approach by endowing teachers with the autonomy “to draw on the methods of different theoretical perspectives and models for the teaching of English to assist their students to achieve the syllabus outcomes at the highest levels” (p.7). In doing so, the syllabus theoretically diffused previous tensions that existed amongst educators who endorsed competing perspectives on literacy and helped reduce confusion amongst teachers who, while not necessarily averse to the multiliteracies agenda, might have been hesitant to enact a pedagogy of multiliteracies that was not endorsed in the previous syllabus (Kress, 2005).

In a study of the factors influencing and guiding teachers’ text selection within the context of the NSW English 7-10 Syllabus (BOS, 2003), Piccolo (2009) noted that in mandating the types of texts to be studied, rather than prescribing specific titles of texts for study, the syllabus “potentially empowers the professional, experienced and talented teacher” (p. 241) to address the needs, interests and abilities of his or her students. It could be argued, however, that mandating text types is as equally limiting as the mandating of titles. Although the intent of the syllabus might have been to broaden the range of visual texts studied, the reality is that the document explicitly endorses the study of more traditional multimodal texts, such as picture books and film, at the expense of their popular culture counterparts. In doing so, it would appear that the status
of the former is implicitly elevated above other visual multimodal texts such as graphic novels, comic books, hypertexts and video games. This line of argument is supported by my analysis of the 2003 syllabus document that revealed no mention of comic books or graphic novels; an absence replicated in the support document of suggested texts (BOS, 2003a) designed to assist teachers with text choices.

When the implicit exclusion of graphic novels as suggested texts is considered in tandem with the lack of mention of graphic novels in the syllabus and the research that suggests teachers are strongly influenced in text choice by syllabus documents (Albright, Knezevic & Farrell, 2013; Piccolo, 2009), it is reasonable to conclude that, within the context of the English Years 7-10 Syllabus (BOS, 2003), the decision by a school, department, or teacher to use graphic novels in the English classroom has been a very deliberate and considered one. Furthermore, it can be surmised that the decision is underpinned by the belief that the value of graphic novels as texts outweighs the “risk” of making pedagogical decisions external to the syllabus recommendations.

As noted previously, the English Years 7-10 Syllabus (BOS, 2003) was replaced during the course of this study by the English K-10 Syllabus (BOSTES, 2012), which was mandated for full implementation in all NSW 7-10 English classrooms in 2015. Although data for this study were gathered under the auspices of the 2003 syllabus, several participants made reference to the “new” syllabus. It is appropriate, therefore, to briefly acknowledge the recognition in the 2012 syllabus accorded multimodality and multiliteracies, and the explicit mention of graphic novels as texts.

The English Years K-10 Syllabus (BOSTES, 2012) reflects recognition in the Australian Curriculum of a re-visioned literacy via the notions of multimodality and multiliteracies. The content requirements of the syllabus explicitly indicate that in Stages 4 and 5 students must be given experience of graphic novels. The content outcomes for Stage 4, however, fail to specifically refer to graphic novels, instead referring more generally to “multimodal” and “visual texts.” In Stage 5, however, graphic novels are explicitly mentioned in Content Outcome EN5-3B, which indicates “students compose and respond to a wide range of visual texts, e.g. picture books, graphic novels and films, using a range of appropriate techniques and metalanguage” (p. 139). Similarly, Outcome EN5-4B indicates that students “investigate and experiment with the use and effect of extended metaphor, metonymy, allegory, icons, myths and symbolism in texts, for example poetry, short films, graphic novels, and plays on similar themes” (p. 140).
At first glance, it would seem that in the *English: Years K-10 Syllabus* (BOSTES, 2012) graphic novels have been accorded parity of status with more traditional multimodal texts such as picture books. A closer examination, however, suggests otherwise. From the syllabus, a linked definition is provided for “picture books” and a definition of them provided in the Syllabus Glossary. In contrast, there is no similar link for “graphic novels,” nor is there a definition of the format in the glossary. Also of note is that the introduction for the section “Picture books and graphic novels” in the *Suggested Texts for the English K-10 Syllabus* (BOSTES, 2012a), acknowledges the value of “picture books,” but makes no mention of graphic novels. Such omissions and lack of clarity in the syllabus suggest a somewhat tokenistic approach from the syllabus developers to the use of graphic novels; their inclusion appearing very much an add-on. Considered alongside the research on factors that influence teachers’ practice (Albright, Knezevic & Farrell, 2013; Piccoli, 2009), it might be concluded that the guidelines of the *English K-10 Syllabus*, like those in the previous syllabus, have the potential to negatively influence teachers’ uptake of graphic novels as classroom texts.

**Classroom Interpretations of a Re-Visioned Literacy**

Comics do not necessitate a place in schools because they offer something new per se, but because they can help us get to the type of English teaching for which we’ve been striving for decades, even as trends and policies and figureheads come and go. (Carter, 2013a, p.8)

The body of research into teachers’ responses to, and experiences with, multiliteracies pedagogy via the use of graphic novels as texts is growing, but remains limited. Although a small number of studies in the United States have investigated teachers’ and pre-service teachers’ perceptions and use of graphic novels as texts (Annett, 2008; Block, 2013; Callahan, 2009; Clark, 2013a; Gillenwater, 2012; Lapp et al.; Mathews, 2011; Rhoades, Dellaqua, Kersten, Merry & Miller, 2015), no similar research in an Australian context could be found at the time this study was reported. That said, some connection can be made to Cheung’s (2015) study into teacher attitudes towards manga and anime texts in the NSW secondary English classroom.

Underpinning this study of teachers’ experiences with graphic novels is the assumption, supported by a persuasive body of research and scholarly comment, that graphic novels warrant inclusion as classroom texts in subject English. To this end,
Carter (2013a) notes, “there are multiple political, theoretical, and research bases to justify comics’ use in the classroom” (p. 8). As is suggested across a broad range of literature, comics might be used as a tool through which to explore the nature of popular culture and young adult literature, to facilitate the development of the multiliteracies required by students, deliver disciplinary content, or enhance student motivation and engagement.

**Graphic Novels as Classroom Texts**

It is erroneous to think of the pedagogical use of comics as “new” (Carter, 2015; Tilley, 2013). Instead, we should see contemporary comics pedagogy as “different.” Carter (2015) notes that “our contemporaneity represents the latest wave of educators, publishers, and scholars seeking to tap into comics’ pedagogical potentials” (p. 1); such “potentials” including the medium’s capacity to facilitate the development of students’ multiliteracies.

School-based research into graphic novels dates back some 75 years to a time when over 80 per cent of American adolescent males and females were regular readers of comics (Zorbaugh, 1944). A close examination of the research, however, indicates that while many studies were conducted within a school environment, much of the research was not specifically related to comics pedagogy. Instead, the research revolved around the demographics of comics readers (Zorbaugh, 1944), the reasons why schoolchildren read comic books (McCarthy & Smith, 1943; Kinneman, 1943; Strang, 1943), the psychological effects of reading comic books (Bender, 1944; Cavanagh, 1949), and adults’ attitudes to children’s reading of comic books (Zorbaugh, 1949). Of the research conducted at this time, a significant portion of it endorsed the negative attitudes towards comics that were gaining ground in the broader social context (Connors, 2010).

Of the limited research conducted during this period that focused on the use of comics in the curriculum, findings highlighted the capacity of comics to enhance language acquisition (Thorndike, 1941), engage and motivate readers (Hutchinson, 1949), and to serve as a stepping stone “to the realms of good literature—the literature that is the necessary and rightful heritage of the adolescent” (Dias, 1946, p. 143). While such research points to the narrow use of comics to support the development of traditional literacy, Hutchinson’s (1949) research warrants particular attention, given an opening statement to the study that mirrors contemporary research into the disconnect between students’ in-school and outside-school literacy practices (Bronkhorst &
Akkerman, 2016; Hull & Schultz, 2001; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Hutchinson noted, “There should be harmony between the ongoing life activities and his experiences in the school–new learning is always a continuation or expansion of learning already possessed by the learner” (p. 236). Based on over four hundred responses from teachers who trialled comics as instructional material, Hutchinson’s findings suggested the use of comics enhanced both learner engagement and understanding of subject content. Despite the fact that the texts used were comic strips comprising a small number of panels and included fairly simplistic narratives, students were also able to use comics as a springboard for “the study of personal situations and social behavior” (p. 241).

Between the 1950s and the turn of the century, a paucity of research into the educational value of comics reflected an increasing academic disdain for the medium (Christiansen & Magnussen, 2000). According to Lopes (2006), such disdain was the product of the stigma attached to comics since their inception, which was exacerbated by the campaign in the United States in the 1950s to associate comics with juvenile delinquency and other perceived antisocial activities. Superheroes who defied the laws of science and brought family values into question, coupled with horror comics that “pushed the boundaries of good taste a little further” (Fingeroth, 2008, p. 14), did little to endear comics to educators.

The turn of the century and the accompanying rise of “the visual,” brought with it a second wave of educational interest in comics, a wave that now carried the graphic novel (Carter, 2015). Articulating the “new” educational value and potential of the comics medium, Jacobs (2007) notes:

By examining comics as multimodal texts and reading comics as an exercise of multiliteracies or multimodal literacies, we can shed light not only on literate practices that surround comics in particular, but also on the literate practices that surround all multimodal texts and the ways in which engagement with such texts can and should affect our pedagogies (p. 183)

Jacobs’ suggestion that comics texts be explicitly examined as “an exercise of multiliteracies or multimodal literacies,” sets twenty-first century educational interest in comics apart from the previous wave of interest some sixty years earlier. Rather than using comics primarily as a crutch for illiterate and aliterate readers, teachers integrating graphic novels into contemporary classrooms have taken a significant “step toward a realization of more democratic notions of text, literacy and curriculum” (Carter, 2008b,
That said, strong negative attitudes towards the comics medium have continued despite efforts by educators to neutralise the historically based criticism of comics and to have the more sophisticated graphic novel format recognised (Hansen, 2012).

Further to the changed perception of how the comics medium might be used in the classroom, the two waves of educational interest in comics are also separated by the very nature of the medium itself, the first wave being characterised by “cheap-paper printed entertainment aimed at children and teenagers” (Fingeroth, 2008, p. 14) and the second by sophisticated comics texts, the reading of which involves “an act of both aesthetic perception and intellectual pursuit” (Eisner, 2008, p. 2). Given the mandate of the NSW English Years 7-10 Syllabus (BOS, 2003) to promote proficiency in subject English so as to enable students to become “confident communicators, critical and imaginative thinkers, lifelong learners and active participants in Australian society” (p.7), Eisner’s description of graphic novels ascribed them the potential to be used as classroom texts under the direction of this syllabus. By virtue of the rise of the graphic novel it seemed the comics medium had evolved from a last line of defence against illiteracy to become a first line of offence in the attainment of a re-visioned literacy (Rycroft, 2014).

Albeit largely emanating from the United States, research into the educational benefits of using comic books and graphic novels in the classroom signposts comics’ ability to not only fulfil a long-standing supplemental role for the facilitation of traditional alphabetic literacy in poor or struggling readers (Annett, 2008; McVicker, 2007; Ranker, 2007; Schwertner, 2008), but also to serve as both an alternate avenue for the study of traditional texts (Carter, 2007; McTaggert, 2008; Schmidt, 2011; Laycock, 2007), and as a means to enhance second language acquisition in students (Carey, 2004; Chun, 2009; Liu, 2004). Research and scholarly comment also highlight the potential of comic books and graphic novels to augment the delivery of subject content (Boerman-Connell, 2013, 2015; Clark, 2013b; Cooper, Nesmith & Schwarz, 2011; Tatalovic, 2009). Boerman-Connell’s (2015) study into the potential of graphic novels to support disciplinary literacy instruction in History, for example, indicated that graphic novels “offer rich and varied affordances for high school history teachers and their students to engage in contextualization, corroboration, and sourcing” (pp. 220-221). Similarly, in a study by Clark (2013a) in the United States, pre-service teachers’ who studied non-fiction graphic novels as texts in History indicated the format was valuable for its ability
to present multiple perspectives, promote historical empathy, and encourage thinking about historical agency.


In subject English, Schraffenberger (2007) highlights the potential of graphic novels to teach disciplinary or subject content through consideration of Gareth Hinds’ (2007) Beowulf. Teaching the graphic novel adaptation of Beowulf alongside the traditional version of the medieval Anglo-Saxon poem, notes Schraffenberger, can accomplish “the dual task of teaching literature and that of promoting critical thinking and learning through visual literacy” (p. 81). As is alluded to in Figure 7, the images in Beowulf can assist students to understand the aristocratic warrior culture, the Christian perspective, and the historical context of the poem, all the while presenting these concepts in an engaging manner.

Not quite as supportive of graphic novels for the teaching of subject content, were the participants in a study by Cooper, Nesmith and Schwarz (2011) into the attitudes and experiences of elementary teachers and teacher educators in regard to the
use of graphic novels in Science and Mathematics. While generally acknowledging the potential of the format to engage students of all abilities, promote content knowledge and reinforce concepts, participants expressed some concern over the content of the specific graphic novels used. There was also concern amongst participants that the graphic novel narratives examined were contrived and simplistic. Given the participants’ concerns were title-specific, they should not be considered a weakness of graphic novels per se to teach disciplinary content. As is the case in any medium, graphic novels can be “as rigorous as a physics textbook or as vapid as a tween movie adaptation” (Boerman-Connell, 2013, p. 73).

In addition to their capacity to deliver disciplinary content, numerous studies have indicated the potential of graphic novels to facilitate and enhance multimodal literacy, and, in particular, visual literacy (Carter, 2007, 2008; Connors, 2010; Gillenwater, 2012; Hammond, 2009; Pantaleo, 2011; Peterson, 2010; Schwarz, 2002). Exemplifying the use of graphic novels in this capacity, Pantaleo’s findings regarding Grade 7 students’ reading of graphic novels and picture books indicated the benefits of graphic novel use for students’ learning of “the grammars of various semiotic systems” (p.114) and the development of a “concomitant metalanguage” (p.114).

The positioning of graphic novels and comic books as popular culture texts further endows them with the potential to engage students and facilitate the development of critical and cultural literacies (Alvermann, Moon & Hagood, 1999; Alvermann, Xu & Carpenter, 2003; Beach & O’Brien, 2008; Beavis, 2000; Faulkner, 2002; Marsh, 2006; Millard, 2003; Peterson, 2010; Schwarz, 2002, 2006, 2010). Beavis (2000), for example, notes that popular culture texts combine “issues of literacy, ideology and identity, making all three available for study” (para. 6). Exemplifying Beavis’ point, research conducted by Alvermann, Xu and Carpenter (2003) highlighted the potential of studying popular culture to extend what is already familiar to students to include “other people’s perspectives, voices and experiences ... or the social and political contexts in which they live” (p. 153).

With specific reference to graphic novels, Schwarz (2002) purports that the diverse subject matter in contemporary graphic novels offers diverse and alternate viewpoints of cultural and historical events, while Peterson (2010) advocates that study of the format holds potential for students to “discover new ways of understanding the world around them” (p. 26). In terms of assisting students to develop an understanding of identity or self (Beavis, 2000; Bernstein, 2008; Boatwright, 2010; Schwarz &
Crenshaw, 2011), Schwarz and Crenshaw note that Bildungsroman graphic novels, or coming-of-age stories, “can be used to teach media literacy/multiple literacies while examining issues that can aid adolescent development and engage students with diversity” (p. 47).

The cutting-edge nature of comics is yet another feature of the medium that contributes to its educational potential, with McTaggart (2008) noting the capacity of comics creators and publishers to respond swiftly, and at times courageously, to current events that are often avoided by the mainstream media as being too sensitive to report. In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, for example, comic books and graphic novels such as DC Comics’ (2002) two volumes of 9-11 were published just months after the event, while terrorist-themed TV programs and movies were shelved or re-scheduled for airing at a more “appropriate” time. While DC Comics’ 9-11 provided a vehicle through which comics creators expressed their grief and support, the comics medium was also used to inform the populace of the inquiry into the terrorist attack via the 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation (Jacobsen & Colon, 2006). As well, in a critical examination of 9/11 memory-making, Costello (2011) suggests that comics also provided fertile ground for alternative comment on the re-negotiation of the “narrative of national identity” (p. 30) that preoccupied the post 9/11 political discourse.

In recognition of their potential as complex and sophisticated multimodal texts to facilitate a range of learning outcomes across the spectrum of learning abilities, and their capacity to provide a bridge between students’ lifeworlds and schoolworlds, contemporary graphic novels might well be described as the Holy Grail of literacy learning. Versaci (2008) notes that the comics medium is one of the best ways through which to present students “with engaging reading material that rewards meaningful analysis, demonstrates important connections with their lives, and invites them to take an active part in their literacy education” (p. 94). Following on from this, the question must be asked as to why graphic novels remain a contentious text choice for teachers and why the teachers who include them in their pedagogy have remained “largely on the fringes of the profession” (Carter, 2007, p. 1).
Teachers’ Classroom Experiences with Graphic Novels

The research findings and comment regarding the positive value of graphic novels and comic books to facilitate multiliteracies in students are compelling. Coupled with the increasing number of books and articles being written for teachers on the use of comics in the classroom (Bakis, 2012; Brozo, Moorman & Meyer, 2014; Carter, 2007, 2008; Monnin, 2010; Syma & Weiner, 2013) the pedagogical step for teachers from theory to practice with graphic novels would seem a fait accompli. Contrary to this expectation, however, the literature into teachers' experience with graphic novels as texts, albeit limited in extent, suggests that teachers face a number of challenges in their implementation of graphic novels into the classroom (Carter, 2008b; Connors, 2010; Hansen, 2012; Rycroft, 2014).

The disjuncture between what could be happening in classrooms with graphic novels and what is happening leads to consideration of the research and scholarly comment that portray teaching with graphic novels as a controversial and potentially risk-imbued practice (Callahan, 2009; Clark, 2013a; Carter, 2009; Connors, 2011; Hansen, 2012; Lapp et al., 2012; Monnin, 2010; Rhoades, et al., 2015; Schmidt, 2011). Monnin notes, “Despite the ELA [English language Arts] teacher’s enthusiasm for and interest in the graphic novel, and that of their students, the applicability of the graphic novel to ELA teaching and learning is currently in question” (p. xv).

While some studies point to teachers’ lack of familiarity with graphic novels or to negative attitudes towards the format as the basis for their hesitancy to engage with graphic novels as classroom texts (Annett, 2008; Lapp et al., 2012), other studies highlight the role played by institutional and programmatic policies and guidelines that operate beyond teachers’ control to reinforce the traditional literacy paradigm. For example, in their study of teachers’ experiences with the graphic novel, The Arrival (Tan, 2006), Rhoades et al. (2015) note:

Our data suggest multimodal texts/literacies sometimes provoke “fierce resistance from those who presently hold power in the current systems of language relations” and education (Gardner & Herman, 2011, p. 23). While most participants eventually embraced this book, others remained frustrated, maintained resistance, or completely rejected it as a potential classroom text because it is a nontraditional academic text with no words. (p. 314).
Macken-Horarik (2009) endorses the “riskiness” of graphic novel use via the general suggestion that, while many English teachers have been excited about the opportunity to explore “an expanded field of textuality” (p. 33), they have also worried about succumbing to the pressures of institutionally imposed accountability. Such teacher concern is evidenced in a number of studies that highlight the tension between literacy pedagogy shaped around multimodal texts and the “deep grammar of schooling” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006) that privileges an alphabetic, print discourse (Comber & Nixon, 2009; Honan, 2009; Cormack & Comber, 2013; Simpson & Walsh, 2010; Tan & McWilliam, 2009; Unsworth & Chan, 2009).

At a broad scale, findings in Comber and Nixon’s (2009) study of Australian teachers’ literacy pedagogy and their attempts to make learning relevant to students, suggested teachers’ pedagogy is adversely affected by “structural and policy matters” (p. 335) that lie beyond teachers’ control. More specifically, Cormack and Comber (2013) found that the macro demands of literacy policy in Australia, embodied in NAPLAN testing, translate into the classroom as an increased emphasis by teachers on “teaching to the test” and the promotion of a limited version of literacy pedagogy. To describe this narrow view of literacy, Street and Street (cited in Hull & Schultz, 2002) coined the term, “the pedagogization of literacy” (23), wherein literacy is defined solely within the context of teaching and learning to the exclusion of “outside” texts and their associated literacies. By implication, and regardless of the merits of standardised testing, texts such as graphic novels that are considered “new” (Carter, 2007) and which focus on literacies that are not accorded importance in literacy testing (Unsworth & Chan, 2009) may be marginalised. To illustrate, a potential participant in Gillenwater’s (2012) study in the United States into teachers’ perceptions and use of graphic novels was precluded after the school principal indicated he “was no longer open to alternative literacy approaches because of the school’s recent performance on the End of Grade tests” (p.40).

There is strong support in the literature for the notion that teachers are frustrated by policies that continue to privilege traditional notions of literacy and which extol the virtues of standardised testing and assessment at the expense of empowering teachers with the autonomy to address the diverse literacy interests and needs of their students (Gannon & Sawyer, 2007; Howie, 2008; Kostogriz & Doecke, 2013; Macken-Horarik, 2009; Simpson & Walsh, 2010; Unsworth, 2008). In such circumstances teachers may theoretically support the use of non-traditional texts such as graphic novels, but
institutional pressures may render them unwilling or unable to include the format in their classroom pedagogy. Consequently, while comics-friendly teachers may have increased in number, comics-using teachers have not matched this growth (Annett, 2008; Callahan, 2009; Carter, 2007; Cary, 2004; Connors, 2010; Gillenwater, 2012; Lapp et al., 2012; Versaci, 2001).

Serving as an example of the tension between what teachers would like to do and what they feel they can do, Clark’s (2013a) study of pre-service teachers’ attitudes to, and experiences with, graphic novels indicated that, despite participants recognising the value of graphic novels as texts, anticipated censure from the school communities in which they hoped to teach would deter them from acting upon their personal beliefs. Clark’s findings echo those of earlier research by Marsh (2006) into pre-service teachers’ pedagogy with popular culture texts that included comic books and graphic novels. Despite the favourable attitudes of participants in Marsh’s study towards popular culture texts, such texts were “othered” by participants from their practice because they were external to the prevailing hegemonic literacy discourse.

The constraining effect of traditional notions of literacy on teachers’ practice with graphic novels was also evident in the study undertaken in the United States by Lapp et al. (2012) into teachers’ attitudes to the instructional value of the format. The study’s findings suggested that everyday decisions by classroom teachers regarding text selection are driven by demands originating outside the classroom, and, by implication, outside teachers’ control. The researchers concluded, “Most national accountability initiatives and curricular demands exclude time for introducing new media such as graphica” (p. 31).

Given the explicit oversight of comics in the English 7-10 Syllabus (BOS, 2003) and the “lightweight” references to graphic novels in the English K-10 Syllabus (BOSTES, 2012), a similar situation to that uncovered in studies overseas regarding the influence of institutional priorities on teachers’ text selection might be assumed amongst teachers in New South Wales. When combined with Piccolo’s (2009) finding that teachers’ choice of texts is significantly influenced by syllabus guidelines, there exists a strong possibility that teachers will be reluctant to incorporate graphic novels as texts because they fall outside the circle of school-sanctioned narratives (Newkirk, 2002). Such reluctance will likely be exacerbated when the discussion of visual literacy in syllabus documents, in professional development for teachers, and in curriculum resources continues to be conducted in a language that is oriented to print texts (Callow,
While no Australian research has been found to support these propositions, Annett (2008) reports in an American study of English teachers’ experiences with graphic novels that many teachers approached as potential participants for the study indicated an inability to participate on the grounds that graphic novels were not listed as texts in their curriculum.

Thus far, the research suggests that teachers engage in an Anubis-like act to weigh their *comics capital* against the power of institutional and programmatic notions of texts and literacy. Several studies suggest, however, that some teachers lack any form of comics capital to be weighed, thus giving them no alternative but to accept the traditional literacy paradigm (Annett, 2008; Callahan, 2009; Xu, 2002). Both Annett (2008) and Xu (2002) found in their studies of pre-service teachers’ use of graphic novels and popular culture texts respectively, that the failure to include these texts in pre-service teacher training hindered teachers’ ability to challenge established practices. A similar finding emerged in the study of Science and Mathematics teachers’ perceptions and use of graphic novels (Cooper, Nesmith, & Schwarz, 2011) and prompted the researchers to urge for the provision of professional development opportunities in graphic novel pedagogy at both the in-service and pre-service levels of teaching.

The research by Lapp et al. (2012) adds weight to the findings that teachers lack knowledge about graphic novels, with participants in their study self-identifying a level of discomfort in regard to their knowledge and familiarity with the format. Similarly, in Callahan’s (2009) study of Language Arts teachers’ perceptions of graphic novels, participants described graphic novels as unfamiliar, yet recognised the format as something with which they *should* be familiar, given students’ interest in graphic novels outside of school.

The graphic novel knowledge-deficit of teachers highlighted through research into teachers’ perceptions of, and experiences with the format aligns with Macken-Horarik’s (2009) broader claim that English teachers in New South Wales have found themselves ill-equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills to sail through “the swirling mist of uncertainties … [in the] … poorly chartered territory, and choppy seas” (p.33) of multiliteracies. Macken-Horarik’s observation resonates with numerous and longstanding calls for the articulation of a metalanguage of the visual (Callow, 2010, 2013; Kress, 2003; Schirato & Webb, 2004) to enable teachers to assist “learners to develop thoughtful and informed readings” (Callow, 2013, p. 13) of visual texts. More
specifically, it supports the call for the explicit teaching of a comics metalanguage to facilitate the development of students’ multiliteracies and enhance new knowledge acquisition (Annett, 2008; Carter, 2015; Connors, 2011; Hammond, 2009; Hassett & Schieble, 2007).

The concern expressed in the literature and the mandate of the current *English Years K-10 Syllabus* (BOSTES, 2012) to provide overt instruction in the comics metalanguage implies that teachers must have a solid grasp of said language. This notion contrasts significantly with Gillenwater’s (2012) suggestion, albeit one based on data from only one participant, that the way in which we read comics is “sometimes overthought” (p. 145) and that a concern with metalanguage is a legacy of our need to discern literal meaning before moving to a critical analysis of the text. While Carter (2015) indicates some affinity for the constructivist-based immersion technique proposed by Gillenwater, in which no frontloading on the comics form is provided, he notes also that if teachers are going to ask students to analyse and create comics it is vital for them to know the vocabulary of comics. By extension, it is important that teachers also have the ability and confidence to communicate in and through the comics metalanguage to help students build such knowledge.

A lack of understanding of the metalanguage of graphic novels is not the only impediment to teachers’ familiarity with graphic novels. Boerman-Connell (2015) highlights that knowing *when* to use graphic novels is essential to their use by teachers. Graphic novels, he notes, should not be used merely to engage students unless consideration has been given to desired teaching and learning outcomes. If, for example, a teacher is attempting to simplify difficult content and concepts, Boerman-Connell suggests “multiplicative complexity of integrating text and image” (p. 221) in graphic novels may only serve to complicate rather than clarify if students are not confident and competent with the metalanguage of graphic novels.

Thus far, consideration of the research and literature regarding teachers’ experiences with graphic novels and popular culture texts assumes teachers’ hesitancy to work with graphic novels may stem from institutional priorities and societal attitudes towards the format or from lack of knowledge and confidence with their metalanguage. The premise that teachers will welcome the opportunity to use graphic novels, however, must also be brought into question. Marsh (2006) notes, for example, that the positioning of popular culture texts outside “established notions of canonicity” (p. 163) render them by some teachers as unsuitable for inclusion as classroom texts. This
perception of graphic novels as sub-literature is found elsewhere in the literature in the context of the more specific debate over the literary merit of comic books and graphic novels and contention over their status as literature (Campbell, 2006; Chute, 2008; Hammond, 2009; Hirsch, 2004).

Connors (2010) notes that to a certain extent the questioning of the literary merit of graphic novels is understandable, given they are not, as is the case with any literature, “neutral” texts. Graphic novels as a format of the comics medium have a checkered history that may well shape our current perceptions of them. This, coupled with the sometimes evocative and visceral images in graphic novels (Hirsch, 2004) has the potential to deter teachers from embracing the format. As Hansen (2012) notes, however, the existence of confronting or objectionable material in some graphic novels does not warrant the holus-bolus rejection of the entire format. Rather, it endorses the call for teachers to become familiar with graphic novels in order to be discerning selectors of appropriate titles for the classroom (Boerman-Connell, 2013; Laycock, 2005; Pagliaro, 2014). To assist teachers in this regard, Pagliaro conducted a content analysis of award winning graphic novels to ascertain the characteristics of “good” graphic novels and subsequently developed a rubric to assist teachers with title selections.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, the educational interpretation of the contemporary textual landscape and the literacies required to navigate it have been considered at the institutional, programmatic and classroom levels. Significant to the discussion is recognition that teachers by no means act in isolation, but instead need to weigh personal and professional judgements against institutional priorities and programmatic guidelines.

The small body of research into teachers’ experiences with graphic novels, coupled with the related discourse in the literature, sends a clear message that for varied reasons teaching with graphic novels is controversial and far from being the norm of the English classroom. This conclusion is further supported by the recurrent inclusion of an opening caveat in books and articles regarding the use of comic books and graphic novels in classrooms that suggests teaching with graphic novels, even in the face of their established value as texts, is risky practice. As the literature and research suggest, the grounds for such risk are located in the pragmatic tensions teachers face in trying to balance hegemonic literacy practices with a multiliteracies agenda, and in teachers’ own
lack of familiarity with the graphic novel format. Even when teachers themselves are amenable to the inclusion of graphic novels in their classrooms, forces outside their control may create tension and apply pressure that prompts teachers to maintain a pedagogical focus on the traditional notion of literacy that honours the reading and writing of prose texts on paper.

The tenuous nature of graphic novel pedagogy underpins Carter’s (2007) call for more qualitative research into teachers’ experiences with graphic novels. To this end, in the following three chapters, the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels is attended to via consideration of the individual experiences of this study’s participants and through a holistic exploration of the phenomenon, teaching with graphic novels.
In this chapter, the symbolic and structural framework for both the interpretation of the participants’ data and the presentation of this study’s findings is considered. In particular, the metaphorical evolution of participants from travellers into pilgrims is explored and the participants in my study are introduced by way of their individual pilgrim stories.

My early immersion in the participants’ data brought forth the image of my participants as travellers on a journey. It was a metaphor that resonated with my personal and professional background, and, in doing so, provided me with insight into the lived experiences of participants by linking those experiences to something “familiar, yet evocative” (Dexter & LaMagedeleine, 2002, p. 369). Holding onto the traveller image, and bearing in mind the aim of the phenomenological text to re-present lived experience as a poetizing and evocative project that effects resonance with the reader (van Manen, 1997), I buried myself in literature on travel to gain a deeper understanding of the travel experience and the manner in which such experience is communicated to readers. I also sought to determine whether the travel metaphor offered an appropriate and sustainable lens through which to illuminate the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels.

The term metaphor has its origins in the Greek word *metaphora*, meaning “carrying over” (Harper, 2017). It is a rhetorical device that enables us to enhance our understanding of a concept or phenomenon by way of approaching it from a seemingly unrelated direction. This juxtaposition of the familiar and the unfamiliar and the subsequent “carrying over” of meaning may facilitate deeper reflection on the idea or event, thus enhancing our understanding of it.

The travel metaphor, expressed through various iterations of the trope, “life is a journey,” is one of the most commonly used metaphors to describe the social world (Dann, 2002; Kelly, 2011; Mikkonen, 2007). The prominent place that notions of travel occupy in our everyday lives can be seen across a broad range of media: in poems, such as *The Road Not Taken* (Frost, 1920) and Cavafy’s (1992) *Ithaka*; in music, such as *Leaving on a Jet Plane* (Denver, 1969) and Nelson’s (1979) *On the Road Again*; in literature, such as Steinbeck’s (1962) *Travels with Charley: In search of America* and Tolkien’s (2012) *The Hobbit*; in numerous travel quotes shaped around the notion of
“Not all those who wander are lost” (Tolkien, 1954); and in advertising slogans, such as United Airlines’ “Life is a journey, travel it well” (Minter, 2001) and Nissan’s “Life is a journey. Enjoy the ride” (Barboza, 1996). Closer to home, as teachers we often encourage students to “get off to a good start,” to “stay on track,” and, when the stress mounts as final exams approach, we emphasize that “it’s all about the journey, not the destination.”

Despite the travel metaphor being somewhat clichéd, it is especially suited to describe the pedagogical experiences of teaching. If we consider the meaning of travel in the vernacular as “Go or be moved from place to place” (Oxford University Press, 2017), teaching can be considered a profession infused with countless opportunities and requirements to travel. As teachers, we spend an inordinate portion of our time preparing for, and embarking on, journeys determined by new policies, new curricula, new perspectives on education, and the relentless pressures of day-to-day teaching. Embedded within these externally imposed journeys are our own inner, or domestic, journeys of self-growth that take place as we reflect and respond to our professional experiences (Dewey, 1998).

The notion of teaching as travel is also apt if we turn to the etymological origins of the term, which lie in the Middle English, *travailen* or *travelen*, meaning to toil or labour (Harper, 2017). Given my participants’ descriptions of journeys made under the weight of accountability, pressures of assessment, a crowded curriculum, and lack of support, the suitability of the travel metaphor as a window through which to view teachers’ experiences seemed appropriate. If we also consider notions of travel as encompassing satisfying and educational experiences that broaden one’s horizons, teaching can be viewed as a journey of external toil and inner enlightenment through professional growth.

As the potential of the travel metaphor to stand as a catalyst and framework for my investigation of teachers’ experiences with graphic novels gained ground, I stepped back to question why this metaphor, above others, had revealed itself to me. Reflecting on the suggestion that the metaphors we choose in certain situations reveal our implicit belief systems (Dexter & LaMagedeleine, 2002), it occurred to me that the notion of teachers as travellers is partly the product of my own experiences as a child, a teacher, a traveller and a researcher.

Notions of travel take me back to my childhood home, to a bedroom lovingly wallpapered by my mother with colourful and information-laden travel brochures. My
bedroom travels took me to the volcanic craters of Hawaii, the gladiatorial arenas of ancient Rome, and to the snow-capped Alps of Switzerland. Perhaps it was these virtual travel experiences that gave life to the two books that became my childhood favourites, *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (Verne, 1864/1965) and *Heidi* (Spyri, 1880/2009).

I am convinced my bedroom travels underpinned my love of Geography at school and thereafter inspired my efforts to become a teacher in that same subject discipline. For some 25 years I shared a passion for the wonders of the world with my students and hoped they too would yearn to see new places and understand the cultures that shaped them. Even the change of direction in my career to become a teacher librarian was inspired by a desire to see the world of teaching and learning in a new and different way.

The travel metaphor also suitably encapsulates my journey as a researcher. My years spent living within my research study have been a journey of reflection and discovery into not only my research topic, but also into my own personal and professional existence. It has been an affective journey spanning the whole gamut of emotions that a traveller might experience: the excitement of new places, the fear of becoming lost, the loneliness of travelling alone in unfamiliar territory, the despair as travel plans disintegrate, the surprise at unexpected discoveries, and the exhilaration of reaching one’s destination. For me, it has been a journey encapsulated in the words of writer, Michael Crichton (1988):

> Stripped of your ordinary surroundings, your friends, your daily routines … you are forced into direct experience. Such direct experience inevitably makes you aware of who it is that is having the experience. That is not always comfortable, but it is always invigorating…. Travel has helped me to have direct experiences. And to know more about myself. (Preface, p. 2).

Given the strong connection between the experiences of travellers and those of my participants, and my own resonance with the travel metaphor, I embraced it as a frame for the interpretation of my data. Furthermore, I felt the metaphor sufficiently strong to provide an “echo” of my research that could “build coherence and unity and … establish a structuring strategy for the thesis that underscores its meaning” (Kelly, 2011, p. 432).

**Pilgrims Revealed**

As I trained my “understandascope” (Figure 8), now with travel lens attached, onto the minutiae of the participants’ descriptions, my image of them as travellers felt
somewhat sanitised. It did little to evoke the frustrations or the celebratory moments of their experiences, nor did it adequately describe the unfamiliarity of the “place” to which they had journeyed with graphic novels. I returned, therefore, to the literature on travel in the hope that it might cultivate further insight. I was not disappointed. Further reading called forth the notion of participants as contemporary pilgrims, a unique type of traveller who seeks authentic experiences in places of special significance that are remote from their everyday lives (MacCannell, 2013; Stoddard, 1994). Frey (1998)


extends this definition beyond the notion of physical remoteness through the suggestion that part of being a pilgrim is also an attitude of “doing things differently than in daily life” (p. 69). Given my participants’ strong respect for, and commitment to, graphic novels as a “place” of special educational significance and the positioning of their graphic novel pedagogy outside the traditional pedagogical norms of their classrooms, the notion of my participants as pilgrims provided an enhanced metaphorical frame through which to illuminate their experiences.
Just as I had earlier questioned whether the term *traveller* was a faithful description of my participants, however, I also cross-examined the notion of *pilgrim* to see how well it might capture the essence of their experiences. Van Manen (1997) notes that we often overwork words to the extent that they lose their original meaning and I was a little concerned that the pilgrim metaphor had suffered this fate. For example, it is not uncommon to hear of families making a pilgrimage to the beach for their annual holiday, shoppers making pilgrimages to the after-Christmas sales, or cricket fans flocking with reverence to the Boxing Day Test\(^{13}\). If we heed van Manen’s (1997) advice, however, to be attentive to the etymological origins of words that “put us in touch with an original form of life where the term still had living ties to the lived experiences from which they originally sprang” (p. 86), the term pilgrim regains its original power: The etymological roots of the term *pilgrim* are found in the Old French *peleri* or *peregrine*, meaning “crusader, foreigner or stranger” (Harper, 2017). Given my interpretation of participants as advocates for graphic novels who found themselves at times vulnerable and in unfamiliar circumstances, the notion of them as pilgrims was a more than apt description. By extension the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels as classroom texts was considered a pilgrimage to a foreign land. Before exploring the details of this pilgrimage, however, the remainder of this chapter is devoted to an introduction to my nine pilgrims.

**A Company of Sundry Folk**

In Southwark at the Tabard where I lay,
As I was all prepared for setting out
To Canterbury with a heart devout,
That there had come into that hostelry
At night some twenty-nine, a company
Of sundry folk whom chance had brought to fall
In fellowship, for pilgrims were they all
And onward to Canterbury would ride.
The chambers and the stables there were wide,
We had it easy, served with all the best;
And by the time the sun had gone to rest

\(^{13}\) The Boxing Day Test is a cricket match held in Melbourne, Australia, which starts the day after Christmas Day and involves the Australian cricket team and the national team of another country.
I'd spoken with each one about the trip  
And was a member of the fellowship.  
We made agreement, early to arise  
To take our way, of which I shall advise.  
But nonetheless, while I have time and space,  
Before proceeding further here's the place  
Where I believe it reasonable to state  
Something about these pilgrims--to relate  
Their circumstances as they seemed to me,  
Just who they were and each of what degree  
And also what array they all were in.  

(The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer, c1380-1392/1993a, lines 0-41)

Consistent with the origin of the term *sundry* from the Old English word *syndrig* meaning distinct or separate (Harper, 2017), my participants’ experiences with graphic novels were underpinned by a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences. Although unlike Chaucer’s pilgrims, who physically travelled to Canterbury as a group, the participants did comprise an interest group that journeyed towards a common goal: the facilitation of their students’ understanding of, and appreciation for, graphic novels as texts and the development of students’ multiliteracies. In the ilk of pilgrimages made in the Middle Ages, this goal rendered their pilgrimage something of a spiritual one. Rather than journeying to a place of significance for religious reasons, however, the participants journeyed for altruistic reasons that extended their professional identities and integrity beyond a concern for self to something greater than ego (Ewing and Smith, 2001; Palmer (2003).

Windsor (2014) notes the eagerness of pilgrims to have someone listen to their stories and my pilgrims proved no exception. As the listener and subsequent teller of their tales, my role paralleled that of Chaucer’s (c1380-1392) narrator, who, upon encountering his fellow pilgrims in the tavern at Southwark, set about describing his companions at the outset of their journey and then recounted the tales told by the pilgrims on their journey to Canterbury. Unlike the tales of Chaucer’s pilgrims, however, which drew heavily on the stories of others, the tales told by my pilgrims were their own.
The participants’ tales that follow convey something of each participant’s circumstances in terms of their personal and professional experiences with graphic novels prior to and during their journey with them as classroom texts. The stories make substantial use of participant voice in the attempt to bring pilgrim and reader together, thereby encouraging the latter to walk vicariously with participants on their pilgrimage with graphic novels. In my interpretation and re-telling of the participants’ experiences I have endeavoured, just as Chaucer’s (c1380-1392/1993a) narrator “promised to tell you exactly what happened on our trip” (line 64), to stay true to what was told to me:

Who tells the tale of any other man
Should render it as nearly as he can,
If it be in his power, word for word,
(Chaucer, c1380-1392/1993a, lines 731-733)

Rob’s Tale

There was with us a KNIGHT, a worthy man
Who, from the very first time he began
To ride about, loved honour, chivalry,
The spirit of giving, truth and courtesy.
He was a valiant warrior for his lord.
(A Knight’s Tale by Geoffrey Chaucer, 1993b, Lines 43-47)

Rob has been an English teacher for eighteen years. When we spoke, he was teaching at the school where I was also working, a non-government Anglican school for boys in Years K-9, and co-educational in Years 10-12. Prior to our interviews, Rob and I had worked together sporadically for more than ten years through the school library’s
Boys and Books program, which was designed to encourage reading for pleasure in our Middle School boys. Rob always actively and enthusiastically participated in the program by sharing his love of reading with his students and by encouraging them to read widely across genres and formats. His love of reading extended well beyond the classroom and it was not uncommon to see Rob in the playground amidst a group of students, “talking books.”

Rob undertook his teacher training when visual literacy was a term largely associated with film and when graphic novels were not on the educational radar. He did, however, have some personal experience with comic books as a boy: “I found them quite thrilling. I always enjoyed the twists and turns and occasional surprises in the end of the narrative. I actually learnt quite a deal of vocabulary from them.”

As an adult, Rob had read one or two graphic novels for pleasure before reconnecting with them in the classroom. Prior to his most recent experience with The Hobbit, which he suggested was, “probably one of the things I’m looking forward to the most about teaching Year 7 this year,” he had used graphic novels only once before when he had taught the same unit in the previous year.

Rob noted that his students were bombarded daily with visual texts and while he believed they implicitly knew quite a lot about how to read them, he also felt they needed to have the language through which to articulate their understanding. He went on to note that “a lot of great texts can be enjoyed by young people with a certain level of understanding, but the more we teach them about it, the more they understand, the richer the experience is for them. I think most students are surprised at just how much is in there.” As a result of Rob’s commitment to equip students with the means to make meaning from graphic novels and to articulate that meaning, Rob’s unit of work based on The Hobbit focused heavily on the technical analysis of graphic novel codes and conventions and how they convey meaning.

Despite his limited experience as an adult with graphic novels, Rob presented as somewhat of a champion for the cause of graphic-novels-as-texts. He was quick to convey, and emphatic about, the importance of using the graphic novel as a vehicle for the development of visual and critical literacy in his young charges. He noted, “I see my role as an English teacher, in part, is to broaden the students’ horizons, both in what they view and read. We like to try and break down all barriers and prejudices wherever we can, and I think there’s one here.” He went on to state that graphic novels “are a clearly underestimated, misunderstood genre, and you get a chance to clear some of that
up, and wave the flag a bit.” That said, Rob also commented that it was a relatively easy task to dispel any misgivings his students had about studying the graphic novel. Given he saw them nearly every day, he was able to show his students that graphic novels “can be much more sophisticated and complex texts than first thought,” and that while “in a way it’s kids’ stuff, it’s a lot more than that.”

Rob was also determined to ensure his students’ parents were enlightened as to the complexity and sophistication of graphic novels. He took the opportunity on occasions such as parent-teacher nights to discuss graphic novels with parents, some of who questioned the choice of a graphic novel as a text. Anytime there was a hint of “parental misunderstanding,” noted Rob, “I’m there being a champion of the graphic novel, and explaining to them that these are very complex texts.”

For Rob, a highlight of the graphic novel unit was his students’ engagement with, and enjoyment of, the graphic novel. As well, he was pleased with their efforts in applying their knowledge and skills to create their own scene for a graphic novel. He noted, “to see the looks on their faces, the appreciation of what others had done, the acknowledgement of how well it worked, and being able to articulate how well it worked; to me that was probably the highlight.”

Lisa’s Tale

Lisa is a classroom teacher at a government co-educational selective14 school for Years 7–12. Although officially considered an Early Career Teacher by the NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC)15, in the eight years prior to

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14 “Selective high schools cater for the specific needs of gifted and talented students who have superior academic ability coupled with high classroom performance” (NSW Department of Education, para. 1).
our interviews she had served various stints as a casual teacher in rural and metropolitan New South Wales and overseas. With a university degree in Communications, and a background in semiotics, Lisa had not intended to enter teaching. She laughingly remarked that she became a teacher “by accident,” and, while having no regrets, she had found that “life is just different.” In elaborating, she indicated that she loves “learning new stuff” but described how teaching pervades her personal life and can be physically draining. She noted, “Sometimes I’m so tired. The passion’s there, but under the layer of fatigue.”

Childhood contact with comic books gave Lisa an introduction to the comics medium that continued to develop in late high school and into university through her interest in anime. She attributed her current passion for graphic novels, however, to her students, whose “enthusiasm sparked my participation.”

Lisa admitted that when she was younger, she would have considered a prose novel “the more challenging text,” but acknowledged that she no longer thought that way as a result of her greater exposure to graphic novels and a change in the nature of the graphic novels themselves to be “doing really interesting things.” Lisa viewed people who don’t see graphic novels as literature or “real reading” are “people who don’t engage with graphic novels themselves and who haven’t had much experience with them.” She noted that teachers who doubt the value of graphic novels face a challenge in the classroom: “You have to sell the text. That’s part of our job…. You’ve got to approach it with enthusiasm, you’ve got to value their experiences and their ideas.”

Lisa shared the missionary zeal of fellow participants Thomas and Kate towards the value of graphic novels as classroom texts and acknowledged the capacity of the format to build critical literacy in her students, who “as teenagers come to us as fairly visually literate people.” She recognised, however, that her students lacked the knowledge and skills to “think about how and why they know what they do…. It’s like technology,” she said, “It always gets to me how kids don’t use technology in a very smart way.”

Lisa’s concern with her students’ need to develop metacognitive skills in regard to critical and visual literacy, combined with her own background in semiotics,
prompted her to focus in the classroom on “equipping them with the ability to decode the text consciously.” She noted, “I was very interested in making sure they understood the effect, that they could not only identify something, but could explain why it’s there, what does it do [and] how does it position you as a reader.” To help her students appreciate her rationale for spending time on the metalinguage of graphic novels, Lisa compared having knowledge of the codes and conventions of graphic novels to having the “key” in a computer game: “These codes give you access.”

In addition to using graphic novels to facilitate critical and visual literacy in her students, Lisa recognised the value of the format both as a means to access her students’ interests and as a vehicle to engage them. She welcomed the fact that the graphic novel unit was being taught after the students’ final exams, because such timing negated the pressure often felt by her students to pursue high marks at the expense of taking the time, and making the effort, to think critically. She noted, “[The timing] means they’re going to engage in more authentic ways.”

Lisa was more than pleased with the manner in which her students responded to the graphic novel unit. She remarked how interesting it was to see students move from an initial position of, “this is an exercise,” to one of, “I want that one. That’s a good one,” as they were exposed to the various graphic novels on offer. Lisa noted, “The texts they sell themselves. You just lay them out and sit back and watch. It’s like seagulls to a hot chip. That’s pretty cool.” She went on to indicate that this reaction came from students “who had never touched graphic novels before [to] kids who were die-hard fans.” She indicated, also, that her students “were one hundred percent involved” in the graphic novel study and that some students she had not expected to be engaged were “dead quiet” as they were given “time with the text.”

Lisa spent considerable time describing how the use of texts that engaged her students forged positive, and reciprocal, teacher-student relationships. She described sharing her large personal collection of graphic novels and manga with her students and noted that her relationship with students was enhanced “when you share stuff that you’re passionate about … they dig that.” Lisa also noted that it was better still when students lent her their own graphic novels and manga: “It’s nice when it’s reciprocal. It means that there’s something more than just, ‘I’m going to get a good mark.’ [It means] I really have found something that’s meaningful to them.”

It was clear from Lisa’s description of her experience that the relationships she built with students continued beyond the classroom. She described how some boys in
her class, who she endearingly described as “the graphic novel nerds,” organised to have a “graphic novel photo” taken with her at the Year 10 Formal.16

Lisa indicated that her personal interest in graphic novels made her feel “really comfortable” and confident to use them as classroom texts. She noted, however, that “if I’d never read any of this” she would probably have felt as under-prepared as she had done in her first year of teaching when she had been required to teach Shakespeare. Not having read Shakespeare since high school, Lisa recalled thinking at the time, “I’m so ill-equipped for this, there’s so much to know.”

Although Lisa felt confident to teach with graphic novels, she admitted that she still had a lot to learn about them, but added that she at least knew where to look. She had yet to find any specific support in that regard from “the Department,” but noted the occasional professional development event that was offered on the broader topic of visual literacy. She also mentioned the lack of opportunity to sit down with colleagues and discuss aspects of the unit and indicated that “we tend to compare notes on the fly” through short exchanges that revolved around questions such as “How’s this one going?” or comments such as, “We just did this, it went really well.”

When I asked Lisa if, given her interest in graphic novels, colleagues looked upon her as a resource, she remarked that while she doesn’t talk about her expertise, her colleagues would only have to “look at my bookcase and know.” She added that she felt the invisibility of her graphic novel expertise to colleagues had much to do with her being an Early Career teacher, which meant she was viewed as someone “to be trained, not to bring new things to the table.”

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16 A school formal is also known as a school ball, or school prom. In New South Wales, the Year 10 Formal is held to celebrate completion of Stage 5. Traditionally, it marked the stage at which some students left school to enter the workforce.
Megan’s Tale

There’s no sense in going further - “it’s the edge of cultivation,”
So they said, and I believed it - broke my land and sowed my crop–
Built my barns and strung my fences in the little border station
Tucked away below the foothills where the trails run out and stop.
Till a voice, as bad as Conscience, rang interminable changes
On one everlasting Whisper day and night repeated - so:
“Something hidden. Go and find it. Go and look behind the Ranges–
“Something lost behind the Ranges. Lost and waiting for you. Go!”
(The Explorer by Rudyard Kipling, 1898, lines 1-8)

At the time of our first interview, Megan had been teaching for 18 months, the
last 12 of those in the same school as Lisa, a selective co-educational government
secondary school. She had no previous experience with graphic novels in either her
personal or professional lifeworlds: “I’d never heard of a graphic novel until I was
working on my accreditation last year. I had to get a friend to teach me how to read
one.”

I first met Megan two months before our first interview at a graphic novel
workshop I presented to English teachers. I had known she was coming to the workshop
and was not surprised when we finally met to confirm that she was the young face in the
second row that beamed with interest and enthusiasm. The same sense of wonder
flowed through our first interview as Megan considered her current position with
graphic novels and reflected on the very new and different experience that lay ahead.
She was the epitome of a novice pilgrim, an explorer in a foreign land.
For the majority of her short teaching career, Megan had been content to till the field of prose texts that dominated the NSW English curriculum. It was a field with which she was familiar. That situation changed, however, when Megan was urged to venture “behind the ranges” (Kipling, 1898) by a voice that belonged to her Head Teacher of English. In the same vein that many an explorer of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was commissioned by a patron to undertake a geographical or scientific fact-finding mission, Megan was commissioned by her head teacher to explore new territory and write a unit of work focused on graphic novels for all seven classes that comprised the Year 10 English cohort.

Megan described how her first attempt to develop a graphic novel unit, undertaken with no personal knowledge of the new landscape and no professional knowledge and skills to call upon, was a dismal failure and the expedition abandoned. With continued support from her patron, however, and some newly acquired knowledge of graphic novels, Megan enthusiastically set off once again to venture beyond trail’s end, this time optimistic as to what she might find. She noted that graphic novels “are engaging to read and I love the way that the images and text work together. There’s so much meaning packed in there. I think it’s fascinating and the kids have a lot to learn from it; hopefully they’ll like it.”

The graphic novel unit developed and taught by Megan was a format study designed to teach students how to read and analyse graphic novels. Megan acknowledged that graphic novels were a logical step “on the road between written texts and visual texts.” Further, she noted that it made sense to take advantage of her student’s lifeworld interests, given that many of her students read manga for pleasure: “Education is through kids, and we should be doing the things that interest them, as well as things classified as classics.”

During the graphic novel unit, Megan spent considerable time working with students on the metalanguage of the format to ensure that “if they’re going to talk about graphic novels, they’re going to talk about them properly.” She felt also that because “we spend a lot of time in a [traditional] novel looking at structure and at language forms and features,” close attention to the grammar of the graphic novel would encourage students “to take it seriously as a legitimate text.”

At the outset of the unit, the legitimacy of graphic novels as classroom texts was something Megan felt students might struggle with in a selective school where students “generally value written texts and classic texts,” and where visual texts, such as picture
books and film, are “enjoyed, but not appreciated.” To a certain degree, she felt that the students’ lack of recognition given graphic novels as legitimate texts reflected a lack of research into their educational use. She felt that access to such research would provide “the ammo up your sleeve” that could help justify to students the use of graphic novels as classroom texts.

The potential rejection of graphic novels as legitimate texts by her students was not Megan’s only concern. The ambivalence of some colleagues to the forthcoming unit was also a source of frustration, and she found it “difficult” that some of her more experienced colleagues treated the introduction of graphic novels as just “one more thing we have to learn.” In stark contrast to this notion of a new text being a burden, Megan felt that her future success as an English teacher lay in “embracing a new kind of literacy” and she recognised the value of positioning herself at the forefront of such progress. Referring to her colleague, Lisa, Megan noted, “We’re keen about [the unit] because we see this as the future. It’s something that we’re definitely going to be teaching in a few years and we might as well try and be at the forefront of it, to try and develop an expertise.”

On top of her concerns about the negative attitudes of her colleagues to graphic novels, Megan was also challenged by her own self-doubt as to her competency to teach with them: “I’m worried I won’t know enough to teach them and to give them the credit they deserve.” As it turned out, Megan’s concerns were not realised and she was satisfied with her teaching of the unit. She remarked, however, that “more knowledge, more research and professional development would be good, as would having the time to ‘cotton on.’ It’s really stressful to try and manage things.”

Apart from challenges related to graphic novels per se, Megan also faced those that were organisational or contextual. She worried about curriculum time constraints that would restrict her ability to embed the unit: “You just can’t throw 16-year-olds something they’ve never seen before, or never understood or valued before, and say, ‘We need to appreciate this’.” Megan also voiced concerns about the placement of the unit as a non-assessable one at the end of the school year. When combined, these challenges led Megan to believe that her students “won’t take [graphic novels] seriously, and [they’ll] go, ‘Oh this is a comic and there’s nothing to be gained from these’.”

Despite her initial misgivings, Megan rated the graphic novel unit a success. While sporadic student attendance created some issues in continuity of the unit, Megan
described her students as happy and engaged: “Their favourite part was reading the novels; they were engrossed and they loved it. [At the start] ninety five percent of them didn’t know anything about [graphic novels], or didn’t know how to verbalise what they did know, and now they can.”

As for the ambivalent colleagues about whom she’d expressed initial concern, Megan had been pleasantly surprised. She reported that “everyone found it really valuable in terms of engaging the kids, while also teaching them something new.” In fact, so successful was the unit that future plans included extending its depth and breadth, moving it forward in the school year and looking at other places in the curriculum where graphic novels could be introduced. Megan concluded, “It’s only going to grow, it’s not going to go away.”

**Thomas’ Tale**

![Thomas is a secondary classroom English teacher in a non-government co-educational school for years 7-12. He is completing his first year of teaching. His prior experience helped him relate more to the students.]

Who would true valour see,
Let him come hither;
One here will constant be,
Come wind, come weather
There's no discouragement
Shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent,
To be a Pilgrim.
Whoso beset him round
With dismal stories,
Do but themselves confound;
His strength the more is.
No lion can him fright,
He’ll with a giant fight,
But he will have the right
To be a pilgrim.

*(To be a Pilgrim* by John Bunyan, 1678, lines 1-16)

Thomas is a first-year-out, or Early Career, teacher. When we met for our first interview, Thomas was approaching the end of his second school term as an English teacher at a non-government Anglican co-educational school for Years 7-12.

Some eight months before our interview, I had met Thomas through an online education forum that he had set up to encourage discussions about graphic novels and for sharing resources. Given our common interest in the use of graphic novels as texts for the English classroom, it was hardly surprising that, in true phenomenological style, our first interview resembled a conversation between friends (van Manen, 1997). The interview took place one afternoon after school in Thomas’ classroom, a location he had chosen because he was eager to show me his students’ work displayed around the room. For our second interview, knowing he would be interested in my library’s vast graphic novel collection, I invited Thomas to my school. I’m not sure who was the more excited. Surrounded by hundreds of graphic novels, Thomas was like a kid in a lolly shop, while I was thrilled to have found a soulmate that shared a passion for the format.

Thomas appeared very comfortable and thoughtful throughout our interviews. While I knew from reading Thomas’ tweets and blog posts that he was finding his early days of teaching exhausting, there was little evidence of that when we spoke. Instead, with the enthusiasm of a five-year-old starting school, Thomas spoke excitedly about his learning journey as a teacher: “Every day I’m learning new things and it’s a new experience.”

Very early in our first interview, Thomas’ considered answers and enthusiastic tone indicated a passion for teaching graphic novels that approached the missionary zeal of a religious pilgrim. He spoke of his conversion to the educational benefits of the graphic novel format well before setting foot in the classroom when, as a pre-service teacher trawling the bowels of his university library, he had a ‘re-awakening’ of his personal interest in the format. His belief in the educational power of graphic novels became so strong and such was his conviction that his message should be shared, that he
and a colleague presented a conference session on graphic novels to English teachers, even though he was yet to attain their trained and certified status.

Once in the classroom as a fully-fledged teacher, Thomas’ faith in teaching the graphic novel was tested. He described a crisis in confidence as the reality of teaching the graphic novel unit hit home. There were moments when he felt his knowledge of the format let him down: “It was harder to teach than I thought. I’d done units of work on them at uni, and I’d read them. I’d been exposed to them. But when it actually comes to teaching them, the ball’s in your court and the students look to you as a model and a kind of wisdom.”

While Thomas was shaken by the realisation that “when you teach something you really have to know it,” he confessed to being made stronger by the relationships he was able to forge with students around a common interest in the comics medium. He noted the reassurance that students felt when they learnt of his passion for reading comics and acknowledged that, in return, his students “taught me a lot about the importance of approaching a text and looking at its context.” He added, “Teaching it, learning with the kids; those dynamics in the class were really, really helpful for me.”

Thomas noted a further benefit of using graphic novels for both him and his students was the format’s ability to engage. He remarked that the unit “refreshed my interest in graphic novels. And what a great tool to get students engaged, to get them back into that ‘excited about English’ game. It was great to be able to use it as a vehicle to explore a concept as well, and to look at how that text reflects these ideas or explores them.”

Despite some personal misgivings about his competency to teach such a “sophisticated and dense text,” Thomas felt overall that the unit was a great success. As a beginning teacher, his experience in the classroom with graphic novels offered him a rare moment to feel “in control” and be able to support his students at a time when “so many times this year I’ve had no idea.” Thomas attributed his sense of empowerment to his personal background in the comics medium, his students’ enthusiasm, and also to the support offered by his professional learning network (PLN), both online and face-to-face.

The support that Thomas received from students and colleagues regarding graphic novels, was not, he emphasised, replicated at a wider scale. He was extremely frustrated by non-believers in the community and education sectors who consider the graphic novel as a “dumbed-down text” and who continue to support twentieth century attitudes to literature that privilege the written word. While the general community’s
“resistance” was often voiced through the media, it was the “silent nature” of graphic novels in curriculum documents and the “whisper of the DET” regarding their use that Thomas believed was characteristic of the attitudes of educational policy makers. Such attitudes, he noted, were self-perpetuating: “Not putting in any resources or support means people will be more hesitant to teach and use graphic novels, which means we’ll have more and more students who aren’t going to be engaging with them.”

Undeterred by bumps in the road, Thomas was optimistic and confident that “innovative teachers” will use graphic novels effectively to address curriculum requirements relating to the development of students’ visual and critical literacies. Despite his frustration that a narrow prescriptive curriculum prevented him doing the graphic novel justice, he stated emphatically that graphic novels “can be embedded deeply into outcomes from the NSW syllabus if you’re willing to make those connections.” From our conversations, it was obvious that Thomas was indeed one of those innovative teachers and was keen to take his message to the people.

Kate’s Tale

Kate is the Head of English at a non-government Catholic boys’ school for Years 5 to 12. Apart from an exchange of emails in which arrangements were made for Kate’s participation in my research, we had met briefly a few days prior to our first interview at a presentation on graphic novels I gave for the NSW English Teachers’ Association.

Kate’s passion for graphic novels was evidenced not only through the animated way in which she described her personal and professional experiences with the format, but also in the large number of graphic novels scattered around her office. It had been Kate’s choice and not a school mandate to use a graphic novel with her high-ability
Year 10 class: “I can pretty much program what I like,” adding that she doubted the school would exclude any type of text unless it was incongruent with the school’s values.

Kate brought considerable personal experience to her classroom practice with graphic novels. She had grown up in a household where comic books and Mad magazine were ever-present and described an ongoing obsession that emerged in her teenage years with “everything 1950s.” She remarked, “I was a big fan of super hero comics, so I used to collect things like Superman and Spiderman.” What Kate had noticed since then, however, was a change in the nature of comics since that early period of engagement: “The thing I’ve noticed most is the complexity of issues that are dealt with and also the beauty of the design, the aesthetic.”

Kate’s knowledge of graphic novels was evident in her comfortable use of the format’s metalanguage. To describe the difference between a graphic novel and a comic book, for example, Kate noted, “a comic is quite linearly presented. With a graphic novel, there’s a lot of variation in the panels and often there can be things across a whole page or that go out into the gutters. There’s more presentation on the page and that empowers me and how I engage with it.” The appeal of the graphic novel, suggested Kate, was that “they aren’t scared of dealing with the dark issues, and I’m drawn to those. I like graphic realism, and I like those issues that are quite serious-minded. So, I love the fact that there’s a platform that does that in a really unique way.”

In Kate’s formative years as a teacher the use of comics was not mentioned amongst her colleagues. She reflected, “I suppose in a way, the silence was a resistance.” She had included the occasional reference to comics in her early teaching, but only fully committed to the medium when a syllabus shift towards visual literacy pushed her firstly into picture books and then, more recently, prompted her to consider, “What else?” It was then that her gaze had turned to graphic novels. She noted that in the last couple of years, graphic novels had become more available, as had the resources to support their use. Kate also described an increase in “talk of them amongst teachers” and the recognition of graphic novels as a “hook” to engage boys who “are quite often visual learners.”

Kate was adamant that graphic novels have a place in the English curriculum: “We’re an Eye Generation [and] we would be doing a massive disservice to our students if we weren’t giving them the toolbox to unpack the texts that they’re encountering constantly in their lives.” Included in this toolbox, noted Kate, was the
“need to empower them with the language [of graphic novels] in a much more explicit way.” Kate was concerned, however, about her ability to fulfil this responsibility and confessed that to do so she needed to “investigate the form a lot more deeply to make sure that I know what I am talking about.”

Kate’s efforts to increase her grasp on the graphic novel format were frustrated by the nature of the support material she encountered. She referred to the online sources that had been the primary focus of her search for support and noted the large amount of material coming out of the United States, a country that “seems to have embraced graphic novel teaching more than Australia.” Kate felt this material was “more about the making of graphic novels [and] not necessarily about them as a form of literature.” Further, she noted, “There’s a lot of stuff at the academic level, but there’s not a lot in terms of high school strategies and teaching and learning in the English classroom.”

Kate recognised her challenge as “I wanted to teach this in an English classroom context and I wanted something that was meatier and really challenging for the higher-order thinkers in my class, and [I wanted to] look at graphic novels as a genuine literary form.”

Kate identified the paucity of practical support for the teaching of graphic novels in the English classroom as problematic at both a personal and profession-wide scale. Combined with her observation that her colleagues were not engaging with graphic novels because “they are just a bit fearful; they don’t know them well enough and aren’t sure what to do with them, [and] they’re not engaging with something that is seen as a bit flimsy,” Kate believes teachers in general “are going to be quite unprepared when the National Curriculum comes into NSW. I think it will take quite a lot of teacher support and PD training to make teachers feel quite supported and knowledgeable about this form.”

Despite initial concerns for her own competence to teach graphic novels and for the possible ambivalence of her students towards a non-assessable unit of work focused on a text that she felt “they wouldn’t take seriously,” Kate was more than happy with her students’ responses to the graphic novel unit. She noted that seeing more than half the students changing their minds from the position of, “Oh comics are dumb,” to say that “Maus was one of the best books they’d read all year,” was for her, “definitely justification on its own” for studying the graphic novel. “The boys really enjoyed it,” she added. “It was really effective in terms of engaging [them] with a new form which they hadn’t had a lot of exposure to.” Kate also noted that the boys’ ability to
understand the relationship between written and visual text was “a really powerful lesson for them to take into their senior studies.”

Although Kate was somewhat frustrated by the scheduling of the unit and associated end-of-year interruptions that prevented her “doing the text justice,” she was keen to expand the future study of graphic novels in both breadth and depth. She would like to spend more time “deconstructing the form, getting [students] to understand the metalanguage [and] also look at the narrative elements” and devote more time to having students create their own graphic texts to demonstrate their understanding.

In addition to the graphic novel unit sponsoring in her students a “change of heart” towards graphic novels, Kate also noted her own growth over the course of her journey with the format: “It’s been a good learning curve for me. It was a really good experience and I’m glad I made myself do it.” She added that coming to value the format and appreciate its richness as a vessel for study had ramifications for her teaching in other areas of the curriculum: “I felt I could use these texts [elsewhere] with confidence because I was piggybacking onto the knowledge I was gaining from preparing this unit. Last year when I tried to do the same thing, I felt I was making stuff up.”

**Helen’s Tale**

![Helen's Tale Image]

Today there are many types of pilgrims, many ways of going, and many ways to interpret what it means to be a pilgrim to “the house of Saint James.” Rather than the length of the journey, the central factor in pilgrims’ categories is how one makes the journey. In general terms the division is between human and motor-powered travel; between those who
walk, bicycle, use a pack animal, or go by horseback and those who make the journey seated in a car, bus or airplane. (Frey, 1998, p. 35)

Helen is Head of English at a large non-government boys’ school for Years K-12. She describes herself as a very experienced teacher who has “been teaching too long to mention.” Prior to my research, I had known Helen in a professional capacity for some three years and when a teacher librarian colleague alerted me to Helen’s upcoming use of a graphic novel to teach a Shakespeare unit, I asked my colleague to contact her as a potential participant.

At Helen’s suggestion, our two interviews took place during the school day at her workplace. Her eagerness to move quickly through the preliminary stages of the first interview as I sought to confirm aspects of her participation, and in our second interview, when I sought to clarify aspects of our first interview, suggested she felt pressured by time and created a somewhat business-like atmosphere for our conversations. This atmosphere, combined with Helen’s description of her experience teaching the graphic novel unit as “prescriptive,” led me to view her as something of a “motorized pilgrim” (Frey, 1998, p. 38), a traveller on a tight schedule with a very prescribed itinerary who chooses to sacrifice something of the authenticity of walking the road in exchange for a more comfortable and familiar means of travel.

Helen described her lifeworld experiences with graphic novels as non-existent. In the family home, there had been no contact with graphic novels or the broader comics medium. She had enjoyed picture books, however, which she described as related texts. Her lack of exposure to comics continued through her schooling into her teacher training and early years as a teacher. Her experiences with graphic novels, she noted, were therefore relatively recent and totally school-related: “It’s pathetic because my own personal reading just reflects school.”

In the year prior to our interviews, Helen had collaborated with a teacher librarian to develop and teach a unit of work shaped around Gareth Hinds’ (2008) graphic novel version of The Merchant of Venice. Helen had also referred to graphic novels elsewhere in the curriculum with her senior classes, and had recommended graphic novels as related texts to senior students.

Helen indicated that she had read “quite a lot” of graphic novels, but “not necessarily all the way through.” The appeal of graphic novels for her, lay in their

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17 In NSW, a “related” text is a text chosen by the student to accompany the study of a mandated, or prescribed, text.
“simplicity, [which] makes them much easier to write about, to connect.” As well, Helen considered graphic novels to have a “literary edge” that enabled them to be “more open than other texts to address areas across the curriculum.” To illustrate, Helen described her use of *The Merchant of Venice* graphic novel to teach beyond “just the content of the play” to explore the concept of manhood: “It’s part of a cultural education as well.”

Artistic considerations, such as the importance of physical layout, the attractiveness of illustrations, and quality of the paper on which graphic novels are printed, were primary influences on Helen’s attitudes to graphic novels. While admitting “those are funny things,” she emphasised their importance in the format’s ability to engage both herself and her students. She explained, for example, that it was the appealing artwork in *The Great Gatsby* (Greenberg, 2007) that made it the only graphic novel she had ever purchased and noted also that the “cheap cartoony paper” in *V for Vendetta* (Moore, 2008) was a source of disappointment for both her and her students.

By way of the graphic novel’s ability to tackle major themes and ideals, and to challenge society’s views, Helen included them within her notion of literature. She elaborated, however, that just as she would do in regard to written texts, she would only use the term “literature” for “quality” graphic novels: “You can have trash novels and trash graphic novels.” Helen also noted that “the canon still shapes my view of really good literature and modern novels” and her assessment of a “good” graphic novel was tied to its ability to “stay true to a play or book … without demeaning the book.”

Helen’s mention of the canon evidenced a hierarchical view of literature that emerged elsewhere during our conversations. For example, while indicating an ability to “teach a comic book, and teach it extremely well,” Helen was emphatic that she would not use the term “comic book” in her classroom to describe a graphic novel as it “demeans” the latter. She admitted, “It comes back to that prejudice I’m showing that I expect graphic novels to be more literary than comics.” She also spoke of graphic novels primarily as being supplementary to written texts and noted that if she were to do a stand-alone unit with a graphic novel, “I wouldn’t allow the same time in that unit that I do to other things. That might be seen as marginalising them, but that would be the truth within a school curriculum.”

In the unit on *The Merchant of Venice*, Helen used the graphic novel in conjunction with the film and play versions to consider the various ways in which the
characters were represented and how those representations influenced students’ understanding of the play. The graphic novel, suggested Helen, acted “like the bridge in the middle” between the original play and the film version by adding “another dimension of meaning” to the text.

Helen’s primary teaching strategy with the graphic novel, which she identified as “very prescriptive” and “unique,” required her Year 8 Scholars\textsuperscript{18} students to examine, without reading the written text, “the diagrams, the painting or the visuals” in order to see the different ways in which the characters were represented. She felt it unnecessary to frontload her students with the codes and conventions of graphic novels, “because they are bright … and I like them to discover those things for themselves.” That said, Helen admitted that her students were confused at times by the images and struggled to decipher them.

When asked about her sources of knowledge regarding graphic novels, Helen noted that, in light of the limited way in which her students were using them, “I never deliberately set out to inform myself properly about the graphic novel.” She had, however, read reviews of graphic novels and the occasional article in a professional journal and had been at the “odd [conference] session where it’s been mentioned.” She categorically rejected curriculum documents provided by the NSW Board of Studies as a potential source of support.

Adding to her remarks about her graphic novel knowledge, Helen mentioned that, had she been using the graphic novel as a “genre study” with senior students, “I would be doing a lot of reading and making sure my thoughts, which I think are accurate anyway, are backed up.” She noted, however, that her use of a graphic novel as a primary text in the senior school would be unlikely in the current context, given the constraining nature of policies and assessments that “stymie the risk-taking” and leave “no room for experimentation.”

At the conclusion of the unit, Helen was “thrilled” with her students’ responses to the graphic novel and found it to have been “a lovely pathing” to higher-order thinking in her students. She reported that no student had questioned the use of a graphic novel and suggested, “Part of that may be me, because if I introduce it as a credible thing, [it] doesn’t matter what it is, they'll take it initially as credible.” Helen considered her positive attitude to graphic novels, therefore, as vital, and “part of the

\textsuperscript{18} The Scholars class comprises the 25 or so boys who have achieved the highest results in English in the previous year.
teaching craft.’ She continued, ‘for any new text you’ve got to be positive; you’ve got to say, ‘This is a fabulous opportunity,’ and if you do that, the credibility will be there.’

Mike’s Tale

The next moment, Pilgrim found himself inside the Free Market Inn and approaching the bar. He had never seen a building like this before…. Above the bar, a mammoth sized glass screen was split into sections; as if by magic, each filled with images of human forms moving to and fro against a background of buildings. They were pictures from a town…. Pilgrim experienced a shivery feeling that he might have some dim remembrance of some of these scenes. But so much had changed. So much was new.

(‘The Road to Corbyn’ by Rob Donovan, 2016, pp. 22-23).

Mike has been a classroom teacher for 17 years and currently teaches at a K-12 non-government boys’ school, the same school where Helen teaches. We first met five years prior to our interviews through our mutual involvement in an action research community for educators and since then we have chatted on occasion about our respective journeys through post-graduate study. When a colleague passed on my call for participants to Mike, he was more than happy to help out a fellow researcher.

Mike initially described a graphic novel as a “visual representation of an existing text” but on reflection acknowledged that such a definition would preclude original graphic novels. He adhered to his description, however, stating, “As an English teacher you’re generally using graphic novels to supplement a written text or novel.” Just as his description of a graphic novel was tied to existent prose texts, so too was Mike’s
decision as to whether graphic novels could be considered as literature. Said Mike, “A graphic novel adaptation of Moby Dick I would consider literature because it’s an adaptation, but if it was just a stand-alone series, then probably not. It depends on what the subject matter is.”

In his description of the difference between comic books and graphic novels, Mike recognised “similar elements” that characterise both formats but noted that the former “is generally a self-contained text” and the latter, “a chapter in a larger story.” He also acknowledged that a graphic novel can be “more sophisticated in the explicit ideas that it’s representing.” Asked whether making the distinction between comic books and graphic novels was important in the classroom, Mike replied that use of the term “graphic novel” in an educational context is probably seen as “more valid.” While he personally felt “the comic book form is certainly a valid text,” he remarked that comic books are sometimes viewed in the same negative light in which film was considered some twenty years earlier upon its introduction into the English classroom. “What we classify as a text develops and changes,” he noted, “and it takes people who aren’t involved in education, but think they know a lot about it, a bit more time to catch up.”

Although Mike confessed that his limited professional experience with graphic novels consisted of some “pretty scarce” reading to enhance his basic knowledge, his positive childhood experiences at home and school with graphic novels such as Tintin and Asterix made Mike “very comfortable with the visual form.” He noted, however, that the nature of graphic novels, which he continues to read for pleasure, has changed to “be a lot darker… like a film noir… [with] more of an aesthetic, or a mood.” He added, “As their audience becomes more aware of the form, they’re playing more and more with people’s assumptions and subverting things.”

Mike was aware that using graphic novels in the English curriculum could “satisfy a range of criteria” and noted their particular potential to expose students to a different and possibly unfamiliar textual form, develop visual literacy, underpin discussion about the appropriation of texts, and highlight the influence of context on a text. He also indicated that his school is always looking for ways to engage students in English, which is “traditionally not a subject they seem to enjoy or understand” and, in that regard, suggested “graphic novels work really well with boys.”

The unit of work developed by Mike was based on the graphic novel adaptation of Charlie Higson’s (2008) novel, Silverfin. While the rest of Year 9 used the word text
of the same novel, Mike chose the graphic novel because “the boys respond to the visual form”, and “it’s something a little bit different, something maybe unique.” He felt that for the boys in his Scholars\textsuperscript{19} class “it’s something that in some ways might challenge them in ways they haven’t been challenged before…. To talk about text in a visual form is a really sophisticated way of responding.” As well, said Mike, students would be encouraged to consider the appeal of visual texts in the twenty-first century. “It’s pretty sophisticated for kids in Year 9 to be doing that,” he suggested, “and it extends them, which is part of the goal.”

In relation to his use of graphic novels in the classroom, Mike might be described as a cautious pilgrim, one with a passion for the journey, but one who can also see potential hazards on the road ahead. He was mindful, for example, of the dangers in teaching something for which one has a passion: “It’s a fair bet that the kids won’t share that passion and you’ll walk away disappointed.” Nevertheless, Mike was willing to take that risk, given “you don’t always get the opportunity to teach something that you enjoy.”

Mike also had some concerns about moving beyond the use of traditional classroom texts such as novels and film. Employing a football metaphor, he noted, “We’re cautious these days. We try and play it safe because we don’t want to kick the bomb\textsuperscript{20} out. Particularly in an “A” class, if the kids don’t get the marks they’re anticipating, you certainly hear about it. But I guess ultimately, I was confident that they were equipped with the ability, or the skills, to do it reasonably well.”

Mike’s confidence in his students’ abilities did not assuage the discomfort he felt regarding the assessing of his students’ work by colleagues who had not used the graphic novel. He noted, “I was a little bit concerned, because they’re cross-marked through the department, that there’d be some teachers who might look at a kid who’s writing about a graphic novel and \textit{Moby Dick}\textsuperscript{21}, and think that it had less validity than the actual \textit{Moby Dick} itself. I said to my Head Teacher: ‘I don't want these kids to be disadvantaged because they’ve written about graphic novels when they’ve been told to.’ I thought that some teachers might think it was less rigorous than maybe something else

\textsuperscript{19} The Scholars class comprises the 25 or so boys who have achieved the highest results in English in the previous year.
\textsuperscript{20} In Australian Rules Football, a bomb is a high strategic kick towards the goal posts, made with the intention that a player on the same side will catch the ball and then be given a “free” kick. If the ball is kicked over the boundary line on the full, however, the kicking side loses possession of the ball.
\textsuperscript{21} Students studied \textit{Silverfin} and one other graphic novel of their own choosing. \textit{Moby Dick} was one of the graphic novels selected by students.
they’d taught. We have teachers of all different ages and all different backgrounds, and all different perspectives, and some would see graphic novels as a bit lightweight.”

Despite his concerns, Mike was pleased with his students’ response to, and performance in, the graphic novel unit. He remarked that “the responses were overwhelmingly positive. It went really, really well. It added another layer of sophistication and complexity into their study [and] it was really exciting to see these guys getting really excited about their graphic novels… You can tell in their writing they enjoyed it, and that’s not something you see all the time. We’ve just had our assessment and the results were outstanding.” As well, Mike noted that the use of a non-traditional text “allowed some kids to shine more than others, and not necessarily the ones you anticipated as being the high flyers.”

And what of Mike’s own response to the unit? In a culturally diverse and academically driven class, Mike found that the graphic novel study provided “a way in” to his students’ interests, and allowed him to get to know them a little better. In regard to teaching the graphic novel, however, Mike admitted that, despite his previous experience with the format, there had been some challenges. He noted, “As an English teacher you’re quite comfortable with the language that you use to talk about film, but not as confident with the metalanguage of graphic novels. I found there’s a lot of visual techniques of the form that I wasn’t as accomplished with as I would have been if we were talking about film.” He noted also, the need “to do more research and be better prepared,” particularly when teaching the “top-end class.”
Andy’s Tale

Without desires, attachment, or any particular agenda or itinerary,
With no selfish concerns, simply roaming freely from place to place
For the sake of others, benefitting impartially those to be trained
This is the way of the very best type of pilgrim.
(The Three Types of Pilgrim by Kathok Situ Chokyi Gyatso, 2006)

Andy is a classroom teacher with some three years’ experience. He teaches, along with another participant, Rob, at the school where I also worked when I gathered my data; a non-government Anglican boys’ school for Years K-9 and co-educational for Years 10-12. Andy was so keen to be a participant in my study that he confessed to bringing a “cheat sheet” to our first interview to help him respond to my questions. By the end of our second interview, it was clear that Andy’s enthusiasm to participate was partly a product of his desire to talk about his teaching, an activity that he valued, but felt was hindered by organisational structures and priorities.

While the majority of contemporary pilgrims choose freely to make their journey (Frey, 1998), Andy’s experience with graphic novels was not of his own choosing: “I just teach what I’m told.” It would be inaccurate, however, to describe Andy as an involuntary traveller journeying in the manner of the “medieval penitential pilgrimage” (Frey, p. 59). Instead, Andy positioned himself as someone who does not personally engage well with graphic novels, but through recognition of their value for others, was prepared to undertake the graphic novel journey in his classroom and take it in a fully committed manner. Andy might best be described, therefore, as a “cause pilgrim” (Frey, p. 42). According to Gyatso (2006), a cause pilgrim is the “best type of
pilgrim” in that they travel for the betterment of those in their care and to advance a cause.

As a child, Andy liked to watch *anime*, Japanese animated films that are closely tied to *manga* (Japanese comics) in regard to their subject matter and artistic style. When it came to reading, however, other than engaging with some manga during high school, Andy confined himself largely to word novels, which he felt would assist him in his love of writing. Visual texts, noted Andy, “didn’t really impress me that much because they didn’t seem to have any relevance.”

As Andy got older, his preference for prose texts continued and was strengthened by his struggle with the reading conventions of comics. He remarked, “As someone who likes engrossing myself and getting lost in the word, graphic novels can really frustrate me because you have to keep jumping about and your eye has to keep moving from bubble to bubble to get the whole story…. I’m always thinking about the next move and can’t just fully immerse myself.” That said, Andy recognised that his students did not necessarily share his feelings towards graphic novels: “The opposite is true for many students because they find it difficult to actually read. They find a page of text really confronting. And that’s where they stop and get lost, whereas [in the graphic novel] they can just follow the images and get through that straight away.”

Andy’s familiarity with anime and manga provided him with a solid foundation for teaching with graphic novels, as did his experience of teaching the graphic novel version of *The Hobbit* (Tolkien & Wenzel, 2001) in the previous year. He recognised, however, that the comics texts that he had been exposed to in his childhood and adolescent years were different from the graphic novels he was now using in the classroom: “It’s only as I matured and got into teaching that I appreciated the difference between the two text types, the comic versus the graphic novel.” While both are predominantly visual mediums and share codes and conventions, Andy commented that “the main difference between a graphic novel and a comic is the depth of the graphic novel.”

The language used by Andy to discuss graphic novels indicated he was well versed in the codes and conventions of graphic novels. He was also able to describe with confidence the differences between graphic novels and other sequential art media such as picture books and film. Referring to the differences between film and graphic novels, for example, Andy noted, “film doesn’t give you the time to process, your director is setting the pace.” When comparing picture books and graphic novels, he
pointed out that the sequences of images on a graphic novel page compared to “one image per page” of a picture book provided a “progression of the narrative” and that picture books are more heavily reliant on the word narrative. In graphic novels, said Andy, “the story is told largely through the actions and thoughts of the characters.”

Andy’s understanding of graphic novels was largely self-driven and individually acquired through conversations with the course coordinator and from online sources. He noted that most available professional development for the middle school (Years 7 – 9) tends to be focused on traditional areas of literacy and grammar and, for the senior school, on final examination topics. Time and financial constraints, said Andy, meant teachers have to make choices that are often driven by the need to ensure senior students’ results are maximised.

While teaching the graphic novel, Andy was never in a position where he felt unsure of what to do or in need of help from his colleagues. That said, he did remark that he would like to communicate more with colleagues about graphic novels, but “it gets busy and you don’t really have the time to sit down and chat about things, which is a shame.” The only “chatting” about graphic novels that Andy had managed was when setting the unit assessment task, with all other attempts to discuss teaching strategies during weekly staff meetings being hijacked by administrative matters.

Andy’s experience the previous year with graphic novels had taught him the importance for students to have the metalanguage through which to discuss the format. While he found most of his students were motivated by, and “conversant” with, comic books, he felt they lacked the language to articulate their meaning. “It’s internalised, but they can’t then make it external…. They know it, they just need the words to express it.” Andy had therefore adjusted his teaching strategies from the previous year accordingly to focus more on the codes and conventions of graphic novels with his current students.

It was clear to Andy that teaching with graphic novels had the potential to be a double-edged sword. Although he recognised the value in students becoming “discerning viewers” able to appreciate the choices that are made in visuals mediums and how meanings are represented through visual images, he was concerned there was a certain danger in taking something from students’ lifeworlds and mandating it for study. He noted, “I almost don’t want them to think objectively because it can often ruin the experience.”
Although Andy indicated that both he and his students enjoyed the graphic novel unit, he had anticipated a little more enthusiasm from the latter. He attributed this to interruptions throughout the unit by “get-to-know-you camps and what not,” that tend to populate the Year 7 timetable and by a shortening of the unit that meant “you only had time to go down one path and not [have] too many digressions” into activities that might extend students’ thinking. Andy not only wanted to extend the unit in the future, but was keen to consider the use of graphic novels as a core text in the senior years “by virtue of the fact there’s so many levels of analysis that you can have with the visual and the text.” He voiced a concern, however, that he would not be comfortable teaching them at the senior level with his current level of knowledge and understanding.

**David’s Tale**

![David’s Tale Image](image)

Here is the road: the light comes and goes then returns again.
Be gentle with your fellow travelers as they move through the world of stone and stars whirling with you yet every one alone.
The road waits.
Do not ask questions but when it invites you to dance at daybreak, say yes.
Each step is the journey; a single note the song.
*Here is the Road* by Arlene Gay Levine, 2014. Reprinted with permission)
David is a classroom teacher at an all-girls non-government school for Years 7 to 12. A colleague who had seen my call for participants recommended David as a participant. When we met for our first interview he was preparing to teach a graphic novel unit for the fourth time, this time using Marjane Satrapi’s (2004) Persepolis with a Year 10 mixed-ability class.

In the description of his journey to become an English teacher, David indicated that he had trodden a different path to that of his colleagues, some of whom “came into the world big hungry readers.” Instead, he noted, “I just loved to read comics when I was a kid … I learned to love reading as a result of reading comics…. I didn’t learn to love reading books until probably I was sixteen.” While David expressed envy towards those who had an early love of books, he also saw a positive side to his late start, “because I do know what it’s like to be in a classroom and not be enjoying the book … when someone really is struggling, I do know what that’s like.” The fact that David repeated this sentiment a number of times in our interviews led me to view David as an empathetic pilgrim: one who walked in the shoes of others and understood the challenges they faced on their journey.

Despite a strong start in life with comics, David felt his childhood experience was not “terribly profound” in influencing his teaching with graphic novels. He noted, “It was just something I enjoyed when I was a kid [and] it’s been a long time since I looked at them in any other way.” He further described his early reading of comic books as “passive” and elaborated that he had never been explicitly taught how to read them at school, university or in his teacher training. David also indicated that his reading of comic books dropped off in late high school, and that he had read only two graphic novels in the past five years, and that was “because I had to teach them.”

Although David’s personal association with the comics medium had waned and he was mandated to teach the graphic novel unit, he acknowledged that “it’s something that I can understand has a great value nonetheless.” He considered the value of working with graphic novels as being primarily twofold; they addressed his school’s philosophy to expose students to a range of literature and they have the potential to engage students who are “very much into the visual experience.”

David’s discussion of graphic novels as a means to expose students to a variety of texts was focused on their potential to facilitate visual literacy. He noted, “Much of the information [students] come across will be visual, so it’s really important that they are critically conscious of how to evaluate text and read it, understand what it’s doing to
them, and how they’re being positioned to feel. It’s absolutely vital.” The use of
graphic novels to address this purpose, noted David, was relatively recent and based
upon the improved quality of the format. He remarked, “The ideas that are being
dispelled, they’re not naïve, they’re quite complex and often sophisticated.” He also
added that graphic novels have “gravitas” and “a density to them” that render them “a
rich text.”

David described a graphic novel as “normally” being “an extended non-fiction
[sic] piece that primarily uses visuals to provide its narrative form.” He noted also the
importance of describing graphic novels as literature, which, from his perspective,
included any text that was “consciously and artfully constructed.” By maintaining a
definition of literature that was “elastic and broad” and “postmodern,” David felt he
avoided being “elitist or exclusive.” He also felt it gave him flexibility in the choice of
texts he could teach and allowed him to “engage with an awful lot of students.”

In addition to his desire to “engage students in a way that they haven’t otherwise
been engaged,” David noted the value of teaching a text that enabled students “who
might have remained silent” to find their voice. Studying the graphic novel, he
remarked, “gives them the opportunity to hold the spotlight for a while, and because
they’re talking about something that they have a passion for, they often articulate
themselves with a great deal of vibrancy.”

David began the graphic novel unit with an introduction to the metalanguage of
the format. Noting that students are faced with “a new type of language” and there are
“unique ways of deconstructing the text,” he drew on his past classroom experiences to
suggest that “even those perhaps who read them for pleasure, don’t know that there’s
terms that they should be looking to explore in the critical evaluation of them.” A grasp
of the metalanguage of graphic novels, noted David, “empowers you to make a valid
and meaningful criticism of the way the text is working and how you’ve been able to
draw ideas from it.”

While David recognised the significance of empowering his students with the
metalanguage of graphic novels, ironically it was an area in which he felt relatively
powerless. He described his experience of teaching the graphic novel as a “relatively
new” and foreign experience, noting, “it’s not part of my reading pattern, it’s not part of
my world at all [and] it’s not necessarily something I go looking for.” He continued,
“It’s in my DNA to go into a class and to teach a Shakespearean play, or to teach an
Austen novel … but when it comes to the graphic novel, I can’t call on my suite of ideas that I would normally have…. There’s a degree of trepidation that comes with it.”

Despite identifying himself as “the one with the L-Plate22 on who still doesn’t know if they’re doing it quite right” and “the dumbest guy in the class” in regard to understanding graphic novels, David was “enjoying the experience nonetheless.” He was happy to defer to his students for guidance and noted that, “I don’t really believe that I’m the source of knowledge in the room, but a conduit to bounce ideas through and around, and help them come to some sort of understanding.”

Further to having to rely on his students, David described how he “felt his way” through the unit by relying on the resources that he and his colleagues shared “on the hop … when you happen to be getting a coffee at the right time.” He had not attended, nor knew of, any professional development events specifically on graphic novels and had not looked for supporting documents at the NSW Board of Studies’ website, which he described generally as “not particularly helpful.” He also indicated that he would really like the opportunity to talk with other teachers about graphic novels, because “for a lot of us, it’s outside our experience and we need to be led.”

In a final reflection on teaching the graphic novel, David remarked that he “liked teaching it a good deal,” but felt neither confident nor comfortable in doing so. To remedy the situation, he suggested that the issue is not the paucity of professional development, but more a matter of “me making sure I’m a little bit more on top of my work when I come to it.”

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, the metaphorical representation of participants as pilgrims and their experiences with graphic novels as a pilgrimage was introduced and teased open. Within this context, the participants were introduced and their individual experiences with graphic novels in both their lifeworld and professional worlds were illuminated.

In the following two chapters, the essential themes of the participants’ experiences of teaching with graphic novels are further explored through the echo of the pilgrimage, and in particular, the pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago23—The Way of St James. By fusing the participants’ voices and my interpretation of them with literary texts and with research-related literature and research, the lived experience of the phenomenon, teaching with graphic novels is reflected on and revealed. The discussion

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22 An L-Plate is attached to a car to indicate that the driver is learning to drive under supervision.
23 Translated from Spanish, the Camino means track, path or way (Oxford Online Dictionary, 2017).
in Chapter Eight, *Signs of the Pilgrim*, explores the participants’ state of preparedness to introduce graphic novels as texts into their classrooms. In Chapter Nine, *Reality of the Road*, the notion of the participants’ experiences as being foreign is considered, as are the high and low points of the participants’ journey with graphic novels.

Structurally, Chapters Eight and Nine begin with metaphorical narratives I have crafted to bring forth the commonalities of the participants’ experiences with graphic novels as classroom texts. I have included myself in the narratives to highlight my presence in the research and to emphasise that my understanding of the participants’ experiences was co-created with them. Furthermore, my visibility in the narratives is to acknowledge my own pilgrimage in the undertaking of this research study.

The voices of participants have been included in both the body of the text and in the accompanying side panels. The side panels do not replicate the content of the body of text, a technique employed at times in scholarly writing to emphasise a point. Rather, the use of panelled comments echoes the synergetic relationship between words and image in comics texts whereby both elements offer different meaning to the reader and must, therefore, be read together to optimise understanding.
The scallop shell. The backpack. The boots and walking staff. The pilgrims certainly looked the part as they gathered nervously beneath the massive stone blocks of the old town gate. Boots kicked at loose pebbles and water supplies were double-checked, and checked again, as the pilgrims prepared to take their first steps on the Camino de Santiago—The Way of St James. Those steps for the intrepid travellers would be the first of many, one million, in fact.24

Nine pilgrims comprised the assembled company of sundry folk; three travelled alone, while the remainder comprised three pairs of friends. They had come by various routes and modes of transport to Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, the small, picturesque French town marking the start of the Camino Frances, the most popular of the pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela. Thinking about the pilgrims’ various points of departure reminded me that there is no single route denoting the Camino de Santiago. Over centuries of the pilgrimage’s history various “ways” or “caminos” to the supposed burial place of St James, an apostle of Jesus, were established and the

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24 Koontz (2013) estimates that to walk the some 800 kilometres of the Camino de Santiago takes approximately one million steps.
Camino Frances was but one. To “walk the Camino,” therefore, is more a reference to an experience than to a line on a map.

Just twelve hours earlier, the search for a place to sleep had brought me into the company of the pilgrims at the local albergue, one of the many hostels on the Camino operated exclusively for pilgrims. I was also nervous as I prepared for a pilgrimage of my own. I had an end-goal in mind, but was not entirely sure as to how I might reach it. Hoping for some support, I headed to the common room of the albergue and the company of others who were itching to get started on The Way. Here, in the absence of conversation-suppressing technology, we shared introductions and a little of the life that had brought us to the Camino.

Despite varied backgrounds and experiences, my nine companions had common reasons for their impending pilgrimage. The pilgrims were all desirous of treading new ground, of leaving behind their everyday routines to seek a more challenging and rewarding way of life. Beyond that, they were also walking for others with whom they shared their lives back home. Having placed their faith in reports from those who had gone before, the pilgrims considered this trip worthwhile in order to enhance the lives of colleagues and those within their care.

As we talked, one of the group sat, head bent, threading a scallop shell onto a string necklace. I soon noticed others attaching similar shells to hats and backpacks. As a novice pilgrim unfamiliar with the purpose of their task, I asked about the significance of the shell. “The scallop shell is the symbol of the Camino. You’ll see it everywhere. Lots of pilgrims will be wearing it and you’ll also see the shell symbol on markers that will show you the way,” replied one of the group. He added, “Wearing the shell has been a Christian tradition since the ninth century, when pilgrims collected the shells from the Galician coast as evidence of their visit to the tomb of St James in Santiago de Compostela.” Yet another pilgrim contributed more about the significance of the scallop shell: “If you want to go back even further in time, some say the scallop shell is associated with ancient pagan fertility and death rites, and that pre-Christian pilgrims travelled to Finisterre to worship the equinox. If you continue your pilgrimage past Santiago to Finisterre you’ll notice how the scallop shell resembles the rays of the sun as it sinks over the horizon.”

25 Finisterre lies some 80 kilometres west of Santiago. In Roman times, Finisterre was thought to be the westernmost point on the Iberian Peninsula and marked the end of the known world. The name Finisterre derives from the Latin, finis terrae, meaning, “end of the earth.”
As another pilgrim offered a more pragmatic perspective on the scallop shell by way of describing its practical purposes in Medieval times when it was carried to scoop water from the streams and to eat from, I couldn’t help but be impressed that these pilgrims had done some significant research on their forthcoming journey. To this point, however, the pilgrims’ historical knowledge failed to account for the reverence with which some seemed to treat the shells. It was not until a pilgrim who had been sitting quietly listening to the exchange spoke up that I finally began to understand. “I guess when you wear the shell you can choose to believe any of these explanations, but I think it represents more than just a tradition or a tool of convenience. For me the scallop shell is a badge of honour and lets the world know I am a pilgrim committed to this journey and I am prepared to be challenged to achieve something that I believe in. So, when I hang that shell around my neck tomorrow, it will be a symbol and constant reminder of why I am here.” After a short reflective silence, heads nodded as each of us appeared to recall their personal reasons for making the journey. Since I was also here for a specific and special reason, I made a mental note to purchase a shell first thing next morning on my way to the Pilgrim’s Office where I would pick up my credential, the pilgrim’s passport that becomes one’s “proof of pilgrimage.”

As quiet reflection eased slowly into talk about next morning’s early start, one of the pilgrims rose tentatively from her chair to announce that she needed advice. “This is the first time I’ve ever done anything like this, I’d never even heard of the Camino until a few weeks ago when a friend convinced me to give it a go. She told me it would change my life. So, while I’m excited to be here, I’m not sure I’m prepared for the road ahead. Some of you have done this before and seem so confident. How do I know whether I’ve packed the right stuff? What if I’m not ready? What if I’ve forgotten something? I really didn’t get much support from too many people at home, so I’m just not sure what to expect.”

A considered reply came from the same pilgrim who had spoken earlier of the personal significance of the scallop shell. “Look, there’s some risk for all of us in what we’re doing. I know I’ve lost a few friends because they think I’m absolutely crazy to leave the comfort and security of a nine to five job to pursue something I really believe in, but I’m sure the outcome will be worth it.” He then slung his backpack onto the table and emptied its contents. Sweeping his hand across the display of clothing, sleeping bag, ear plugs, journal, a large camera, and very necessary medical kit, he announced, “This represents my previous experience, advice from friends and a good
deal of research that I did before coming here. Some of these things are essential items that we probably all have, but we’ll also have packed some things that are different. That’s because we are different. What’s in my backpack is who I am. I’ve got a camera because photography is my passion. Maybe you’ve got something special that represents your unique interests and experiences.”

“I wouldn’t worry too much about what you might have forgotten,” added another pilgrim. “I feel a bit the same as you, but if you don’t have something you need you’ll be able to get it along the way. I’ve been told the locals are very supportive of those wearing the scallop shell and the Camino is a place where you soon learn to trust others and lean on them for help.” As an afterthought, he added, “Speaking of support, I hope you’ve got sturdy boots and a good walking staff to help you on the steep and uneven sections. I hear they can be tough going. And if you have your phone with you I suggest you turn it off and put it at the bottom of your backpack. Who wants a constant companion that’s going to remind you of how things are done at home? You need to put that life aside for a bit and be passionate about the here and now.”

As the albergue curfew of 10.00pm approached and with concerns seemingly addressed, we drew our jackets tight and headed to our bunks. Before dispersing, however, we agreed that despite some common bonds we would remain with our original plans to do the Way, our way. We would take slightly different routes and walk to Santiago de Compostela at their own pace. We did agree, however, that since winter was approaching and pilgrims on the road might be scarce, we would at least set out together and be confident in the knowledge that while our steps would soon diverge, we would remain united in spirit on the long, challenging, and often lonely, journey ahead. We would be walking alone, but together.

Introduction

The visible and iconic signs of the Camino pilgrim—the scallop shell, backpack, boots and walking staff—provide insight into the life of their wearer. The scallop shell denotes the pilgrim’s spiritual, but not necessarily religious, commitment to the journey and provides a constant reminder to the wearer of their reason for being on the Camino. Meanwhile, the contents of the pilgrim’s backpack provide a window into the knowledge, skills, and experience that the pilgrim brings to the journey. Completing the appearance of the typical pilgrim are the boots and walking staff that offer physical support and reassurance on a journey that, at times, can be physically and emotionally difficult. In the ensuing discussion, these signs of the pilgrim are employed to support
and extend consideration of the following essential themes of teachers’ experiences with graphic novels: *In anticipation, Some don’t understand,* and *Going it alone.*

**The Scallop Shell**

The scallop shell serves as a badge of honour for those walking the Camino. It announces to others and reminds the wearer of the pilgrim’s commitment to a purpose; their reason for making the pilgrimage (Bennett, 2013; Conrad, 2004; Frey, 1998). Within this metaphorical context, consideration is given here to the participants’ reasons for making their pedagogical journey with graphic novels and their attitudes to the forthcoming journey.

Frey (1998) notes a variety of reasons that individuals give for embarking on the Camino pilgrimage. For some, the purpose of their journey is personal; the long and often difficult walk to Santiago de Compostela providing an opportunity for reflection and to “find oneself.” Others make the journey to break free of their everyday experiences in order to seek something new and challenging or to improve their physical state of health. Yet others look beyond self to follow an altruistic path, walking not for themselves, but on behalf of those unable to make the journey or for those who will benefit from their endeavours. Amongst my participants similar reasons underpinned their approach to their forthcoming graphic novel unit.

In Medieval times, some pilgrims were forced by ecclesiastical and legal authorities to walk the Camino for penance (Rudolph, 2004). While none of my participants were being forced to teach with graphic novels to attain atonement, the majority of them were “involuntary” pilgrims; the graphic novel unit of work being a mandate within their departmental teaching programs.

Unlike their Medieval involuntary counterparts, however, my six involuntary pilgrims shared a strong professional interest in graphic novels as texts and were excited by the opportunity to take the graphic novel journey; there was no apparent hesitancy or reticence. To the contrary, Rob, noted that “it’s probably one of the things I’m looking forward to the most about teaching Year 7 this year.”

For Helen, Kate, and Mike the decision to teach with graphic novels was a voluntary one. Kate and Helen held positions as Heads of Department, while Mike was a teacher within Helen’s department. Reflecting the autonomy at the time provided by the *NSW English Syllabus* (BOS, 2003) in regard to teachers’ selection of texts to be studied (Piccolo, 2009), all three participants indicated a relative freedom to teach what

“I was cool about having to teach them. This was interesting and exciting.”

(Lisa)
they wanted. For Kate and Mike, both of whom had a lifeworld background with comics, their familiarity with comics was a guiding factor in choosing a graphic novel as a classroom text. They both also noted the appeal of graphic novels to “hook” boys into learning as a factor of influence in their decision. Kate and Mike’s use of graphic novels to engage boys in their learning provides an example of what Reichert and Hawley (2010) refer to as a “transitive” factor (p. xxi); transitivity being defined by the researchers as “the capacity of some element in a lesson … to arouse and hold student attention in a way that leads to understanding and mastery” (p. xxi). The inclusion of transitive elements in classroom pedagogy, note Reichert and Hawley, is essential to address the “periodic eruptions of concerns that boys are not thriving in school” (p. xvii). More specifically, given the finding that boys’ performance in reading achievement worldwide continues to be of concern (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2016), the potential of comics to serve as a transitive element by way of their appeal to boys should not be overlooked by teachers (Australian Centre for Youth Literature, 2000; Booth, 2002; Newkirk, 2002; OECD, 2002; Sanford & Madill, 2007; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). To illustrate, in their study of boys and reading, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) concluded that, “The intense importance of the visual as [the boys] engaged with all forms of text was evident, and we believe it cannot be undersold” (p. 152). Similarly, in my own research into the use of graphic novels to engage boys in school reading (Laycock, 2007), the findings clearly highlighted graphic novels as an effective transitive factor to enhance boys’ behavioural, cognitive, and affective engagement in their learning in the English classroom.

Helen’s reason for choosing a graphic novel was focused on her need to be pedagogically open to change. Although having limited experience of the format, she indicated, “I need to be open to any sort of strategy, any sort of idea.” Helen’s comment that she thought herself “unusual in that way,” suggests she viewed herself as standing apart from most English teachers by way of her preparedness to be innovative.

Whether engaging in the graphic novel experience by choice or mandate, a number of participants described personal gains to be made through the use of graphic novels as classroom texts. For those with a personal history of the comics medium, the upcoming journey proved an opportunity to bring a lifeworld interest into the classroom; an action they felt would enhance their

“You don’t always get the opportunity to teach something that you enjoy.”
(Mike)
enjoyment of teaching. These “experienced” pilgrims also described approaching the graphic novel unit with an elevated sense of confidence in their subject knowledge and skills. In particular, Early Career teachers Thomas and Lisa anticipated the integration of something familiar into their teaching would provide a rare moment of “knowing” amidst an otherwise long journey of pedagogical uncertainty.

Some participants also anticipated personal gain by using graphic novels to encourage students to “like” their subject and thereby advance the cause of English. By turning to students’ lifeworld texts, for example, Andy looked forward to extending his students’ understanding “that English is more than just the stereotypical big novel that they have to wade through.” Andy’s use of the term “wade,” a word which implies a laborious activity, suggests that the “stereotypical novel” detracts from students’ enjoyment of English. Not unrelated to their objective of having students engage with English was the opportunity seen by some participants to use graphic novels as a foundation for building positive relationships with their students.

A final foreseeable personal benefit to be gained from teaching with graphic novels was identified by Megan, another of the Early Career participants. Both she and her colleague, Lisa, were excited by the forthcoming graphic novel unit since for them a focus on multimodal texts represented the future direction of English. Hence, the forthcoming graphic novel unit provided them the opportunity to develop expertise that would prove invaluable.

Not all participants identified potential personal benefits to be gained from their graphic novel journey. They did all ascribe as one, however, loyalty and commitment to a higher purpose. Ewing and Smith (2001) suggest that the notion of altruistic service to others lies at the heart of teacher practice and it was this deep sense of purpose that emerged as a common thread in the participants’ descriptions of why they were keen to include graphic novels as classroom texts. Without exception, participants explicitly articulated a belief that teaching with graphic novels had the potential to enhance their students’ ability to walk with confidence and competence through a textual landscape in which images prevail as the point of reference for reading the world (Kress, 2003). They
acknowledged with one voice the visual nature of students’ lifeworlds and recognised the need for students to be able to both deconstruct and make meaning from visual texts and to be able to design their own. In particular, David and Megan, who very much described themselves as new to graphic novels, along with Andy who considered them “not his thing,” were keen to use the format in their classrooms because they recognised the potential benefits for their students. They were prepared to put others above self.

The requisite abilities for students to move seamlessly across the borders between the texts of school, home, and leisure are described by Comber (2005) as “literacies of currency” (p. 4). Recognising the need for teachers to facilitate such literacies, and echoing Siegel’s (2006) metaphorical call for teachers to expand students’ “semiotic toolkits,” Kate noted, “We would be doing a massive disservice to students if we weren’t giving them the toolbox to unpack the texts that they’re encountering constantly in their lives.” By taking ownership of the responsibility to provide the bridge between texts of the contemporary textual landscape and the multiliteracies students required to effectively engage with them, participants were enacting the assignation to teachers of the responsibility to foster a literate citizenry (Avgerinou, 2009; Freebody, 2003).

The participants’ commitment to facilitate the growth of students as informed and discerning managers of multimodal texts, particularly graphic novels, was manifest in their acknowledgement of a responsibility to frontload students with declarative knowledge on graphic novels. Such knowledge was provided by participants through overt instruction and then put to work by students to build functioning knowledge (Biggs, 2003; Wilhelm, 2005). Specifically, participants endorsed the well-supported call in the literature for the explicit teaching of a visual grammar or metalanguage (Callow 2013; Kress & van Leeuwin, 1996; Schirato & Webb, 2004) As Kress (2003) notes, whereas “the logic of speech – and by extension of writing – is that of time and sequence, and the logic of image is that of space, and of simultaneity” (p. 152). By extension, the language of prose texts is unsuitable as the means by which visual texts such as graphic novels are accessed.

Thomas conveyed the importance not only for students to have a language through which to articulate their understanding of visual texts, but also for someone to assist them develop that language, thereby highlighting the pivotal role of the teacher in

“*If they’re going to talk about graphic novels, they’re going to talk about them properly.*”

(Megan)
facilitating students’ multiliteracies. To illustrate his point, Thomas recalled his own childhood experience reading comic books and graphic novels and suggested that if there had been someone to help him understand their codes and conventions it would have challenged his thinking and, “I would have got that extra meaning that I didn’t otherwise get on my own.” Kate also acknowledge her role in meeting the need for students to be fluent in the metalanguage of graphic novels by noting, “I’m going to empower them in a much more explicit way.” The participants’ intentions to provide students with a comics or graphic novel metalanguage align with the broader findings by Callahan and Low (2004) that the “seemingly mundane exercise” (p. 52) of providing students with a vocabulary for exploring popular culture texts provides students with a language with which they can talk about the myriad texts they encounter in their everyday lives.

Only one participant did not identify a need to frontload students with a graphic novel metalanguage. Helen planned an organic approach in working with her high-ability class on Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice by intending to let her students “work it out for themselves.” She noted, however, that in a class of lesser ability, she would introduce students to the metalanguage of graphic novels to assist them to make meaning.

In addition to recognising an ethical responsibility to endow students with the knowledge and skills to navigate multimediated and multimodal texts, participants also articulated the need to acknowledge the lifeworld texts of their students in order to engage and motivate them. The educational literature abounds with research and comment on the importance of motivation and engagement for student learning (Biggs, 2003; Chapman, 2003; Cummins, 2011; Guthrie, 1996; Skinner & Belmont, 1993: Trowler, 2010). Essentially, but not withstanding the complex nature of learning, the literature suggests that students will learn effectively when teachers construct learning environments that align with desired learning outcomes and engage students (Biggs, 2003).

With particular reference to engaging students in literacy learning, Guthrie (1996) notes that students’ “involvement, curiosity, social interchange, emotional satisfaction, and self-efficacy” (p. 433) are developed through students’ ability to internalise, via interest in, literacy activities. As a case in point, David spent some time

“If they’re reading them and they’re enjoying them, then why aren’t we doing something about it?”
(Megan)
describing a previous experience with graphic novels as texts in which students who were disengaged by traditional texts flourished in the graphic novel classroom:

Kiddies who might have remained silent find they can have a voice because this is a medium that engages them in a whole new way. That’s really liberating for them, and it’s also liberating for the girls who otherwise might own the conversation because they’re good novel readers. All of a sudden, they have to defer to someone else who might know more than them. It’s good for the dynamic of the class. (David)

Several other participants anticipated that the use of graphic novels as texts would foster student interest and engagement in English by connecting students’ lifeworlds to their schoolworld. Their perspective echoes the findings in a study by Callahan and Low (2004) whereby the use of popular culture in the classroom provided a site for “genuine dialogue that holds potential for literacy learning” (p. 55). Thomas, however, added the caveat that teachers walk a delicate line when bringing popular culture texts into the classroom. He noted, “You don’t want to make English boring, but there’s a real danger in bringing in that element of popular culture that they can hook on. If we go too far and hammer it home too much, then they’ll end up hating it.” Lisa reinforced Thomas’ fear through her retelling of a joke posted on Facebook that highlights the reputation that English teachers have for the over-analysis of texts:

So, a student sees blue curtains and says, “Hmm, blue curtains.” An English teacher sees blue curtains and says, “The pathetic fallacy of the blue representing the protagonist’s melancholic state.”

Recognition by Thomas and Lisa that the inclusion of graphic novels can be a double-edged sword that can either engage or expunge students’ lifeworld interests through analysis or dissection of the format was also endorsed by other participants. Andy noted, “I almost don’t want them to think objectively because it can ruin the experience.” In considering the risks of bringing graphic novels into the classroom, participants echoed the sentiments of student participants in Callahan and Low’s (2004) study, one of whom compared the classroom analysis of hip-hop music to the act of revealing the secret behind a magic trick, thereby destroying any enjoyment of the experience.

Similar to their counterparts on the Camino, the participants’ reasons for donning the scallop shell, whether through mandate or choice, highlight that the journey
was being taken for varied reasons that were by no means mutually exclusive. In “walking for self” some participants endorsed the notion that by using graphic novels in the classroom there was “something in it for me.” Anticipated benefits included the participants’ heightened sense of enjoyment in their teaching, enhanced confidence with their subject’s content, an opportunity to prepare for the anticipated future of their subject, or an opportunity to build relationships with the students in their care. In terms of “walking for others,” all participants declared that they were embarking on a journey with graphic novels to address the interests of their students and to enhance their lives by helping them to develop the knowledge and skills to understand, manipulate and create the multimodal and multimediated texts that they encounter daily in the 21st century textual landscape.

The Backpack

A pilgrim’s backpack symbolises “the metaphorical baggage that one carries in life” (Frey, 1998, p. 80) and, by extension, shapes the nature of the journey on which it will be carried. It follows, that my “emptying” and exposure of the contents of my participants’ backpacks in terms of their attitudes, intentions, knowledge and previous professional and personal experiences regarding graphic novels will enhance understanding of those experiences.

The notion of “metaphorical baggage” aligns with Duro’s (2007) concept of anticipatory memory, wherein a traveller’s existent knowledge, attitudes and previous experiences combine with future hopes and intentions to shape the experience of places yet to be visited. From a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective, the notions of “metaphorical baggage” and “anticipatory memory” encapsulate the Heideggerian concept of Dasein, or being-in-the-world, whereby Dasein “means not being here instead of over there, but is the possibility, the condition, of being here and being over there” (Heidegger in Duro, 2007, p. 95). That is, in going from here to there, it is unlikely that the “here” can be completely left behind.

De Botton (2002) provides further comment on the incomplete separation of “here” and “there” by reminding us that when travelling, the oft-ignored continuity between home and destination renders it impossible to sustain living in the moment without the uninvited intrusions of unfinished business or a “quasi-permanent concern for the future” (p.23). Departure from our everyday experiences when we travel, therefore, is at best incomplete; there is always some reminder of our everyday lives that captures our thoughts.
The notion that we cannot act without intervention from our past is illustrated in Coelho’s (1992) account of his pilgrimage on the Camino, whereupon he encountered a gypsy who offered to find the sword that Coelho was seeking. Coelho notes, “If he could find my sword for me, it would save an enormous amount of time, and I could return immediately to my friends and my business in Brazil; they were always on my mind” (pp. 23-24). In a similar example of “there” being “here,” Bennett (2013) highlights the intrusion of home into his pilgrimage on the Camino by way of describing his attempt to secure a business deal online amidst the cacophony of washing machines and shouting pilgrims in the albergue laundry, the sole access point to the Wi-Fi.

The idea of anticipatory memory sits comfortably with the concept of teacher mindset, defined here as the “assumptions and expectations we have for ourselves and others that guide our teaching practices and our interactions with students, parents and colleagues” (Goldstein and Brooks, 2007, p.3). Just as “home” shapes the traveller’s and pilgrim’s experience, “it is impossible for [teachers] to separate out who we are from what we do: we bring our beliefs and our already acquired knowing and understanding to our practice” (Ewing and Smith, 2001, p. 16). Simply stated, “We teach who we are” (Palmer, 2007, para. 4). The exploration of the mindsets of this study’s participants, therefore, assists us to make meaning of their pedagogical experiences with graphic novels as classroom texts.

Despite considerable diversity in the participants’ personal and professional experiences with graphic novels, with the exception of David and Helen, they alluded to a sound working knowledge of the format. This included Megan, who had described graphic novels as unfamiliar territory when she was first given a mandate to develop a unit of work around them, but had since worked hard to acquire what she considered were the requisite knowledge and skills. As the participants’ knowledge of graphic novels was unpacked during my pre-journey interview with them, however, some of their descriptions suggested they held a relatively superficial understanding of the format.

In a number of instances, participants struggled to find the words with which to define graphic novels or to talk about the comics metalanguage. Instead they clutched at non-descript words and phrases such as, “you know,” “whatever,” and, “that sort of thing,” or left sentences hanging in the air for want of the appropriate language to complete them. On other occasions, and providing an example of the intrusion of
“home,” participants fell back on more familiar filmic terms to talk about graphic novels when lacking the appropriate graphic novel nomenclature.

When the participants were asked how they might define graphic novels to their students, they mirrored the lack of agreement in the literature regarding the terminology with which to both define a graphic novel and to describe the format as an entity. (Carter, 2008; Fletcher-Spear, Jenson-Benjamin & Copeland, 2005; Groensteen, 2006; Wolk, 2007).

Although the participants’ descriptions loosely aligned, they varied in the granular detail. At a basic level, all described a graphic novel as an extended narrative that combines images and words, while some went on to describe the primacy of images over the words. Others used the particular codes of the comics metalanguage, such as panels, gutters, speech balloons, and motion lines, to expand their definitions.

Reflecting the imprecise use of the term “graphic novel” throughout the literature (Carter, 2007; Wolk, 2007), most participants suggested that the “novel” in “graphic novel” is a misnomer because the format is inclusive of both fiction and nonfiction narratives. Furthermore, two participants noted that graphic novels might not be originally written as complete stories, but instead be an anthology of serialised comic books.

Two participants offered alternative perspectives on the definition of a graphic novel that suggest the influence of their background experience. David, whose experience with graphic novels had focused on *Maus* (Spiegelman, 1997) and *Persepolis* (Satrapi, 2004), both of which might be described as memoirs focused on particular historical periods, defined them as being “primarily non-fiction.” Mike, on the other hand, suggested that a graphic novel was “a visual representation of an existing text.” After a pause for reflection, however, he added that such a definition would preclude texts “purely written as graphic novels.” He then contextualised his comment by adding that “as an English teacher you’re generally using graphic novels to supplement a written novel.” Both David and Mike’s definitions of a graphic novel bear witness to the comment by comics artist Eddie Campbell (2006), which is redolent of a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective, that we define things relative to where we stand:

“A graphic novel is a complete narrative ... a combination of text and image in a longer form.”
(Kate)

“It’s not just a regular comic book ... it’s appealing to more mature ideas and audiences.”
(Thomas)
A thing is what it is. When persons argue about what to call it, what they are really talking about is their relationship to it. For instance, Person A: is he a friend or an enemy? Obviously there is no absolute answer; it depends on where you’re standing (Campbell, 2006, para. 1).

Despite some variation in the details of their definitions of a graphic novel, all participants identified the difference between a graphic novel and a comic book in terms of length, completeness of narrative, and intellectual weight. Although Megan admitted to only recently coming into this knowledge, she provided the most detailed description of this perceived difference:

Mostly in length I suppose. The graphic novel is a novel, whereas a comic feels as though it’s a pulp fiction sort of thing. You know, it’s a couple of pages, it’s a magazine, it’s printed in smaller chronicles. But I suppose, put all together, you could make a graphic novel like the Watchmen or something. I think it was initially little periodicals.

(Megan)

What appeared more important to participants than the technical differences between a graphic novel and a comic book was the difference in the integrity of the two formats; the graphic novel being a more complex and sophisticated text and subsequently attracting a different audience. Kate spoke at some length about the higher level of variation in the presentation of panels and gutters on a page in the graphic novel and noted the “beauty of the design” and their coverage of “issues that are quite serious-minded.” Participants also indicated the heightened potential of the extended and complete narrative arc in graphic novels to facilitate students’ understanding of traditional literary techniques, such as characterisation, plot development, appropriation and the influence of context.

In making the distinction between comic books and graphic novels, participants implicitly acknowledged the deliberate intention by comics creator Will Eisner to popularise the term “graphic novel” so as to distinguish his work, A contract with God and other stories, from what he considered its less sophisticated comic book antecedents (Fingeroth, 2008). Helen perceived comic books as “lower” literature, while most other participants felt that their colleagues and even some students might see

“The ideas that are dispelled, they’re not naïve. They’re quite complex and sophisticated.” (David)

“It’s not just a regular comic book…. It’s a text with more mature ideas that’s appealing to mature audiences.” (Thomas)
comics in the same light. As a result, participants felt others would be less likely to endorse the study of graphic novels if the term “comic book” was used to describe a classroom text. So strong was the influence of others’ attitudes to graphic novels that the participants were adamant that they would always use the term “graphic novel” over “comic book” to preserve the integrity of the format and to promote graphic novels to their students as legitimate literature.

The lack of clarity in the participants’ definitions and descriptions of graphic novels carried over to their descriptions of graphic novels as a literary grouping. David, for example, used the term “medium,” while the other participants, with the exception of Kate and Thomas, described graphic novels as a “genre.” Thomas was at somewhat of a loss as to how to describe them, while Kate was the only participant who employed the term, “format,” which is the term favoured in this study and one strongly advocated for in the literature (Carter, 2007; Wolk, 2007). Kate admitted her preference for the term stemmed from hearing me argue for its use in a graphic novel workshop I had given for English teachers.

In regard to whether graphic novels qualify as “literature,” a notion not without scholarly challenge (Chute, 2008), participants agreed that graphic novels generally warrant recognition as such, given their sophistication and complexity, and their potential to deal with significant issues. In ascribing literary status to the format, participants focused their definitions of “literature” on the quality of text construction across a range of media, rather than on the notion of membership to the traditional Western canon of prose texts. David suggested that by adopting an “elastic” rather than “elitist” view of literature, he was able to bring a broader range of text types into the classroom and engage a wider range of students. He noted further, that if he were to take a more “archaic” view of literature, “I’d disconnect a lot of people.”

While all participants committed to broad notions of literature, some imposed qualifiers on their inclusion of graphic novels under that umbrella. Helen noted, for example, “You can have trash novels, and you can have trash graphic novels.” In making this claim, Helen reinforced Fountain’s (2004)
comment that “in any medium there are the good, the bad, and those useful for wrapping fish and chips” (p. 37). While Helen’s statement implies that she considers “good” graphic novels as literature, her additional remark that “the canon still shapes my view of really good literature and modern novels,” and her admission that this view might seem “elitist,” suggested Helen’s notion of literature is a hierarchical one. In a similar vein, Mike also referenced his notion of graphic novels as literature against traditional prose texts and commented that he would label graphic novel adaptations of word novels as literature, but would not necessarily label stand-alone graphic novels as such: “It depends on their subject matter.”

With regard to the reasons why participants endorsed the use of graphic novels as classroom texts in English, they described them as being attractive and valuable for teaching and learning in terms of their improved quality, range and availability, academic integrity, versatility to address a range of curriculum outcomes, and ability as popular culture texts to motivate and engage students, especially boys. More specifically, in terms of the potential of graphic novels to meet subject learning outcomes, Thomas described how the graphic novel *Maus* (Spiegelman, 1997) might be used:

Outcome one, students compose their own texts. Students respond to texts with meaning and substance and variety and depth. So, looking at a graphic novel and saying “What makes this work and how does it make you feel?” If we’re doing *Maus*, “What makes this evocative and emotional and such an impacting text for students to be able to respond?” Also, outcomes that relate to the regular kind of text things, like character development, like structural conventions and form and meaning, and things like that.... So I think it can be embedded deeply into outcomes from the NSW Syllabus if you make those connections and if you’re willing to. (Thomas)

Other participants built on Thomas’ description by noting the importance of having students put all that they have learned about the visual and verbal affordances of graphic novels into practice through the creation of their own graphic novels.

While participants recognised that other visual texts such as film and picture books also held potential to facilitate the development of multiliteracies in students and to meet learning outcomes, it was the “unique” and “different” nature of graphic novels that prompted participants to perceive them as texts of significance. In this respect, they
endorsed Crutcher’s (2011) argument that through their multimodality, diversity of genres, and iconic characterisation, graphic novels “can provide unique complexity not found in prose-based novels or traditional films, and therefore deserve critical and scholarly attention” (p. 69). In a similar vein, Beavis (2013c) suggests that through the combination of visual and verbal modes, graphic novels offer “rich and complex narratives, managing sequence, space and time in ways that require significantly different forms of ‘reading’ than do primarily verbal forms, such as the novel” (p. 1). In this study, to illustrate the affordances of graphic novels, David noted how the study of Persepolis (Satrapi, 2004) would offer students another representation of historical events alongside those of writers and filmmakers and provide them with “a whole suite of techniques to explore things that they otherwise wouldn’t be doing because it’s such a unique kind of text.”

Consideration of the participants’ preparations for their classroom journey with graphic novels extended beyond the technical aspects of what they knew about graphic novels to include how they felt about their impending journey. To this end, all but one participant described feeling anxious about their forthcoming classroom experience. Reasons offered by participants for their concern included having insufficient time to study graphic novels in depth, lack of knowledge about the codes and conventions of graphic novels, and frustrations caused by the attitudes of others who were implicated in the journey ahead.

The feelings of anxiety expressed by participants placed them in a position of vulnerability and endorse suggestions in the literature that teaching with graphic novels brings with it an element of risk (Bakis, 2012; Callahan, 2009; Clark, 2013a; Carter, 2009; Lapp et al., 2012; Schmidt, 2011). Just as the participants in the study by Callahan and Low (2004) embraced the “risky business of teaching popular culture” (p. 52), however, so too did my participants display a willingness to journey into unfamiliar territory rather than avoid teaching something they recognised as valuable.

Also evident in the participants’ descriptions of their concerns for the road ahead was a sense of frustration and disappointment at the attitudes of some who were potentially implicated in their graphic novel experience. While no participants spoke of the outright rejection of graphic novels by any stakeholder, a concern regarding anticipated apathy from certain quarters clearly emerged. Both Kate and Thomas...
suggested that at the institutional and programmatic levels, the absence of any explicit
mention of graphic novels in syllabus and support
documents was indicative of the apathy of educational
authorities towards use of graphic novels as classroom
texts. At a broader level, and redolent of the discussion
earlier in my reflection on the literature, several
participants flagged concerns regarding the negative attitude accorded graphic novels by
the media and general public.

Hansen (2012) suggests that not only can teachers also be potential critics of
graphic novel use in the classroom, but that they are possibly “the most difficult [group] to overcome” (p. 61). In making this claim, Hansen refers not so much to those ignorant
of the format who might simply need information about the value of graphic novels to
be won over, but rather to those who “view graphic novels as the handmaidens to ‘real’
or ‘good’ literature” (p. 61). While no participants described their colleagues as being
specifically patronising in their attitude to graphic novels, some did express concern that
there were those with whom they worked that did not share their enthusiasm and respect
for the format. Kate identified the “silence” of her colleagues as an indicator of
ambivalence, while Megan also detected ambivalence in her colleagues through their
recognition of the graphic novel as “just another book on the pile” (Megan) that they
needed to teach.

Despite the proliferation of suggestions throughout the literature that graphic
novels are part of students’ lifeworld interests,
participants also raised concerns that their students might
not be familiar with the format, or might not consider
them valid texts for study. In doing so, they reinforced a
similar, but rarely expressed, concern in the literature (Connors, 2010; Hansen, 2012;
Romagnoli, 2013). Megan’s comment that “I think that they won’t take them seriously,
and say, ‘Oh this is a comic and there’s nothing to be gained from these,’” echoed
Connors’ (2010) suggestion that the stigma surrounding
the comics medium might be sufficient to render the more
able students less likely to value graphic novels as texts
with gravitas. Both Megan and Lisa expected some
resistance to the introduction of graphic novels into their
classrooms where students are selected on the basis of

“There’s a perception in the community that comic books and graphic novels are a little bit, kind of, dumbed down.” (Thomas)

The kids aren’t going to value it because we’re not devoting enough time to it (Megan).

“Academically selective kids generally value written texts and classics. They think everything else is, kind of, pulp fiction and not to be appreciated.” (Megan)
academic merit and are very results-driven. They predicted that the school’s emphasis on testing and assessment, which in English is focused on traditional prose texts, would prompt some students to discount graphic novels as classroom texts worthy of consideration.

The “contents” of the participants’ backpacks suggest their strong commitment to the inclusion of graphic novels as literature for classroom study. Although most participants described a lack of familiarity with the nuances of graphic novels, all demonstrated a respect for the format and a sound understanding of the potential value of graphic novels as unique and engaging multimodal texts through which to facilitate the development of students’ multiliteracies. Despite the position of vulnerability participants felt they would be placed in through their lack of familiarity with the codes and conventions of graphic novels and the negative or ambivalent perceptions of graphic novels by some elements of the pedagogical circles within which they moved, the participants were strongly committed to move beyond what Callahan and Low (2004) describe as “the comfortable structures and hierarchies of the classroom” (p. 55). In making this commitment, participants indicated a willingness to take risks and to be innovative; their concerns tempered by opportunities to both engage students and extend their learning, and to build positive classroom relationships with those in their care.

**Boots and Walking Staff**

In Medieval times a wooden staff or walking stick served primarily as a pilgrim’s defence against robbers, wild dogs and wolves (Conrad, 2004; Frey, 1998). While many contemporary pilgrims continue the tradition of carrying a staff and might call on it to fend off the occasional Spanish dog, a more significant function, like a good pair of walking boots, is to provide the pilgrim with support on a journey over what might prove difficult terrain (Frey, 1998).

Just as contemporary pilgrims on the Camino are relatively self-reliant in sourcing boots and a walking staff that suit their purpose, so too were the participants in this study primarily reliant on their own initiative to prepare for their graphic novel experience in the classroom. In the relative absence of support from their pre-service training, curriculum and associated support documents, or professional development opportunities offered by educational authorities, participants instead relied on more locally sourced support. Such support came from fellow practitioners vis-à-vis the participants’ professional association for English teachers, “significant others” such as teacher librarians, and self-sourced online resources.
The degree to which participants sought support varied considerably across participants. At one end of the needs-spectrum, Helen indicated, “I never really set out to inform myself properly about the graphic novel” and felt that her thoughts about graphic novels were “accurate.” Similarly, Andy described being happy to rely on his own efforts. At the other end of the spectrum, however, Megan was desperate for help, noting, “I need all the resources I can get.” Between these two extremes, the other participants described active efforts to seek support in terms of both resources to expand their understanding of graphic novels per se, and effective strategies through which graphic novels could be implemented as classroom texts.

Megan indicated that she been to a few professional development sessions where people talked about the “why” of graphic novels, but what she needed now were practical examples of how teachers and students might create their own comics texts. Megan’s practical need is concomitant with the findings of a study into secondary English teachers’ responses to curriculum change whereby “the main focus of [teachers’] activity was to find ready-to-teach resources and new assessment tasks done by others” (O’Sullivan, Carroll and Cavanaugh, 2008, p.177).

Participant descriptions of the support they acquired in readiness for their graphic novel unit indicated a lack of formally organised professional development focused on graphic novels at both the pre-service and in-service stages of their teaching careers. As might be expected, participants who began their teaching careers prior to the evolution of an extended view of literacy in the 1990s had engaged in pre-service training that primarily focused on traditional notions of literacy and literature. Helen, with over thirty years teaching experience, noted that no visual texts such as picture books or film, let alone graphic novels, were included in her training. David (22 years’ experience), Kate (20 years’ experience), Rob (18 years’ experience), and Mike (17 years’ experience) also described teacher training devoid of graphic novels. David and Rob noted the very limited inclusion of visual texts in their training by way of picture books and film and noted that teaching film at that time was considered “somewhat avant garde” (David).

It was somewhat surprising however, to find that two of the three Early Career teachers who had undergone their pre-service training since the “visual turn” of the twenty-first century also lacked exposure in their training to the use of graphic novels as classroom texts. Megan had no idea what a graphic novel was until faced with the...
prospect of introducing the format into her classroom, while Lisa struggled to recall anything but a passing mention of graphic novels in just one university tutorial.

Thomas stood out as the only participant for whom pre-service training provided genuine support for his forthcoming graphic novel journey. He described at length how his university lecturer had modelled the potential use of graphic novels to investigate contemporary and contentious issues, such as race relations in Australia. He recalled how this had “re-awakened” the interest in graphic novels he had during his teenage years, but which he lost during years of tertiary study dominated by prose texts. He explained how this renewed interest, however, was different to his lifeworld interest in that he was now focused on the use of graphic novels as teaching tools and his thoughts revolved around questions such as, “I’d like to see what the research says. Is it beneficial? How can I use this?”

Given the offer in the *English: Years 7-10 Syllabus* (BOS, 2003), albeit a somewhat vaguely shaped one, for the inclusion of multimodal texts, it is not unreasonable to assume that professional development and support focused on graphic novel pedagogy would be provided by the governing educational body in the state. This assumption is backed by research that highlights a need to support teachers engaging in innovative pedagogy (Lankshear, Green & Snyder, 2000). Such professional development might include “opportunities to learn, to participate with ownership, to reflect, and to enhance their professional identities through customized, relevant and timely support” (O’Sullivan, Carroll, & Cavanaugh, 2008), p. 179). Like those in the study by O’Sullivan et al. into teachers’ discourses and responses to new syllabi, however, the participants in this study were strongly critical of the lack of support provided at the institutional level for the teaching of graphic novels.

According to Piccolo (2009), English teachers in NSW are strongly influenced in their choice of classroom texts by curriculum documents. The participants in this study, however, described the syllabus and support documents as being of next-to-no value in influencing their decision to teach with graphic novels or in assisting them to prepare for the implementation of graphic novels

“I went to the library and they had a whole stack of graphic novels in the Curriculum section, and that’s when I had this re-awakening.” (Thomas)

“The NSW syllabus talks about visual literacy and visual texts, so there’s always room to have graphic novels.” (Lisa)

“The support documents aren’t engaging with something necessarily that is seen as flimsy.” (Kate)
into their classrooms. Helen was particularly scathing of the syllabus support documents, stating, “I wouldn’t even look for them.... I find those documents do the opposite of what they’re intended to do. They constrain, they jumble; they constrain and are bureaucratic.” David expressed a similar sentiment, stating, “I find the Board of Studies website not particularly helpful and those support documents are not particularly enlightening.” Furthermore, Kate commented that the low priority given visual texts was problematic in policy documents that continue to privilege print. She noted that visual texts are listed “as just one of many [texts] and if you look at what the ‘many’ are they’re primarily written fiction and non-fiction, and length is seen as a benchmark.” Thomas was also frustrated at the absence of anything related to graphic novels in the support documents offered by the Board of Studies. He felt the absence of mention was indicative of “how they’re valued to a certain extent” and how it created a “self-perpetuating issue” whereby a lack of resources means teachers are not encouraged to use graphic novels and so no resources are devoted to it, and so the cycle continues.

If face-to-face opportunities organised by educational authorities were available in regard to graphic novel pedagogy, most participants were either unaware or unable to access them. Several participants spoke of the pressure placed on them to attend professional development that was geared towards improving senior students’ performance in exams. Andy also suggested that professional development events aimed at the junior years “tend to be based around literacy and grammar as opposed to visual grammar.” Those events that did focus on visual literacy, noted Rob, tended to be non-inclusive of graphic novels. Some participants also mentioned that even when professional development opportunities focused on graphic novels were offered, constraints of time and timing in the year thwarted their ability to attend.

Research suggests that customised and practically-focused professional development delivered by fellow practitioners though professional subject associations is more valued by teachers than the support offered through syllabus documents and associated support material (O’Sullivan, Carroll & Cavanaugh, 2008). In this study, this research finding held true. To compensate for the construed failure of curriculum documents and institutionally organised professional development opportunities to meet their graphic novel needs in the lead up to the graphic novel unit, participants instead turned for help to more local sources. A number of participants referred to useful
articles on graphic novels in their professional association’s journal, while three participants had attended graphic novel workshops organized by the English Teachers’ Association of NSW. Megan provided some insight into the value of such local support when I asked her how she would define a graphic novel and she laughingly responded, “I would go back and flip through my notes from the ETA Day and write down exactly what you said.”

For teachers implementing changes to their pedagogy, the research suggests that in-school resources are viewed “considerably more authoritative than externally produced resources” (Albright & Knezevic, 2013, p. 111). To this end, Helen, Rob, Andy and Kate referenced their teacher librarians as a source of support in terms of providing graphic novel resources, while Andy, Mike, and Megan noted the support and encouragement provided by their respective heads of department. Most participants anticipated support from their departmental colleagues, but indicated that the pressure of time and the resultant need to be focused on the “here and now” meant collegial support within their departmental group was more likely to occur once the graphic novel unit of work was underway in the classroom.

The participants’ primary source of support during the preparatory stage of their graphic novel units is epitomised in Thomas’ comment that “more and more of the professional dialogue is happening in online forums, and Twitter, and Facebook…. Graphic novels are feeding really well into that.” While most participants mentioned accessing graphic novel resources and teaching strategies from the Internet, Kate’s description of the different types of resources that she accessed provides insight into the benefits of balancing the personal and professional dimensions of teaching:

There’s two quite distinct sources of information on the Net. One is the chat group–passionate fanzine kind of people who write whatever, but often have something interesting. Then there’s a more academic tone to some papers, and research that’s been undertaken…. I quite like balancing the two. You remember why you like them in the first place

“There’s a lot of good stuff [online] on deconstructing a graphic novel, empowering students with a glossary of terms and looking at the different ‘ins’ to a graphic novel.”

(Kate)

Reference to a workshop I gave at a professional development even organised by the English Teachers’ Association of New South Wales.
through the fanzine, and then you see why you’re really doing this for student learning. I quite like getting empowered from different sources.

In summary, the support with which participants stood on the brink of their classroom experiences with graphic novels was very much individually acquired rather than gained through pre-service training, curriculum documents, or formal professional development activities. Notwithstanding the difficulty of finding time to attend formal professional development events within the constraints of a crowded and assessment driven curriculum, the professional development activities themselves provided few opportunities for participants to further their knowledge and skills in regard to the use of graphic novels as classroom texts. Consequently, participants turned for support to individually tailored resources, primarily accessed online and at the point of need. This contextualized nature of professional support aligns strongly with the broader research findings regarding teachers’ acquisition of knowledge and skills when implementing pedagogical changes (O’Sullivan, Carroll & Cavanaugh, 2008; Connors, 2011; Albright & Knezevic, 2013).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the preparatory stages of the experience of teaching with graphic novels were explored via consideration of the participants’ personal and professional circumstances as they prepared to undertake their journey with graphic novels as classroom texts. Framed by the metaphor, “signs of the pilgrim,” the discussion focused on the participants’ rationale for teaching with graphic novels and the mindset with which teachers approached their classroom experiences with the format. Consideration was also given to the preparations made by teachers for the forthcoming journey graphic novel unit in terms of the support obtained prior to departure. Of note was the participants’ general feeling of commitment to the teaching of graphic novels as texts, which held strong in the face of them feeling relatively unsupported by institutional agencies and initiatives. While those participants who declared some knowledge of graphic novels approached the unit with confidence, others who lacked lifeworld experience with comics approached the unit feeling hesitant and somewhat vulnerable. Not to be deterred, however, they sought and found some comfort in locally produced resources and in their own efforts to ready themselves for their journeys.

In the following chapter, “Reality of the Road,” the participants’ experiences as they implemented graphic novels into their classrooms are explored and illuminated. In
particular, attention is afforded the foreign nature of teaching with graphic novels and the challenges and celebrations that characterise the phenomenon.
Feelings were mixed as the pilgrims took their first steps on the Way of St James. Those who had prepared well or had made the journey before were excited and stepped out with confidence to take the lead. Others for whom the journey was their first, or who had visited before under different circumstances, smiled the same excitement as those out front, but trod more tentatively while attempting to ignore niggling concerns that they were ill-prepared for the road ahead.

As the first of the 780 kilometres to Santiago fell away beneath the pilgrims’ tread and walking began to inflict its toll on body and spirit, those leading the group dropped back to join the more hesitant travellers. “It’s much harder than I thought,” gasped Thomas, who was fast coming to realise that childhood holidays to the region had failed to provide him with the finer details of the landscape he now traversed. On those occasions, he recalled, he had come to play and had little desire to mix with the locals or to enhance his understanding of the customs and traditions of his playground. He’d felt safe and sure of himself then, his parents making all the decisions for him and the comfort of home lying just an arm’s length away in a suitcase filled with his most familiar and favourite toys.

The first day of the Camino is perhaps the hardest; a steep climb of 1200 metres combining with the burden of a backpack that seemingly increases in weight with every
step. Over a much-appreciated break in which the first blisters were seen to and bodies fed and watered, we set our eyes on the horizon and reflected on the journey so far. Some pilgrims recalled experiences similar to those described earlier by Thomas when they had been here before, but under different circumstances. Others added that the landscape itself had changed from what they remembered and the memory maps created through their childhood experiences would be of little use in steering them through the complexities and sophistication of this new and unfamiliar landscape.

Even those who had visited the area recently felt a little uneasy in their current surroundings, a reflection of the new and different purpose for their visit. “Last time I was here,” said Andy, “I travelled this road by bus with a whole bunch of other people. I remember we were rushed from church to church by an umbrella-waving tour guide who gave us no time to explore and who kept telling us that we needed to hurry if we were to catch the smorgasbord back at the hotel. I’m sorry now that I went for that quick and easy option, because I got back home knowing little more about the place than when I started. That’s why I’ve decided to walk this time, to take my time and talk to the locals, to eat at the local cafes, and to stay at the albergue. It’s the only way I’ll get to understand and appreciate this journey.”

With laces tied, bread and cheese back in our packs, we agreed it was time to continue at our own pace. We each nursed different reasons for being on the Camino and, while feeling comfortable and safe walking with the group, we all felt it time to pursue our own goals. It would be some weeks and thousands of footsteps later that we would meet again in Santiago de Compostela...

..... It was the cacophony of bells and high-pitched voices of excited pilgrims waiting for the beginning of the Pilgrim Mass in the Santiago de Compostela Cathedral that signalled I had reached the end of The Way. Searching for the faces of those whom I’d met on that first night in St Jean Pied de Port, I cast my eyes over the pulsing throng and finally spotted Thomas within the sea of weary yet enlightened faces. I waved my walking staff frantically and, having finally gained his attention, agreed through much pointing, waving and shouting, to meet after the Mass. To my surprise and delight, it was Thomas plus several others with whom I’d taken those first steps that waited on the Cathedral steps an hour later.

It seemed appropriate that we share our Camino experiences over a coffee, for it had been coffee that had pushed us towards our first step each day on the Camino and it was “coffee opportunities” that provided us with our daily waypoints. As we sipped
and chatted, we were reminded also that it was unplanned conversations over coffee that had been a major source of support for us all, whether it be through the sharing of small tips such as how to deal with the inevitable blister, or through discussions that prompted some serious soul-searching.

As people are prone to do, the pilgrims' early words focused on the hardships of the journey: the uncontrollable intrusions from home that required them to hurry and stick to the main path, the pressure and frustration of being left largely to fend for themselves, and the challenges to their confidence as they met the occasional unfriendly local and realised the inadequacies of their preparation for the journey. Always the optimist, however, it was Thomas who brought the conversation back to the delights and discoveries of the pilgrim experience. He reminded us that between the hard times, there had been many days of sunshine that had warmed us as we walked. Almost in unison, the pilgrims' faces lit up as they reflected on the benefits of leaving home to make their journey, albeit for a short time only. They confirmed enthusiastically that their pre-pilgrimage hopes that the experience would be a valuable one had been realised and that their various goals had not only been achieved, but in most cases, surpassed.

The pilgrims described to varying degrees how their sense of being occasionally lost in an unfamiliar landscape had been a cause of both frustration and celebration. Faced with the challenges of where to go and not having the right equipment to get there, they learned to “let go” and place their trust in those around them who had the knowledge and skills to guide them. Some confessed to feeling invigorated and empowered by their journey and described the changes in lifestyle that would be made when they arrived back home, while others described finding friendship in the most unexpected places. Given the seeming success of their journeys, it was not surprising to hear that all participants longed to walk the pilgrim trail again. They recognised, however, that it could never be the same experience, the knowledge and skills acquired on this journey having equipped them with the confidence to make extended and more nuanced explorations of the landscape in the future.

Introduction

The serious modern traveller about to set off for some strange and unknown place expects to prepare for his travels by the careful study of maps and the consultation of a number of easily available guidebooks. Normally he also has a reasonable amount of practical information about
the problems of long-distance travel in general and of his destination in particular. (Labarge, 1982, p. 1).

A few years ago, I was invited to visit South Africa to give a presentation on graphic novels. Immediately my head filled with the soulful sounds of gospel choirs and the images of wild game roaming the savannah that so often populate the brochures to entice the traveller. While these anticipated sounds and sights did become a reality, however, they turned out to be a small part of a much larger and very much unanticipated reality that was filled with experiences far less romantic than those imagined. There were the constant warnings that it was dangerous to venture out alone, the threats of harm after I photographed a gathering of chanting men in Soweto, women in the townships sweeping dirt floors in houses little bigger than my garage, people unconcernedly going about their day-to-day business while side-stepping around a lifeless body on the footpath, and a community “library” whose sparsely populated shelves stared at me like a toothless grin. The reality of my experience was very much a mismatch with my anticipation.

Like Labarge’s (1982) modern traveller, I had not journeyed to South Africa in total ignorance; I had researched my destination thoroughly and knew something of the visceral reality that might confront me. For whatever reason, however, I chose “to forget how much there is in the world besides what we anticipate” (De Botton, 2002, p. 13). As De Botton suggests, we build mental images of our destinations on the basis of what we might read, hear, or even taste, and then, in the manner of theatre-goers who suspend disbelief in order to immerse themselves in the reality of a performance, we avoid applying too logical a mind to those images. Moreover, in our search for something new and different we allow ourselves to be guided by innocence and optimism to imagine a simplified and selective version of our anticipated experience that gives it “a vividness and coherence that it may lack in the distracting woolliness of the present” (De Botton, p. 15). As I discovered first-hand, nothing can quite prepare the traveller for the reality of the road.

As was the case in my South African experience and is the case for many who tread the Camino (Frey, 1998; Rudolph, 2004), none of the participants in this study embarked on their graphic novel journey in ignorance. All had expectations and knowledge of the road ahead, albeit it not acquired through “easily available guidebooks” (Labarge, 1982, p. 1). Indeed, to have approached their graphic novel units of work in ignorance would have contravened the regulatory and ethical standards that
require Australian teachers to have knowledge of discipline content and an understanding of those to whom the content will be delivered (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2014). Even participants who lacked previous experience with graphic novels had the advice of colleagues and their own research efforts as a point of reference. Once embedded in the landscape of graphic novels, however, the everyday realities of the classroom intervened to pepper the participants’ anticipated experiences with unanticipated and unfamiliar situations, some of which manifest themselves as challenges, while others as cause for celebration.

In this chapter, the experience of teaching with graphic novels moves from the preparatory stage of the journey to the implementation stage and the essential themes identified in my thematic analysis are kneaded into the pilgrim metaphor. The Pilgrim’s Credential provides a description of the path taken by participants in their use of graphic novels as texts, a path that in some instances was forced by unanticipated challenges to differ from that intended. Within the discussion of Wet Days: Challenges from above and beyond the challenges encountered by participants that lay largely outside their control are called forth, while the discussion within Wild Dogs: Challenges from within is focused on the local challenges over which participants had greater agency. Sunshine and Surprises: Celebrations of the journey encapsulates the positive outcomes and unexpected discoveries made when participants remained firm in their faith to work around wet days and wild dogs to complete their graphic novel journeys. Finally, consideration is given to the theme that revealed itself as central to the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels, the notion of the phenomenon as a foreign experience.

While this study is focused on teaching with graphic novels rather than students’ learning with the format, this discussion is underpinned by the premise that the relationship between teachers’ experiences and students’ experiences is reciprocal and cyclical (Cummins, 2011; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Students’ experiences, therefore, significantly influence teachers’ experiences and vice versa. According to Skinner and Belmont, students’ affective, cognitive, and behavioural engagement are reflections of the way teachers’ pedagogy meets the needs of students in terms of providing structured and authentic learning opportunities and by the degree to which teachers connect with students on an interpersonal level. When teachers operate effectively in each of these domains, the benefits for students, which manifest as engagement, motivation, a sense of belonging, and the development of competency, in turn encourage teachers’
engagement in their pedagogy and promote within them a sense of wellbeing. The participants’ perceptions of their students’ experiences are thus an integral dimension of the participants’ experiences and have been considered here accordingly.

The Pilgrim’s Credential: The Path Taken

The credencial del peregrine, or credential of the pilgrim, functions as the pilgrim’s “passport”, the Spanish term peregrine deriving from the Latin word peregrinus, meaning, "coming from foreign parts" (Harper, 2017). The pilgrim’s credential identifies the genuine pilgrim by providing proof of passage to the authorities in Santiago de Compostela who issue the Compostela—the pilgrim’s certificate of achievement. As pilgrims journey along their chosen paths on the Camino, they collect stamps in the credential from authorised parties such as albergue or hotel owners. In the context of this study, the pilgrim’s credential symbolises the path taken by participants in terms of their pedagogical objectives and strategies in regard to the use of graphic novels as classroom texts.

In Medieval times, pilgrims travelled on paths that varied in width and importance, from narrow foot tracks connecting village to village, to broad Roman highways that accommodated the less adventurous and time-poor pilgrim. Importantly, the well-travelled highways offered the safety of numbers (Frey, 1998). The path taken by a pilgrim provided a good indication of a pilgrim’s purpose, predisposition, and the constraints imposed on their journey by external forces such as time. In a similar fashion, the path taken with graphic novels by participants in this study illuminated the aims and objectives of graphic novel use and signalled the parameters that dictated the path taken and length of the journey.

Anecdotal accounts from teachers, marketing brochures from publishers, and scholarly articles on the educational use of comics suggest the common path taken by teachers using graphic novels as texts is a narrow one, whereby graphic novels are used to supplement the use of traditional prose texts. More specifically, graphic novels are often touted as a crutch for students struggling with alphabetic literacy, a motivating agent for those disengaged from traditional literacy, or a stepping-stone to “legitimate” literature (Carter, 2007, Connors, 2010; Hansen, 2012; Jimenez & Myer, 2016). The popularity of using graphic novels in this manner is supported through research such as that by Lapp et al. (2012), whose findings indicated that elementary teachers “seemed to work from definitions that positioned graphic novels as tools that either motivate readers or are supplemental in character” (p. 31). Used thus, graphic novels serve as
handmaidens to traditional literature, a strategy that has the potential to detract from their use to facilitate higher-order knowledge and skills in students (Connors, 2010; Hansen, 2012).

In contrast to the relatively straightforward and supplemental road most travelled by teachers using graphic novels, participants in this study walked roads less travelled, which, while denying them the safety of more established and popular routes, empowered them to explore the landscape in more detail and to appreciate graphic novels as entities in themselves rather than as extensions of the texts traditionally studied. This is not to say that participants discounted the use of graphic novels to enhance the development of functional alphabetic literacy or potential to engage students. Megan, for example, described the replacement of the previous year’s unit of work, which rendered students “bored” and “disengaged,” with a graphic novel unit that would be “engaging, interactive, and also literacy-based.” Other participants recognised the need to engage students, especially boys, as the precursor to any attempt to develop and extend students’ multiliteracies. David and Helen both acknowledged the value of graphic novels to serve as a stepping-stone for struggling readers to prose texts, while Mike spoke of the power of graphic novels to provide students with access to texts, such as Shakespeare’s plays or the “classics,” that might otherwise lie beyond the literacy reach of students.

While participants acknowledged the benefit of using graphic novels to engage and motivate, such use was considered just a starting point. Before too long, participants stepped off the main highway onto more challenging paths that drew on the multimodal and polysemic nature of graphic novels to encourage the development in students of visual literacy through the analysis of graphic novel codes and conventions; critical literacy through consideration of the manner in which graphic novels are constructed; and cultural literacy through exploration of the context in which graphic novels are located, written, and read.

The participants’ choices of more challenging paths with graphic novels endorses claims in the literature that graphic novels are sophisticated and complex texts suitable for use across the entire spectrum of literacy expectations, interests and abilities to facilitate students’ visual, critical and cultural literacies (Beavis, 2013c; Carter, 2007; Connors, 2010; Crutcher, 2011; Downey, 2009; McTaggart, 2008; Sabeti, 2012). Furthermore, the participants’ use of graphic novels to facilitate students’ development of multiliteracies also addressed their responsibility as English teachers “to facilitate
students’ exposure to, interaction with, and examination and creation of multiple existing and possible text forms” (Carter, 2013a, p. 9). Within the context of the NSW English Years 7-10 Syllabus (BOS, 2003), this responsibility is encapsulated in the aim of English as a subject “to enable students to use, understand, appreciate, reflect on and enjoy the English language in a variety of texts and to shape meaning in ways that are imaginative, interpretive, critical and powerful” (p. 12).

The following vignettes describe the paths taken with graphic novels by participants. Of note is the repeated use of the texts *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*27 (Spiegelman, 1997) and *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*28 (Satrapi, 2004). These texts present deep and rich biographical and autobiographical accounts set within significant periods in contemporary history—the Holocaust and the Iranian Revolution respectively—and figure prominently in the literature as recommendations for academic study (Beavis, 2013b; Carter, 2007; Chute, 2006; Connors, 2012, 2013; Hassett & Schieble, 2007). In combination with a robust bank of available online and print resources, these texts provide a “safe” pilgrimage for teachers new to the use of graphic novels in the classroom.

Lisa and Megan’s chosen route with graphic novels focused on the graphic novel format per se with a view to having their Year 10 students build on the visual literacy knowledge and skills previously acquired through the study of picture books and film. Lisa noted the natural progression to the study of graphic novels in Year 10 that was encouraged through the syllabus: “[We do] film techniques in Years 7 and 8, visual literacy through static images in Year 9 … so it’s not completely out of nowhere.”

While Lisa and Megan acknowledged the importance of recognising their students’ needs and interests, their intention was to extend these experiences. When Lisa’s students requested that manga texts with which they were familiar be included in the unit, she indicated: “We don’t want to re-hash what you already do. We want you to use that knowledge, but be exposed to stuff that’s new.” In a comment that tied Lisa’s pedagogical intent to her own experience at school, she added, “The coolest part of English was finding books that I loved through into my adult life.”

In working towards their goal, Lisa and Megan hoped also to “validate graphic novels as a literary and narrative form” (Lisa). To this end, Megan felt that replicating the time spent looking at the structure and language of traditional novels on the

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27 Hereafter referred to as *Maus.*
28 Hereafter referred to as *Persepolis*
grammar of graphic novels would encourage students to see them as valid texts for study. Further to working with the more technical aspects of graphic novels, Lisa and Megan had students explore a range of concepts that included gender, race, and multiculturalism, to encourage them to develop the ability to engage in sophisticated analysis, evaluation and interpretation of visual texts.

To achieve their aims, Lisa and Megan spent a considerable portion of the unit working with students on the metalanguage of graphic novels. Echoing the research findings of Carter (2015) and Connors (2012), Lisa felt students were implicitly able to make meaning of graphic novels, but lacked a semiotic vocabulary through which to articulate such meaning. Providing time for students to read and explore their chosen graphic novels was also considered important by Lisa and Megan. The texts they introduced to their classrooms included *Maus* (Spiegelman, 1997), *Persepolis* (Satrapi, 2004), *Fungus the Bogeyman* (Briggs, 2012) *Coraline*, (Gaiman, 2002), *The Sacrifice* (Mutard, 2008) and *Rapunzel* (Peters & Timmins, 2009). While providing the opportunity for students to create their own graphic novels had been part of Lisa and Megan’s original itinerary, this part of the journey was not completed due to constraints of time.

The graphic novel units implemented by Rob and Andy in their Year 7 classes were also format studies, but with the addition of various elements of a traditional prose novel study. In doing so, the unit aims endorsed Hansen’s (2012) suggestion that visual representations of information provide an effective means to teach traditional literary devices. The path taken by Rob and Andy involved their students studying two graphic novels: J. R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* (Tolkien & Wenzel, 1991) and a graphic novel of the students’ choice. Students then compared the two texts with regard to the techniques used and the effectiveness of such. As in the case of Megan and Lisa, Andy and Rob’s units had a strong focus on assisting students to develop an understanding of the metalanguage of graphic novels. To complete the unit, students created their own graphic novel, albeit a very short one due to time constraints.

Kate’s teaching experience with graphic novels, like that of Lisa and Megan, also focused on having high-ability Year 10 students, most of whom had no previous experience with graphic novels, “understand the conventions, and then being able to apply those in their own creative way.” As the foundation for her multimodal approach,
Kate specifically chose the graphic novel *Maus* (Spiegelman, 1997) for its Holocaust themes, which provided a segue from her students’ previous study of prejudice in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1988). Through the study of *Maus*, Kate asked her students to consider the idea of prejudice on a mass scale and through a close panel-by-panel study of particular pages that modelled a multimodal approach to the text (see Hassett & Schieble, 2007) she had them explore how that idea could be represented through a particular format.

Kate noted, “I wanted to do something that really challenged the higher-order thinkers in my class, and to look at [the graphic novel] as a genuine literary form.”

Acknowledging that her students “understood visual literacy quite well, but were not familiar with things like the layout conventions of a graphic novel,” Kate devoted considerable time to work with students on their development of the graphic novel metalanguage.

Thomas was yet another participant who used *Maus* as the core text for his unit of work with a Year 8 mixed-ability class. In Thomas’ case, *Maus* was one of a suite of texts that included poetry and film, which was studied to explore the concept of war. Thomas described a number of activities focused on the graphic novel metalanguage that allowed students “to slowly break into the text.” In recognition of the cultural background of his students and their limited understanding and knowledge of the Holocaust, Thomas also spent time exploring the historical context of the text, “particularly in terms of the survivors’ experience and the wider Jewish context.” To this end, he took his students on an excursion to the Sydney Jewish Museum, an experience he described as leading to “rich discussions of characters, plot and the representation of war” during the study of the graphic novel.

The graphic novel *Silverfin* (Higson, 2010) chosen by Mike as a classroom text was also the focus of a concept study, the concept of “heroes and villains.” Students paired *Silverfin* with a graphic novel of their own choice to facilitate a comparative study. While the remainder of the Year 9 cohort in Mike’s school studied traditional prose texts to access the concept, Mike chose to use graphic novels on the grounds that they were more engaging and “brought the story to life.” Explaining his decision further, he deferred to the cultural diversity of his students and the opportunity that a graphic novel provided to spark their interest and provide him with a bridge to get to know them better. As well, Mike acknowledged the need for his high-ability students to

“It’s obviously dealing with a really sensitive, tragic era in history…. I couldn’t not explore that.” (Kate)
understand the contextual nature of representation in a text and noted that the graphic novel was “a really good way” to achieve that. He added, “It was an enjoyable way-in to really sophisticated deconstruction skills.” Echoing the pedagogical approach of other participants, Mike began his graphic novel journey with a discussion of the “technical language,” or metalanguage, of graphic novels.

David’s school followed the International Baccalaureate (IB) program of study rather than the state-endorsed curriculum for schools in New South Wales that was followed by all other participants in this study. As part of the IB’s Middle Years Program (MYP), which caters for students from 11 to 16 years of age, David used the graphic novel Persepolis (Satrapi, 2004) as one of several texts within a module of study entitled “Personal Challenge.” General questions posed to students within this module included: “How does the study of literature help enable debate about social and historical issues?” and “How does the genre of the graphic novel help a reader to see the world in new ways?” David’s students were also required to tell the story of a personal challenge of their own in graphic form.

The Personal Challenge module’s requirement to consider the notion of “human ingenuity” was addressed through consideration of how the author of Persepolis shaped the story and “how she showcases her ingenuity by choosing to tell it in graphic form rather than in print form” (David). David considered as vital the development of students’ understanding of the graphic novel metalanguage to empower students in what he described as “a whole new way to make a valid and meaningful criticism of the way the text is working” and to give students the ability and justification to use graphic novels as texts in their senior years. Given the serious and complex context of Persepolis, the Iranian Revolution of the 1980s, David spent considerable time with his students looking at the historical setting of the graphic novel.

Helen’s journey with graphic novels took place via an extension unit for her Year 8 Scholars class and differed somewhat to that of the other participants. Helen noted, “I have not actually set a graphic novel to study on the English curriculum. It’s there in incidental ways, but it’s not a set text that I make people do. I use the graphic novel unit for extension work. The unit’s a work in progress.” Although she acknowledged that she had adopted “a risk-taking style,” Helen indicated that her students “appreciated” her organic approach.
Helen chose Gareth Hind’s (2008) graphic adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* to not only support a study of the play as an “Introduction to Shakespeare,” but also to underpin an exploration of the concept of manhood. She noted, “I was looking at concepts and how different text types present those concepts or enriched your understanding.” Helen paired the graphic novel study with an examination of the play and film versions of *The Merchant of Venice*, labelling the graphic novel as “the bridge in the middle”; a metaphor also used by Yang (2008) to describe the location of graphic novels as the link between the media we watch and the media we read. By having students create their own performances of the play’s trial scene, Helen hoped to encourage her students to consider different representations of the play. To enhance this approach and further students’ cultural understanding, Helen enlisted the support of a teacher librarian, who assisted students to research the historical context of the play.

Through an approach that she described as being “prescriptive” and “unique,” Helen chose not to frontload her students with a graphic novel metalanguage, preferring instead to leave initial meaning-making entirely in the hands of her students by having them read the graphic novel by themselves before considering the text together as a class. In their first pass of the graphic novel, Helen also asked students to only read the images and not the words to encourage development of the students’ analysis of characters. By asking students to focus solely on the images, Helen believed greater attention would be paid to the characters’ appearance, body language and relationships with others. She noted that reading body language “has a real application to life.”

Helen’s approach to the graphic novel stands in contrast to the recurring emphasis in the literature on the synergy of word and image in graphic novels and the proposition that “you cannot remove the words or images or the shapes from a piece of visual language without destroying or radically diminishing the meaning a reader can obtain from it” (Horn, 1999, p. 27).

Helen’s pilgrimage route, whereby students were immersed in the text and told to go it alone, along with Lisa’s dilemma as to when was the right time to introduce students to a graphic novel metalanguage, reflect alternative perspectives in the literature on the degree of frontloading that should be given to students when working with multimodal texts and comics in particular (Carter, 2015; Gillenwater, 2012). Although Carter is supportive in theory of the constructivist approach wherein students

“I like them to discover those things for themselves.” (Helen)
build their own knowledge of a comics metalanguage, he is also emphatic that immersion in comics texts will lack depth if students are not adequately equipped through overt instruction with the appropriate knowledge and skills to make meaning of graphic novels, analyse them critically, and create them.

In Mathews’ (2011) study of pre-service teachers’ attitudes to graphic novels as texts, participants with previous graphic novel experience leant on that experience to shape the way in which graphic novels were considered as classroom texts. In a similar fashion, the background experiences of the participants in this study was reflected in their practice with graphic novels. While Mathew’s participants focused on the influence of politics and morality on the way in which they would use graphic novels, however, my participants described the influence of personal interests and pre-service training on their approach to the graphic novel unit. Lisa, for example, attributed her focus on metalanguage and her metacognitive approach to her background in communication and semiotics. Her colleague Megan referenced her background in history by including in her lessons McCloud’s (1993) notion that the history of modern comics can be found in ancient Mayan and Egyptian friezes and through her suggestion that examining the history of comics is “a way to understanding; it’s fascinating.” David also attributed his approach in the classroom to an interest in history: “I quite like history, so I find these novels fascinating. I always start with the history of the period and then we work our way into the ways that it’s been represented.” Furthermore, in describing his emphasis on the critical analysis of *Maus*, Thomas reflected:

“Too much perhaps? But that’s where my strengths are and you’ve got to play to your strengths. Another teacher would approach this from a really great angle, but I was concerned with, ‘Why has the author done this?’ ‘What’s the effect on the reader?’ and ‘How does it make you feel?’ You know, all those analytical and critical focuses. That’s how I’ve been trained [and] that’s how I tended to teach it, for better or worse.” (Thomas)

In summary, the varied pilgrimage routes taken by participants reflect the complexity of the pedagogical decisions that teachers make in their classrooms. The participants in this study weighed consideration of school, syllabus, and departmental requirements against the individual needs of students and against their own experience,
knowledge and skills. As will be evident in the following discussion, this juggling act presented a number of challenges for participants, some of which lay within their control, others beyond it.

**Wet Days: Challenges from Above and Beyond**

Weather on the Camino can be unpredictable, extreme, dangerous, and, at times, deadly. Blinding rain, freezing cold, and sweltering heat plague pilgrims at various times and threaten to spoil or end the journey of those who come unprepared or who lack the flexibility to adapt to conditions beyond their control. Like pilgrims exposed to the vagaries of Camino weather, this study’s participants faced challenges imposed from “above” that lay largely beyond their control. The constraints of a crowded and prescriptive curriculum, the pressure of accountability through assessment, and the need to largely “go it alone” in the absence of external support on the journey were described by participants as some of the “outside” challenges faced during their experiences with graphic novels in the classroom.

Wet days imposed by a crowded curriculum were largely expressed through participant descriptions of time, or rather, lack of it, as a major constraint on their experiences with graphic novels in the classroom. Participants spent a disproportionate amount of our time together describing the lack of time to prepare the graphic novel unit of work, to teach it, and to reflect upon it. In feeling time-poor, they were not alone. Lapp, et al. (2012) also surmised from their study of American elementary teachers’ experiences with graphic novels that the requirements of the curriculum narrowed teachers’ pedagogical options and provided insufficient time for the inclusion of graphic novels in the classroom.

Findings in Comber and Nixon’s (2009) study of Australian teachers’ efforts to redesign high school curriculum and pedagogy that would foster more socially just and democratic classrooms suggest that “designing responsive, inclusive and engaging curriculum and pedagogies which are also seen to be appropriate and rigorous within the school takes time” (p. 343). While such research indicates the challenge of being pressured by a lack of time is by no means new or exclusive to teachers working with graphic novels, it was clear that my participants’ state of being time-poor was exacerbated by the “newness” of graphic novels as classroom texts. Given most participants lacked familiarity with the metalanguage and affordances of graphic novels,

“You’ve got so many units and you can hardly catch your breath before you’re onto the next one.” (Lisa)

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29 The Spanish Federation of Friends of the Camino publishes lists of pilgrims who have died “in transit.”
extra effort and time were required to accrue the knowledge, skills and resources required to teach the unit. As well, once in the classroom, most participants spent time legitimising the choice of graphic novels for study to counter their concerns voiced prior to the unit that students would not take the unit seriously. In contrast, participants saw no such need to adopt a similarly defensive strategy when introducing traditional prose texts into their classrooms.

While the participants’ concerns about lack of time were not exclusive to the graphic novel unit, when considered alongside their comments about needing time to resource the unit, it was apparent that the participants’ efforts with graphic novels were “over and above” those they gave to traditional units with which they were more familiar. Participants suggested preparing and teaching the latter came easily and naturally, while preparing for the more unfamiliar graphic novel unit proved more time consuming.

In her state of being time-poor, Lisa described having to rely on her colleague Megan to prepare the graphic novel unit. Megan, however, was also suffering under the pressure of time. Somewhat reminiscent of the white rabbit in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (Carroll, 2014), there seemed a sense of urgency in Megan’s description of her preparation for the graphic novel unit: “I need to read a lot more of them … when I have time. It’s all about time.” Kate also spoke of having to prepare resources “quickly,” while David indicated the need to be “a bit more organised or disciplined in my preparation” in order to get “on top of the [graphic novel] literary devices.”

For most participants, time as the enemy during their preparation for the graphic novel unit carried over into their classrooms, where syllabus mandates regarding the course content to be covered had an impact on the time available to teach the graphic novel unit. The participants’ descriptions of having to squeeze graphic novels into the curriculum as additional texts, of having less time to teach the graphic novel unit than was given to traditional novel units, and the scheduling of the graphic novel unit as a non-assessable one, all suggested that graphic novels lacked equal footing with their traditional prose counterparts.

“The notion of not having time to “do the text justice” was articulated by all participants, with the exception of Helen, and was indicative of the value they placed on graphic novels as texts. Participants recognised, however, that within the constraints of
the curriculum, there were limits to what they could achieve. Thomas noted, “It’s such a rich text I would have liked to have spent more time on it, but in a unit so rigorous in terms of its content, there’s only so much you can do. Time is always a constraint, unfortunately. It’s hard.” Like Thomas, Lisa also indicated resignation to the fact that one could only do so much: “The timing was a challenge. To do it justice you need more time. And that’s no-one’s fault, that’s just how it panned out.”

The addition of a graphic novel study to an already congested curriculum created what Thomas perceived as an unrealistic expectation of him. He articulated his frustration through use of the phrase, “Would you believe” when reporting the number of texts that he was expected to teach within the term. He noted also that only one graphic novel unit was taught in English between Year 7 and Year 12 and remarked that his students “really wanted to continue with Maus … [and] would have easily chewed up another graphic novel.” Reinforcing a perception that he had expressed in our first interview, whereby policy makers continue to privilege prose texts, Thomas noted at our second meeting, “It kind of reflects the world to a certain extent, that the world says you’ve got to look at traditional ideas of literature.” This sentiment expressed by Thomas in regard to the uneven ratio of graphic novels to traditional prose texts in the curriculum was replicated by several participants and might be seen as endorsing the suggestion by Connors (2015) that “inviting students to read one or two graphic novels in the context of a class that privileges print fiction is not sufficient…. Students require more sustained exposure to graphic novels” (p. 14).

To further highlight the disconnect between the syllabus emphasis on prose texts and the visual texts of students’ lifeworlds, Thomas described the negative responses of his students when they moved from the graphic novel unit to the study of the traditional word novel Goodnight Mr Tom (Magorian, 1981). He described the students as being bored with the text and recalled them asking him where the images were. Similarly, David indicated his students’ disconnect with prose novels by describing how he “plodded” his way through an earlier unit of work on the traditional prose version of A Tale of Two Cities (Dickens, 2003) and was forced to laboriously deconstruct the text after realising that most of his “very, very, very reluctant readers … hadn’t done it, couldn’t do it.” He noted, “It’s not the way I like to teach, but just had to.”
In a roundabout way, Helen supported Thomas’ criticism of the unequal status accorded graphic novels in the curriculum. Rather than advocate they be given more time, she acknowledged that the time allocated to their study aligned with the way in which they were represented in the curriculum: “To be honest, if I was just doing the graphic novel I wouldn’t allow the same time in the unit that I do for other things. That might be seen as marginalising them, but that would be the truth in the school curriculum.”

Andy was also frustrated by the time given to the graphic novel unit relative to more traditional units that focused on prose texts. Commenting on a reduction in length of the graphic novel unit from the previous year to accommodate an extension to a poetry unit, he noted the effect on his classroom pedagogy: “I didn’t like how the unit was so compressed … it doesn’t give you time … I only did one activity this time around and even that was quite rushed.” He noted further that time constraints required that he change his teaching approach by pushing him into teacher-directed lessons so as to cover the content quickly, an approach that he felt reduced the opportunity for students to be creative. His teacher-directed approach also ran against the grain of the multimodal classroom wherein the authoritative control of teachers is lessened and the exploratory behaviour of students is heightened (Ryan, Scott & Walsh, 2010).

Andy was not alone in having to change the route of his graphic novel journey. Kate indicated that she had to sacrifice time set aside to critically analyse the graphic novel because of the extended time required on helping students with the metalanguage of graphic novels. In a similar vein, Megan and Lisa’s efforts to legitimise graphic novels by spending time on its technical construction came at the cost of having insufficient time for students to create their own comics texts, an activity they had considered at the outset as being essential for students in order to apply their newly acquired graphic novel knowledge and skills.

The participants’ focus on ensuring students had a solid grasp of the graphic novel metalanguage came at the expense of providing students with opportunities to engage in critical analysis and redesigning texts, practices considered essential for working effectively with multimodal texts (Carter, 2015; New London Group, 1996; Connors, 2015). In discarding this aspect of the unit, students were denied what Carter

““It’s really such a shame. We started to get into it then, ‘Bam!’ it was graduation.” (Lisa)

“It’s not long enough, I didn’t spend time deconstructing the form itself.” (Kate)
(2015) posits is the possibly the most important exercise in the study of multimodal texts:

A key goal of multimodal pedagogy is facilitating students’ design knowledge. Meaning-making … comes from noting available designs and their affordances; engaging in the work of designing/creating; and examining and articulating the affordances of the redesigned. Through design work/creating, students illustrate understandings of current trends, issues and thought … critically engage with those conditions, and demonstrate “transformed practice” through a product which illustrates their understanding while offering something new to facilitate understanding of others. (p. 10)

The participants’ descriptions of their experiences with graphic novels highlighted that the impact of teaching graphic novels within a crowded and prescriptive curriculum cannot be considered purely in practical terms. The participants also revealed the impact on their emotional wellbeing of having to walk quickly through the graphic novel unit. The Early Career participants, and Megan in particular, spoke of how stressful it was to try and manage things while preparing for the unit, with the result that “certain things just kind of get pushed to the side” (Megan). Likewise, Thomas and Lisa described the negative effect of being time-poor on their wellbeing. Drawing on the metaphor of eating a balanced diet to promote good health, Thomas noted, “It was so heavy on me. I get that the Board [of Studies] mandates that we’ve got to cover a certain number of text types, but surely a variety and surely a balance is essential: essential for healthy teaching, essential for healthy learners.”

While the status of Thomas, Lisa and Megan as Early Career teachers might be considered a significant factor in their feeling of being overwhelmed (Izadinia, 2014), the literature also points to the often difficult, stressful, and exhausting journey for both experienced and inexperienced teachers as they attempt to change their practice in an effort to reconcile the needs of their students with the demands of institutional and programmatic directives (Comber & Nixon, 2009; O’Sullivan, Carroll & Cavanaugh, 2008). This certainly seemed the case for my participants who were committed to provide their students with texts that related to the demands of their lifeworld, but, in doing so, had to work within a curriculum dedicated to the past. Kate predicted the
curriculum’s traditional emphasis would position many teachers as being unprepared, and by implication, possibly anxious, with the addition of graphic novels as recommended texts in what was at the time the soon-to-be-implemented Australian Curriculum: English (ACARA, 2017). Thomas suggested, however, that most teachers successfully deal with such tensions by pushing through them: “That’s what we do as practitioners, we work around that and make the best of what we have, even though it’s easier said than done.”

As well as being frustrated in their pedagogy by institutional input regulation in the guise of curriculum requirements (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2013), participants also expressed exasperation at the institutional emphasis on output regulation in the form of assessment and testing that position the study of prose texts as the key to academic success (Cumming, Kimber & Wyatt-Smith, 2011; Macken-Horarik, 2009; O’Sullivan, Carroll & Cavanaugh, 2008; Portelli & O’Sullivan, 2016). Thomas noted, for example, that “time and assessment are always going to be a factor … you’re always teaching to the test.” In making this call, he highlighted the negative impact of such an approach on both himself and his students: “It’s hard, because at the end of the day you know that it takes the enjoyment out of it.”

Lisa also referenced the influence of assessment on her pedagogy by noting that the scheduling of her graphic novel unit as a non-assessable had helped her avoid “falling into that culture of teaching to the test.” Lisa’s use of the term “culture,” when considered alongside Thomas’ use of “always teaching to the test,” suggests that assessment is a pervasive influence on teachers’ pedagogy across space and time. Furthermore, their comments endorse the broader findings in Portelli and O’Sullivan’s study (2016) into English teachers’ perceptions of the influence of assessment on their teaching, whereby:

The focus on skills and measurable improvement around reading print based texts as a consequence of systemic and school policy, reveal a model of English that reduces the flexibility of the pedagogical choices of individual teachers limiting their professional agency, and thus, potentially, reducing the opportunities to address the diverse needs of their students. (Portelli and O’Sullivan, 2016, p. 78).

The difficulty for participants in reconciling the “offer” of the multiliteracies agenda made through curriculum documents with the “business” side of education,
where assessment is focused on a narrow range of “semiotic particulars of texts” (Macken-Horarik, 2009, p. 37), was especially evident where participants used graphic novels with students they identified as being of higher-ability. Mike, for example, was concerned that “it was stepping outside the conservative novel-film comparison. Particularly in an A-class, if the kids don’t get the marks they’re anticipating, you’ll certainly hear about it.” As well as being concerned as to how his students and their parents might react if the students’ assessment results were compromised through the study of graphic novels, Mike was also worried that his colleagues’ perceptions of graphic novels would influence his students’ results in the across-the-grade assessment. Since Mike’s study of a graphic novel was not mandated across the grade, he was uneasy at the prospect of his students’ work being assessed by teachers who had instead chosen to study the prose version of Silverfin. As it turned out, Mike’s anticipation and reality did not align and his students’ efforts were not jeopardised by studying a graphic novel. In fact, they performed above his expectations in the assessment.

In several cases the pressure of assessment on participants’ pedagogy was seemingly avoided through the scheduling of the graphic novel unit as a non-assessment unit. Megan and Lisa, for example, taught the unit after the School Certificate, which at the time was one of the two standardised state-wide examinations in New South Wales. Both participants recognised that such scheduling, which had been a decision made by their head of department and hence out of their hands, was recognition that graphic novels were being trialled as a means to keep students engaged in the period between the end of their exams and the end of the school year. Consequently, they appreciated that the unit would be a short one and predicted that student attendance might be erratic. Despite these potential shortcomings, Lisa and Megan seized the opportunity to introduce a text form that they felt not only acknowledged their students’ interests, but also addressed students’ need to be multiliterate in a visual world. Prior to teaching the unit, Lisa anticipated that the students would “engage in a more authentic way” by not having to concern themselves about assessment marks.

Kate also assigned the graphic novel study as a non-assessable additional unit for her high-ability class. What Kate, along with Lisa and Megan, did not anticipate, however, was the reaction of some of her students to the absence of assessment. All three were questioned by students as to why they were doing the unit if it was non-
assessable. By implication, it would seem their students failed to see the inherent value of studying the graphic novel. Kate noted, “it’s a real challenge for teachers to say, ‘We’re just doing this because it’s really important for you to understand.’” The students’ responses endorsed Macken-Horarik’s (2009) suggestion that the acceptability of “only some forms of semiosis” (p. 39) in examinations is sufficiently powerful to determine learner engagement and further suggest that this is especially so in students who demonstrate high academic ability.

Although Kate’s graphic novel unit was non-assessable, she did keep her “eye on the prize” that presented in the form of the looming School Certificate examination. In doing so, she did not totally overlook an opportunity to use the graphic novel unit to prepare students for the exam: “I made sure everything I did for Maus was aligned to some section of the School Certificate.” Kate admitted that through this approach she was attempting to “manipulate the system” and avoid “teaching to the test” by preparing her students in “a more interesting and engaging way.” Kate’s comments not only highlight how graphic novels can provide the oft-absent bridge between student lifeworld interests and institutional or school requirements for accountability (Hull & Schultz, 2001; Alvermann & Xu, 2003), but also demonstrate that one can be innovative and “pragmatic at the same time” (Kate).

Despite the initial reticence of some students to engage with graphic novel unit because of its non-assessable status, the participants’ efforts to highlight the benefits of studying graphic novels to their students were sufficient to bring the doubters on side. Kate did this by emphasising to her students the importance of what they were learning for future examination success and encouraged them to feel a sense of pride in doing “more, rather than extra” to broaden their knowledge of texts and their affordances. By taking this approach, Kate felt her students’ initial hesitation regarding the lack of assessment “was a pretty easy thing to overcome.” That said, Kate indicated that in future she would tie the graphic novel study to an assessment task so that students might “treat it more seriously.”

Megan and Lisa also discussed with their students the benefits of the knowledge and skills that they would acquire through the graphic novel study. They couched some
of these benefits in terms of the short-term advantages it would give students regarding the texts they would study over the next two years, but they also emphasised the importance for students to have the ability to critically analyse the image-saturated environment in which they lived. As was the case with Kate’s students, Megan and Lisa noted that their students readily came to recognise the potential benefits of studying graphic novels and consequently willingly engaged with the texts.

The participants’ descriptions of having insufficient time to work with graphic novels in the classroom and the tension created through a focus on assessment that privileges prose texts both add weight to the proposition that institutional accountability initiatives and curricular demands may impede the introduction of graphic novels into the classroom (Annett, 2008; Connors, 2015; Lapp et al., 2012). Adding to the potency of this impediment were indications from participants of the paucity of support provided by educational authorities, a finding also evident in other studies into teachers’ pedagogy with the graphic novel format (Annett, 2008; Clark, 2013a; Romagnoli, 2013).

As discussed in Chapter Seven, participants perceived curriculum and support documents provided by the Board of Studies New South Wales and the New South Wales Department of Education and Training to be of little use in assisting them to prepare for the implementation of graphic novels as classroom texts. During the implementation stage of the graphic novel unit the participants’ perceptions remain unchanged. Consequently, participants pinned the hope of in-unit support on their colleagues and, in doing so, endorsed the indication that Australian teachers of English “view in-school resources as considerably more authoritative than externally produced resources” (Albright, Knezevic & Farrell, 2013, p. 111).

The participants’ expectations of support from colleagues by way of shared resources and teaching strategies are commensurate with the notion that departmental cultures are a significant determinant of professional learning for teachers (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005; O’Sullivan, Carroll & Cavanaugh, 2008). Rather than such support being formally provided to this study’s participants through organised activities such as departmental meetings, however, the majority of collegial support occurred informally and serendipitously.

David was the only participant to identify regular departmental meetings as an occasion where the graphic novel unit was discussed in terms of teaching strategies and resources. In contrast, Andy described how plans to share graphic novel ideas and
strategies in staff meetings were often “derailed” by discussions on marking and assessment. I was able to witness first-hand an example of this when a session on graphic novels I had been invited to present at an English Department meeting was postponed to allow for the discussion of non-related assessment tasks. When I presented the postponed session at the next meeting, which by this stage occurred towards the end of the participants’ graphic novel unit, it was cut short by yet another discussion on marking and assessment.

For Andy, restricted access to discuss graphic novels at a departmental level deprived him of seeing “how others have formatted their lessons and structured them.” Andy’s colleague, Rob, also described not having time for collegial discussions on graphic novel practice and rued missing the benefit of such collaboration: “It’s a matter of taking the time to get some teachers together and giving them time to talk to each other, which clearly we don’t get enough of. Every time I’m involved in something like that, I come away thinking, ‘That was such a valuable use of my time.’”

While Lisa and Megan also lamented that lack of opportunity on a formal basis at the departmental level hindered their ability to discuss the graphic novel unit with colleagues, Helen deliberately chose not to share her graphic novel experience with colleagues for fear of appearing too self-assured and successful: “I didn’t really talk a great deal about this project because, I know it sounds funny, but I had to be careful that as Head of English I don’t big note myself.”

In the absence of opportunities for formally organised collaboration with colleagues, support for the graphic novel unit at the collegial level primarily occurred on an informal point-of-need basis. Interestingly, four participants mentioned the physical space of their staffrooms as a factor of influence on informal collaboration around graphic novels with colleagues. Such collaborations might be considered the equivalent of what are colloquially termed in the business world as “water cooler conversations,” those casual and unplanned face-to-face conversations with colleagues that occur at office gathering points. Both David and Lisa used water-cooler equivalent phrases, such as “on the fly” and “on the hop,” to indicate impromptu conversations had with colleagues.

“There was time to organise assessment, but no specific time for talking about teaching methods and activities.” (Andy)

“People will say, ‘I don’t know what I’m doing here,’ or someone will devise some worksheets and share them around.” (David)
about graphic novels. Several other participants indicated that useful resources were often shared by colleagues through email.

By ascribing import to place, Megan, Lisa, Andy, and David implicitly endorsed research that positions the staffroom as an important professional learning space: “a physical place in which several spaces operate (e.g. professional, social, organisational) and are inextricably and dialogically linked with teacher practices and relations” (lisahunter, Rossi, Tinning, Flanagan, & Macdonald, 2011, p. 33). While Megan spoke of having conversations about graphic novels with the colleague sitting next to her, David described how being on a large staff that sits together meant the sharing of ideas and resources was something “natural.” To his advantage, he noted, there were a number of his colleagues “who are probably keen practitioners of [graphic novels], and they’ve helped us.” Through the description of his dependence on his more knowledgeable colleagues as “collegial,” David’s situation mirrors a situation in Cheung’s (2015) study of teachers’ experiences with manga and anime, whereby participants developed a “collegial identity… which suggested a level of trust or respect and the collaborative practices that are extended within the faculty circle when considering texts for study within English” (p. 48).

While Megan and David recognised the benefits for teaching with graphic novels derived from their physical staffroom arrangements, Lisa and Andy noted the disadvantage of not sitting near colleagues who were using graphic novels as texts. Interestingly, it was Andy’s reflective “jolt” (Ghaye, 2010, p. 82) during our interview on the absence of collaboration with his colleagues that brought him to realise the role played by the physical arrangement of the staffroom:

Things were quiet … that’s the nature of the department because we’re so large. I don’t actually sit near anyone who teaches Year 7, they’re all on the other side. Oh, I’ve got one teacher who is Year 7, but I’ve got a big bookcase between us…. I’m only just realising it now, but that makes a lot of sense why I haven’t really talked about this to anyone else, because they’re all on the other side of the department!

Although Thomas described having access to colleagues’ graphic novel resources via a shared network drive, the absence of any opportunity to discuss them rendered the resources more overwhelming than helpful. He also noted that his “cool,
calm and collected colleagues” did not seek to tap into his lifeworld expertise and experience with graphic novels: “When it came to that kind of technical knowledge and things like that, they weren’t calling on me by any means.” Interestingly, Lisa’s solid knowledge surrounding graphic novels was also largely overlooked by her colleagues. While she felt that part of her “invisibility” stemmed from a reticence to put herself forward as having some expertise in graphic novels, she also lamented that her colleagues viewed beginning teachers as having little to offer.

During their teaching of the graphic novel unit, several participants noted the ongoing local support of “significant others” such as their teacher librarian and head of department. Referring to his school’s policy and my role in his school as a teacher librarian, Rob suggested that such support was not always in the form of physical resources: “We’re being supported and encouraged by the school and I suppose that’s where you come in. You’re clearly seen as an expert in the field, so it’s nice for us to know that we’ve got people there who know what we’re banging on about and should be banging on about.” Clearly for Rob, the empathy of others towards what he was doing in the classroom with graphic novels was important.

In this study, I also have to include myself as a “significant other,” with four participants making specific reference to the support I gave them in my capacity as researcher. On several occasions, I went to my interviews with participants armed with books and articles about graphic novels to share. I also shared online resources with them, and, knowing of Lisa’s passion to pursue the work of comics scholar Scott McCloud, invited her to attend a lecture with me that was being given by him. These interactions, plus the comment from Megan that “I felt confident teaching the [graphic novels] because I’d read the two books that you’d lent me,” highlights one advantage of my decision to adopt a methodological approach that explicitly values the contributions and interests of the researcher.

In their search for support in their teaching with graphic novels, a number of participants also looked to the interests, knowledge, and skills of their students. In doing so, they enacted a constructivist model of teaching and learning, whereby there is “a
dynamic interchange between all classroom participants [, and] students and teachers can become coinvestigators of culture” (Callahan & Low, 2004, p. 52). In taking this approach, participants epitomised a key characteristic of the pilgrim, whereby “a pilgrimage requires us to ask for help, to develop an ability to recognize when it is being offered, and the humour, humility and open hands to receive it” (Whyte, 2016, Para. 2). David, for example, showed a willingness to be prompted and corrected by his students:

I’m not really the confident one. One of the things we do is give the kids a list of definitions of, you know, what’s the difference between a border and a gutter and so forth, and I must admit I forget those things. But basically, they pick it up, and I say, ‘I’m going to forget these things, you need to correct me. They enjoy that process as we’re going through it of letting me know that I’ve got it wrong. That’s fine. (David)

Thomas also approached the graphic novel unit from the perspective of “meddler-in-the-middle” (McWilliam, 2009, p. 281) rather than “sage-on-the stage” by acknowledging what his students had to offer. Worthy of note is that the support Thomas received from his students was not so much in regard to the technical aspects of the format or the critical framing of the texts, but instead came in the form of a reminder as to the power of the texts to engage readers when they have been provided with support or background information. In such instances, student contributions might be considered as value-adding to teachers’ pedagogy, rather than as a replacement for it. This notion is commensurate with the suggestion in the literature that, despite students’ engagement with multimodal texts, teachers play a vital role in guiding students’ ability to critically analyse examples of the format (Carter, 2015; Connors, 2015; Ryan, Scott & Walsh, 2010).

In addition to a reliance on the informal support of colleagues and students, participants also reported relying heavily on their own graphic novel knowledge and skills. Thomas noted, “I tried to do as much as I could from my own learning about graphic novels and their use in the classroom,” while Andy was also explicit in describing his reliance on the strategies and resources he had used when teaching the unit in the previous year. While he attributed his self-reliance to the confidence he had “second time around,” Andy noted that to a certain extent he had little choice but to do so, citing the pressures of teaching as precluding meaningful opportunities to collaborate with colleagues.

“They taught me a lot about approaching a text and looking at its context.”
(Thomas)
Several participants found support for their graphic novel pedagogy in their existent knowledge of other multimodal texts, particularly film. The transference of textual knowledge from film to graphic novels provided participants such as Mike with the confidence of being in more “familiar territory” and supports the discourse in the literature around the notion of transliteracy: “The ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media” (Thomas, Joseph, Lacetti, Mason, Mills, Perril & Pullinger, 2007). In particular, filmic language regarding perspective, framing, and salience can enhance meaning making in readers of graphic novels (Connors, 2015; Dellacqua, 2012).

The self-driven efforts of participants to procure support for their graphic novel pedagogy parallels Connors’ (2011) findings that teachers addressing visual literacy in their classrooms are “being left largely to their own devices” (p. 72). Although Connors notes the element of autonomy this can bestow on teachers, he also raises the point that self-reliance constantly forces teachers to re-invent the wheel, rather than build on the experiences of others. Endorsing this perspective, while the participants in this study were generally content to work within their own funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti & González, 1992), they were also keen to further their graphic novel pedagogy by attending more formally organised professional development. In particular, and not unlike the pre-service teachers in Connors’ (2015) course on children’s literature, my participants sought opportunities presented by fellow teachers who could share practical strategies for using graphic novels in the classroom.

Both Megan and David described a need for professional development that goes beyond the, “Why we should use graphic novels” argument, an argument that Connors (2010) posits is now axiomatic. Instead they sought professional development on the “How,” which offered resources and strategies focused on graphic novels. Their need parallels the broader need of teachers uncovered by O’Sullivan et al. (2008) for ready-to-go resources to support changing pedagogy.

Thomas noted that accessing the expertise of others was important not only for him, but also for his colleagues and for the students they all teach. Moreover, he

“The metalanguage of film in many ways transfers nicely into talking about visual representation in graphic novels.” (Thomas)

“I’d love to learn more about what other people are doing with graphic novels.” (Rob)
described being frustrated with the lack of support at the institutional level and the resultant perpetuation of the hegemonic hold of print on the textual environment:

I find it hard and I find it frustrating, and I think it’s this self-perpetuating issue that by not putting any support and resources in means that people will be more hesitant to teach [graphic novels]. [It] means we’re going to have more students who aren’t engaging with [them], who’ll feel they’re not accessing, who’ll feel they aren’t understanding the concepts. And it’s going around and round. (Thomas)

In summary, forces largely beyond the control of participants imposed unwelcome pressures on their efforts to prepare and teach the graphic novel unit. A crowded curriculum that was focused largely on traditional prose texts and very much driven by the mandate of assessment affected the responses of both participants, colleagues, and their students to the use of graphic novels as texts. Furthermore, participants were challenged by the lack of support at the institutional level by way of resources and professional development opportunities. As a result, local sources of support in the guise of colleagues and self-acquired knowledge and resources, often gathered serendipitously at the point-of-need, characterised the participants’ experiences of teaching with graphic novels.

Wild Dogs: Challenges from Within

Dogs also play on the minds of pilgrims and while the dogs that stand guard over Spanish properties along the contemporary Camino are a far cry from the wild dogs and wolves that threatened the pilgrims’ medieval counterparts, they continue to pose both a real and perceived threat (Frey, 1998). Unlike the weather, however, the power to manage wild dogs on the Camino lies largely in the hands of the pilgrim. Dogs present as more of a nuisance than a roadblock to forward progress; they can generally be stepped around without too much inconvenience. Frey (1998) also suggests that the “nasty dog anecdote” (p. 124) has depth beyond adding a dimension of adventure to the Camino by representing a pilgrim’s attempt to deal with the unexpected and challenging local encounters of the journey. For these reasons, the notion of “wild dogs” provides an apt frame within which to discuss the challenges encountered by participants within the local environment of their classrooms. Such challenges included students’ lack of familiarity with graphic novels and the participants’ own lack of “personal fitness” to teach with the format. In most instances, these were challenges that were, or could be, dealt with relatively easily.
As discussed earlier, the launching pad for the graphic novel unit in all but one of the participants’ classrooms was an introduction to the technical aspects of the graphic novel format via the frontloading of students with the graphic novel metalanguage. This choice of entry point reflected the participants’ perceptions that, despite their students living in a visually oriented society, most lacked the capacity to effectively articulate the meaning of visual texts. It is a perception similar to that highlighted by participants in Romagnoli’s (2013) study of three college teachers’ attitudes to the use of graphic novels as texts. At a broader scale, the participants’ perceptions that students can’t articulate what they see is strongly endorsed in the literature by way of the discourse which argues that the act of “seeing” through an analytic lens is neither natural (Avgerinou, 2009; Schirato and Webb, 2004), nor passive (Felten, 2008). Felten notes, “living in an image-rich world … does not mean students (or faculty or administrators) naturally possess sophisticated visual literacy skills, just as continually listening to an iPod does not teach a person to critically analyse or create music” (p. 60). The knowledge and skills of graphic novels, therefore, should be explicitly taught (Carter, 2015; Connors, 2015). By implication, both teachers and students must have access to a graphic novel metalanguage; a language defined by Connors (2015) as “a shared set of terms that they can use to describe the visual-verbal relationship they encounter in the design of graphic novels” (p. 6).

When the graphic novel unit was introduced into the classroom by participants, their pre-journey expectation that students would have a graphic novel knowledge deficit was more than realised. Participants indicated that not only did most students lack the capacity to competently and confidently examine and discuss graphic novels, but also that the overwhelming majority of them came to the unit with little or no previous contact whatsoever with the format. Any hope that participants had nurtured, therefore, that their students would have the knowledge to compensate for any deficit in their own graphic novel knowledge, as Ryan, Scott and Walsh (2007) suggest might happen in the multimodal classroom, was unlikely.

Carter (2015) suggests that students in the graphic novel classroom will possess varying levels of comics knowledge or the ability to enact this knowledge in the critical
examination of the medium. Readers of graphic novels may fall anywhere along the “experience spectrum” of being able to read, understand, analyse, synthesise, or conduct a high-level analysis of them. While the obvious challenge for participants was to equip students at the “no experience” end of this spectrum with a graphic novel metalanguage, it proved part of a larger challenge that also drew in those students who claimed some pre-existing experience with comic books, graphic novels or manga.

The experiences with comics that students brought into the participants’ classrooms were largely shaped outside the classroom and, therefore, were recreationally rather than academically focused. Consequently, participants noted that while students were able to make meaning and comprehend graphic novels on one level, they lacked the means to examine them critically and to articulate their analysis. Encapsulating the essence of all participants’ descriptions in this regard, Andy remarked, “The students could read it and know what it meant, but they found it difficult to take it apart and convey that meaning verbally or in writing.” When students’ outside interests are brought into the classroom, therefore, the role of the teacher is heightened, rather than diminished (Connors, 2015; Ryan et al., 2010), the imperative being for the teacher to encourage students to “ask the right questions and realize the literacy merit that exists in the graphic novel” (Rycroft, 2014, p. 7).

A compelling body of literature and research reminds us that explicit instruction in the metalanguage of multimodal texts is a necessary component of equipping students with the capacity to be effective consumers and producers of information in a multimodal environment (Callow, 2013; Carter, 2015; New London Group, 1996; Kress, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Pei-Ling and McWilliam, 2009; Ryan, Scott & Walsh, 2010; Simpson, 2004). In particular, Carter (2015) notes that such instruction in regard to graphic novels should include the early introduction to students of “well-engrained, widely applicable terminology about form, function and fluidity” (p. 8). The implication here is that teachers will have the knowledge and skills to provide such instruction. In this study, however, all participants struggled in one way or another to provide overt instruction in the metalanguage of graphic novels.

As noted earlier, some participants’ past experiences with graphic novels provided them with a certain degree of confidence to introduce graphic novels into their classrooms. In the reality of the classroom, however, any head start in confidence held

“Even those who had read them didn’t know that there’s terms that they should be looking to explore in their critical evaluation of it.” (David)
by participants was soon eroded by the realisation that the knowledge and skills used to read comics in a non-classroom context fell short of the requirements to provide overt instruction to others in the graphic novel metalanguage. Reflecting on their “fitness” as their graphic novel journeys progressed, eight of my nine participants described a deficit in the knowledge and skills required to teach with graphic novels. This not only hindered them in the way in which they spoke to students about graphic novels, but, given participants were unable to fully provide students with the metalanguage to articulate a critical analysis of the format, it had the domino effect of hampering students in their ability to also talk about the format. This finding is illustrative of Carter’s (2015) comment that “knowing the associated vocabulary of comics … is important if one is going to ask students to analyse and create” (p. 4).

In describing their lack of technical expertise in graphic novels, participants flagged their frustrations and a sense of vulnerability through the use of emotive language. To illustrate, Megan indicated feeling “a little bit anxious” about teaching the graphic novel metalanguage, while David noted being “uncomfortable” and working with “a degree of trepidation.” In a similar vein, Thomas described a scenario in which he became so “mixed up” that he was brought to conclude, “I don’t feel I have the knowledge to do this.” Others, such as Mike, described being confident at a basic level, but, as Carter (2015) suggests may happen when graphic novel design becomes more complex, he experienced discomfort when challenged by the nuances of graphic novel codes and conventions:

I had one boy with an adaptation of Heart of Darkness and it was very different … it really worked against the conventions we’d seen in the other one…. There’s one quite large panel where it’s an image, but there’s images overlaid on top of that image…. And then there are all these little images and it’s sort of, “Well how do I actually… what do we call those?” It’s like an establishing shot, but what are the frames on top actually called, how do they progress?” So, I found myself at a bit of a loss. It’s a really beautiful setup, but I only knew what was actually going
on because I’d read *Heart of Darkness*. It could be confusing for someone who hadn’t read it…. So, it’s quite sophisticated, the language, to talk about those things. (Mike)

Mike went on to explain that, at his current level of knowledge and skills, he would not be able to sustain an extended, close study of a graphic novel “beyond two weeks” and would certainly not consider using graphic novels as texts with senior students. Several other participants expressed a similar sentiment about not teaching graphic novels at a senior level until they felt more competent and confident with the metalanguage.

The lack of the participants’ recourse to a metalanguage of comics/graphic novels, and the difficulties encountered as a result, echo findings in comics research elsewhere (Annett, 2008; Cheung, 2015; Clark, 2013a; Connors, 2015; Lapp et al., 2012; Ryan et al., 2010; Walton, 2010). In Annett’s study of five American teachers’ experiences with graphic novels, participants considered themselves “weakest in the vocabulary of the graphic texts and history of the genre” (p. 151). Mirroring almost word-for-word the sentiments of the participants in my study, a participant in Annett’s study noted, “We barely have the background or don’t have the vocabulary that would be needed or the knowledge to teach an elective course on graphic novels” (p. 169). Similarly, Cheung’s (2015) study of NSW English teachers’ experiences with manga texts revealed participants’ unease with technical aspects of the comics medium.

Although Walton’s (2010) study was focused on student responses to graphic novels in NSW English classrooms, Walton also surmised that a lack of familiarity with a comics/graphic novel metalanguage was the reason why the students’ English teachers found visual texts “outside of their comfort, and support, zone” (p. 155). Findings such as these are not restricted to the experiences of in-service teachers. Connors (2010), for example, highlights the difficulties pre-service teachers in his college course experienced when, in the absence of shared comics vocabulary, they attempted to engage in conversations about the design of graphic novels.

A majority of the literature on comics tends to overlook the possibility that the students themselves might also have a less than enthusiastic response to the use of graphic novels as classroom texts. Lyga and Lyga (2004), for example, claim that for young people, “Static text on an immobile page isn’t just boring and laborious; it’s practically alien” (p. 8). From a contra perspective, however, Connors (2010) claims that in spite of the fact that graphic novels pervade students’ social landscape, “We
often seem to proceed under an assumption that students will embrace them unquestioningly, as if they were somehow impervious to the stigmas their elders recognize” (p. 68). A small number of other comics scholars also flag the likelihood of student resistance to the format. (Hansen, 2012; Hammond, 2009; Rhoades et al., 2015; Snowball, 2011). Although Snowball’s (2011) research indicating that some Australian teenagers do not view graphic novels favourably was focused on recreational reading, the notion that this finding could be extended into the classroom is supported by Hammond’s (2009) research, which found American high school students’ reception of graphic novels as texts was negatively influenced by comics’ ignoble background and the common perception of comics texts as something for poor readers. Furthermore, Romagnoli’s (2013) study of college teachers’ experiences with graphic novels highlighted that their students’ lack of familiarity with graphic novels resulted in significant student apprehension towards their use as artefacts for academic study. Furthermore, in the study by Rhoades et al. (2015), while the majority of student participants in their study eventually embraced the graphic novel, others remained “frustrated, maintained resistance, or completely rejected it as a potential classroom text because it is a non-traditional academic text with no words” (p. 314).

In this study, although outright rejection was not encountered by any participant, student responses to the use of graphic novels were varied and a number of participants faced the challenge of having students question the value of graphic novels as classroom texts. When she discussed assumptions about graphic novels with her students at the beginning of the unit of work, Kate noted that about half of them commented, “Oh they’re dumb … comics don’t interest me at all.” In a different vein, and suggesting that graphic novels are somewhat of a novelty in the classroom, some students in both Rob and Andy’s classes questioned the use of graphic novels from a curiosity angle rather than a judgemental one. These students were more interested in finding out what graphic novels had to offer, rather than rejecting them because of negative attitudes. As noted earlier, there were also some student concerns where no assessment was tied to the graphic novel study. These latter concerns,
however, stand as an indictment on the pressures of accountability in the curriculum, rather than as a specific critique of graphic novels per se.

Helen attributed the absence of any resistance to the graphic novel from her students largely to her status as the teacher and her subsequent control of the learning agenda: “If I introduce it as a credible thing, it doesn’t really matter what it is, they’ll initially take it as credible.” Other participants who faced student reticence to engage with graphic novels, however, felt that the way to “sell” graphic novels was through having a belief in their value and communicating that belief to students. Lisa noted, “It helps in teaching to care about the text… You have to sell it, that’s part of your job.” In a similar vein, Rob remarked, “I like to think that a big part of my job is to inspire these kids, to have them see the possibilities of joy that you can have from English.”

To counter students’ hesitancy towards the use of graphic novels in the formal learning environment of the classroom, participants with a lifeworld interest in graphic novels also used personal stories of their experiences with the format to demonstrate that graphic novels were legitimate classroom texts. Thomas told his students how he had been an avid reader of comic books at their age and added, “I don’t have any shame” at having done so. He noted further, that some students were “a little bit shocked” at his interest in graphic novels, but at the same time they seemed reassured to know that they would not be judged for reading comics when the student next to them was reading a traditional prose text.

In summary, the local challenges encountered by participants in the graphic novel classroom primarily presented as their own lack of confidence with, and knowledge of, the metalanguage of graphic novels, students’ inexperience with the format, and low-level student apprehension regarding the legitimacy of graphic novels as academic texts. To step around these challenges, participants employed a number of strategies that included recognising students’ interest and expertise in graphic novels, a willingness by participants to share their authority in the classroom with students, and the participants’ passionate defence and promotion of graphic novels as classroom texts. In the following discussion, the positive outcomes achieved through these strategies are considered.
Sunshine and surprises: Celebrating teaching with graphic novels

Such great dangers, however, did little to dampen an almost unbridled enthusiasm for the pilgrimage, for the rewards were more than worth the risks to all who chose to undertake the journey. (Rudolph, 2004, p.6)

Despite a variety of institutional, organisational and contextual challenges, this study’s participants found great reward in their graphic novel experiences. In the first instance, participants found reward, or sunshine, in the affective, behavioural, and cognitive engagement of their students with graphic novels and the students’ subsequent achievement of the learning outcomes for the graphic novel unit. Moreover, participants not only basked in the sunshine of their satisfaction with their students’ achievements, but also in feelings of validation that the use of graphic novels to achieve these outcomes was worth the risk. As well, participants welcomed their professional growth that resulted from their journey with graphic novels.

In terms of supporting autonomy in their students’ learning, and consistent with the notion that a pedagogy of multiliteracies promotes social justice in the classroom (New London Group, 1996), participants recognised graphic novels as both a means to extend the range of texts to which their students were exposed and as a means to acknowledge the diverse textual interests of their students. As noted earlier, the inclusion of graphic novels as classroom texts was something new for the vast majority of the participants’ students, with only those in Lisa’s class having had previous classroom experience with the format. Furthermore, many students reported it was an extension of the texts with which they were familiar in their lifeworlds.

Despite the newness of graphic novels and some initial apprehension about their use as classroom texts, the students’ responses to the study of graphic novels were overwhelmingly positive. For Lisa, the wholesale investment of her students in the format came as somewhat of a surprise. She indicated that her students “were one hundred percent involved” in the graphic novel study and they took to the graphic novels “like seagulls to a hot chip.” Even students she had expected to not be

“Kiddies who might have remained silent found that they can have a voice because this is a medium that engages them in a whole new way.” (David)

“I think the boys really enjoyed it. It was really effective in terms of engaging them with a new form that hadn’t had a lot of exposure to.” (Kate)
engaged, those “who would normally chat,” were “dead quiet” when they were given “time with the text.” She laughingly noted, “It was probably the quietest lesson I’ve had all term.” Similarly, Megan noted that her students “were happy and engaged. Their favourite part was reading them. When they were told they could have a lesson to read, they were engrossed, and they loved it.” Both Megan and Lisa’s observations support claims as to the value of providing students time to interact with graphic novels (Connors, 2015; Cromer & Clark, 2007).

Other participants also provided anecdotes that indicated their students enjoyed the graphic novel study and consequently held English in a positive light. David noted, “The thing that happens with this text, which I do like, is that you’ll often get a kid that says, ‘that’s the first English book I’ve finished.’” Thomas also reported his students being intrinsically motivated to read the graphic novel during the school holidays. He added, “They really did enjoy it, they responded well to it. The subject matter of Maus was very mature and they dealt really well with that.” Interestingly, it was the mature subject matter of Maus, which deals with both the Holocaust and the author’s dysfunctional family within the structure of a dual narrative, that Megan also felt was attractive to her students: “Possibly, they felt more grown up reading it.”

As noted earlier, not all students embraced graphic novels at the outset and in this regard all participants were able to provide anecdotes that described the movement of these students from reticence to acceptance. Kate described how one of her brightest students, who was initially hesitant to study the graphic novel because, “I much prefer words and I want to imagine stuff myself,” finished the unit with the announcement, “That’s amazing, I never thought I’d be interested and engaged on that sort of level with a text.” As for others in her class who had initially considered comics as “dumb” and “uninteresting,” Kate indicated they too underwent a change of heart as the unit unfolded. For Kate, her students’ change in attitude to graphic novels was perhaps the warmest moment on her graphic novel journey: “The fact that half of them came away with a new attitude about this form was definitely justification on its own for doing it.” Lisa’s anecdote also ended in sunshine, with a student’s initial apathy towards the graphic novel doing a complete turnaround:

“You can tell in their writing that they really enjoyed it. That’s not something you always see.”
(Mike)

“That was really great for them to have that journey and that change of heart.”
(Kate)
“By the next lesson, he had his head down intently, wanted more time, [and asked] ‘Can we do this next lesson?’”

In addition to describing their students’ affective engagement with graphic novels by way of their enjoyment of the format, participants also identified the cognitive engagement of their students achieved through the critical examination of the texts. By way of numerous examples, participants illustrated how their students developed a respect for graphic novels and what they could achieve educationally. Kate echoed the findings by Rhoades et al. (2013) in noting that, as her students became familiar with graphic novels and their understanding of the format evolved, they “recognised just how sophisticated the form was and how, in a way, it allowed more—to explore a really sensitive topic in a way that just words couldn’t do justice to.” She went on to say, “The insights from the students were fantastic in that they really quickly started to see the relationship between, layout, design, the images and the text…. They very quickly deconstructed the symbolism in the text, which I was really impressed by.”

David’s reflections on the graphic novel unit involved an unexpected “pop-up” teaching and learning moment that, like Kate’s experience, illustrated the ability of graphic novels to convey meaning in a way that was both new and powerful for students. He was surprised that the most animated discussion of the graphic novel Persepolis focused on the students’ exploration of violence. He suggested that, while students were exposed to violence on a daily basis through film and television, “having it in this context was new for them” and went on to describe how “the ‘naïve form’ of the illustrations had “a potency” that was missing in the print novel the students had previously studied. In particular, David noted, “[The students] were affected by it. It was quite a grisly exploration of it, but it’s the truth of the moment. If you’re going to write an accurate history of this period, you can’t avoid talking about the fact that many people suffered terribly.”

The engagement of David’s students with images of violence in Persepolis parallels the findings in Mathews’ (2011) study that “images can motivate students to

“They did really well… their level of detail and their deconstruction was outstanding.” (Mike)

“We had a whole lesson on colour… We challenged the assumption that you need colour to represent emotion and mood symbolically.” (Kate)

“It wasn’t an intention to look at the violence of it, but it came up in conversation.” (David)
read, help students interpret text, and support historical accounts” (p. 428). At the same time, however, David’s willingness to embrace the violent images as a “teaching moment” stands contra to the rejection of graphic novels containing violent images by most of the pre-service teachers in Mathews’ study. Interestingly, Mathews notes that one of her participants who initially rejected the graphic novel Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda (Stassen, 2006) for its violent depiction of the genocide in Rwanda, underwent a complete turn-around after teaching for a year and later admitted, “It’s time for students to stop being sheltered. They really need to see what’s going on in the world” (Robert in Mathews, 2011, p. 433). Mathew’s participant, it seems, had encountered the reality of the road.

The high point in Rob’s experience with the graphic novel unit was provided through his students’ engagement and application of their acquired knowledge and skills to create their own scene for a graphic novel: “To see the looks on their faces, the appreciation of what others had done, the acknowledgement of how well it worked and being able to articulate how well it worked; to me that was probably the highlight of the unit.” Rob was just one of several participants to notice the high level of student engagement and critical thinking sponsored by the students’ creation of their own comics texts. Kate described looking at examples of her students’ work and thinking, “My God, you really get this,” while David was also quite taken aback by this students’ efforts:

The stuff they produced was beautiful. More than anything, not only was the execution beautiful, but the concepts were really sophisticated. These kids had seen that you can write about family loyalty, and relationships, and fear, and horror, in a graphic way, and they emulated that. Very sophisticated stuff.

Together, Rob’s, Kate’s and David’s anecdotes provide a solid endorsement for the argument that students need to create comics texts to optimise their critical thinking about graphic novels (Carter, 2015; Connors, 2015).

While all participants indicated their students were affectively and cognitively engaged in the study of graphic novels, Mike and David described additional benefits for students when their students’ lifeworld interests were recognised in the classroom. In doing so, they endorsed the proposition that “Because war is such a graphic concept … the combination of words and images meant that quite a distant concept was now becoming alive.” (Thomas)
students who might normally be excluded from discussions of traditional texts may be better equipped to engage with, comprehend, and articulate the content in graphic novels (Christensen, 2006; Rycroft, 2014).

Both Mike and David drew on the metaphor of light to illustrate the breaking down of traditional classroom dynamics that can result from recognition in the classroom of students’ interests and expertise in comics (Carter, 2015). The following reflection from David highlights how graphic novels shifted the source of student voice in his classroom and subsequently changed the classroom dynamics by empowering a particular group of students:

It tends to be this boutique readership, the graphic novel, and it’s associated with a particular type of kid. And I suppose it just gave them the opportunity to hold the spotlight for a while. And because they were talking about something that they have a passion for, they often articulated themselves with a great deal of vibrancy…. It was really liberating for them and for the girls who otherwise might own the conversation because they’re good novel readers. All of a sudden, they had to defer to somebody who might know more than them. It’s good for the dynamics of the class that we share or indulge in a range of texts.

(David)

Importantly, David noted the implications that the formal study of graphic novels had on the self-esteem of those students for whom graphic novels were preferred reading:

It gives it credibility that their reading pattern all of a sudden has meaning beyond their own little circle of friends. If it appears on the program, it’s almost like we’ve recognised that it has status, that it’s worthwhile examining and there’s merit there, and its literary merit, and it’s worthwhile unpicking. (David)

The final word regarding students’ responses to the study of graphic novels belongs to Rob, whose comment encapsulates the overall feelings of participants in regard to their students’ enjoyment of the graphic novel, the learning achieved by their

“It allowed some kids to shine more than others, and not necessarily the ones you might have anticipated as being the high flyers.”

(Mike)
students, the students’ development of respect for graphic novels, and the sense of pride that students had in their achievements with the format:

[The unit] worked really well and I think they learned a lot. It’s not just that they enjoyed the unit and have a new insight into the value of graphic novels, but they learned a lot about visual language, and they learned that they already knew something and could then add to that and learn to articulate that more clearly. I think they were quite proud of themselves by the end that they’d done as well as they had, you know, pleased with their assessments and so on …. They appreciated the graphic novel. They appreciated the bits that they had to produce themselves, and they were able to evaluate those intelligently, knowledgeably and articulately. And I thought to myself, ‘For a Year 7 unit to have that outcome is great. It does so much for them and they enjoy it so much.’ (Rob)

The participants’ positive responses to their students’ experiences with graphic novels illustrate the reciprocal relationship between student and teacher behaviour (Cummins, 2011; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). As well as expressing their satisfaction with the unit via their students’ responses, however, most participants also directly articulated their feelings of satisfaction: “I was thrilled” (Helen); “We had lots of fun” (Thomas); “I was really impressed” (Megan); and “I was happy” (Kate).

Beyond satisfaction with their graphic novel experience, participants also described a sense of validation for the perceived risk they had taken in introducing graphic novels into their classrooms. They felt that not only did their own and their students’ positive responses justify the use of graphic novels as texts, it also validated the future inclusion of graphic novels in their classrooms. Mike noted, “The responses from the kids were overwhelmingly positive. If the kids had been like, ‘This is something I’m not interested in. I don’t want to pursue this,’ then I would have thought, ‘Next time, maybe not,’ because there’s plenty of things that don’t work in the classroom.”

Rob also validated his use of the graphic novel via descriptions of his students’ engagement and learning: “The work they did for the assessment was just wonderful … and they all came across as being really positive. They enjoyed

“I felt the response justified the actual process.” (Mike)
all the experiences. And I thought, ‘that’s what we’re here for, you know.’” Interestingly, both Mike and Rob expressed some surprise at the success of their respective graphic novel journeys. In particular, a comment by Rob suggested that the combination of enjoyment and learning was not necessarily the norm in his classroom:

It’s just amazing how much they’ve picked up on and they’re able to articulate, and at the same time be enjoying the book and the story, and be not thinking, “Oh God, he’s killing this.” That’s a great thing. (Rob)

The participants’ descriptions of their experiences suggest that the strongest rays of sunshine that warmed them from the “outside” were sourced in the relationships they were able to forge with students through a common interest in graphic novels. By “affirm[ing] student identities while helping them to explore the world beyond their limited realities” (Nieto, 2013, p. 16), participants developed relationships with their students that might be considered “the bedrock of any learning” (Nieto, p. 6). Several participants described incidences where students brought their own graphic novels into the classroom to share with them, while others reported informal conversations with students about graphic novels that occurred outside the classroom. Interestingly, it was the two participants with the strongest personal interest in graphic novels that provided the most detailed descriptions of the way in which graphic novels sponsored positive relationships with their students.

Although his confidence had been shaken by the reality of “really having to know” graphic novels, Thomas confessed to having been made professionally stronger by the relationships he was able to forge with students around their common interest in the format. By way of his comment that “it’s great to be able to learn with them, and research with them, and go on a journey with them,” Thomas indicated that he was prepared to share his authority in the classroom. In particular, his interest in graphic novels helped him reassure students who had little or no previous experience with the format that reading them for pleasure and studying them at school were both perfectly legitimate activities.

Lisa spent considerable time describing how the use of texts that engaged her students had forged positive and reciprocal teacher-student relationships. She described sharing her large personal collection of graphic novels and manga with her students and noted that her relationship with students was enhanced by doing so. She remarked that it

“It was a way to get to know the kids a bit better and talk to them about the text and see their interests.” (Mike)
was better still when the tables were turned and students lent her their graphic novels as it suggested to her that her students were genuinely interested in their learning.

The benefits for participants derived from the use of graphic novels as texts were not confined to those attained through interactions with students. Several participants also noted their own growth over the course of the unit vis-a-vis the development of their graphic novel knowledge and skills and their subsequently enhanced confidence to teach graphic novels as texts. Kate, for example, spoke of her deepened understanding of the format and her enhanced appreciation of graphic novels as texts for classroom study. She also noted the ramifications that this held for her pedagogy in terms of encouraging her to use graphic novels in other areas of the curriculum. On the back of the success of her experience, Kate intended to expand her graphic novel unit in the future and spend more time “deconstructing the form, getting [students] to understand the metalanguage [and] also looking at the narrative elements.” She suggested she would also schedule more time for students to design their own graphic novels to demonstrate their understanding.

Megan’s change of heart as a result of her experience with graphic novels was focused on her original perception of them as “a boy thing”; a perception that she attributed to having a brother that always had his head buried in comic books when he was young. Having seen the boys and girls in her class equally engaged in the selected texts, and having read some herself, however, she described her epiphany:

I’ve completely changed…. I’m totally engrossed in *Persepolis* at the moment. That’s not a boy’s thing at all, that’s totally aimed at almost adult women, or at least, adolescents, and so that’s fantastic. And, as a nerdy historian, I loved *Maus*. Even things like *Sacrifice*, it’s the story of a man [and] a beautiful snapshot of society and the culture. And so, I’ve definitely changed my mind. And even looking at how the girls in class responded to them, I would totally disagree with that now. (Megan)

While the literature and research (Carter, 2013b; Laycock, 2007; Newkirk, 2002; Wilhelm & Smith 2002), along with some of the other participants in this study (Kate, Mike, Lisa), note the attraction of comics for boys, the engagement of the girls in Megan’s, Lisa’s and David’s classes is testament that it is not a case of

“*It’s nice when it’s reciprocal. It means… that I really have found something that’s meaningful to them.*”

(Lisa)

“*It’s been a good learning curve for me. It was a really good experience and I’m glad I made myself do it.*”

(Kate)
either-or. The engagement of both boys and girls in the participants’ classrooms supports the research by Moeller (2011) that suggests factors other than gender are at play in influencing students’ engagement with the graphic novel format.

As a beginning teacher, and despite some hiccups in his confidence throughout the unit, Thomas’ experience in the classroom with graphic novels offered him a rare moment to feel in control and able to support his students at a time when he lacked confidence in so many other areas of his teaching. In addition to acknowledging the contributions of his students, Thomas attributed his empowerment to his personal background in the comics medium and also to the support offered by his professional learning network, both online and face-to-face. He noted that conversations with colleagues about the graphic novel were “most fruitful.” Thomas added, “The unit refreshed my interest in graphic novels…. What a great tool to get students engaged and to get them back into that ‘excited about English game.’”

At one stage Mike admitted that had he not been involved in my research he might not have pursued the graphic novel study. That said, when the unit was over he indicated, “I was pleasantly happy—I don’t want to say pleasantly surprised, but I was satisfied that it worked well. It would be something that I’d be interested in working with down the track. So, it was a good moment. Yeah.” He added, however, that if he were to teach with graphic novels again he wanted to be better prepared, particularly if he would be teaching a “top-end” class. Recognising that such students in particular seek formal academic success, he noted his need to increase his knowledge about “the terms that examiners like to see, and the type of things that can raise their responses above someone else’s.”

A Foreign Experience

You are, and eventually feel, very much apart from the rest of the world, a world with which you are familiar, but of which you are not at that moment an immediate part. The feeling is one of a certain distance over which you have very little control. You are a stranger in a strange land, a pilgrim, one who seemingly has little to do with the life of the places he or she passes through. And yet you have a purpose. (Rudolph, 2004, p. 34)
Despite the participants’ general feelings of confidence as they prepared to introduce graphic novels into their classrooms, they all found that the reality of teaching with the format rendered them to varying degrees, “strangers in a strange land” (Rudolph, 2004, p. 34). Most found their efforts to provide authentic learning experiences for their students stood in contrast to the curriculum priorities afforded traditional prose and visual texts, while some struggled with an unexpected lack of familiarity of the format when it came to providing overt instruction in the metalanguage of graphic novels. Participants also acknowledged the use of graphic novels as being outside the norms of their usual textual practice by way of teaching strategies that were defensive of the format and through their call for more professional development to support their pedagogy. Given the term “foreign” derives from the Medieval Latin foraneous, meaning “on the outside,” it is appropriate, therefore, to label the experience of teaching with graphic novels a foreign one.

In one way or another, the graphic novel journey was a new and different experience for all participants, one quite foreign in appearance and circumstance compared not only to the everyday literary and literacy experiences of their classrooms, but also to their personal experiences with the comics medium. Despite their preparations for, and commitment to, the use of graphic novels as texts, the initial comfort and confidence of some participants cracked as the journey unfolded and the unfamiliarity of the experience revealed itself. Not unlike the pilgrims described by Rudolph (2004), all participants at various times became frustrated, lost or confused as they struggled to understand the nuances of the graphic novel landscape and stumbled to communicate these to other parties who, directly or indirectly, shared in their experience.

As I delved more deeply into my participants’ descriptions, the importance of context in rendering their experiences foreign revealed itself. It soon became clear that familiarity in one context did not guarantee familiarity in another.

At the outset of their pilgrimage, participants possessed varied levels of personal and professional experience with graphic novels. Some brought extensive lifeworld experience to their practice, others had some previous experience in the classroom with the format, while others were total novices in both domains. The persistent descriptions by most participants of teaching with graphic novels as “new” and “different,” therefore, were initially puzzling. I wondered, for example, how David could describe

“When it comes to the graphic novel, I can’t call on my suite of ideas that I would normally have.” (David)
himself as “the one with the L-plate on who still doesn’t know if they’re doing it quite right” and describe teaching with graphic novels as a “relatively new experience,” when he had taught the graphic novel unit on three previous occasions.

Insight into the apparent inconsistency between participants’ previous experiences with graphic novels and their perception of their most recent experience as “new” can be garnered through consideration of the contextual nature of the concepts of “newness” and “foreignness.” As Robert Louis Stevenson (1895) highlighted in a passage from his travel memoir, *The Silverado Squatters*, written while he resided in California and far from his native Scotland, no place or event is inherently foreign. Rather, a place or experience is foreign only when considered from a familiar perspective. Stevenson wrote:

> The redbreasts and the brooks of Europe, in that dry and songless land; brave old names and wars, strong cities, cymbals, and bright armour, in that nook of the mountain, sacred only to the Indian and the bear! This is still the strangest thing in all man’s travelling, that he should carry about with him incongruous memories. There is no foreign land; it is the traveller only that is foreign, and now and again, by a flash of recollection, lights up the contrasts of the earth (p. 360).

The notion of “home [as] a necessary counterpoint” (Richardson, 2014, para. 26) helps us to understand why the graphic novel experiences of all participants can be described as foreign. Teaching a text with which they were “educationally unfamiliar” and teaching it in a context where the use of graphic novels was not well supported at the institutional level placed the participants’ experiences of teaching with graphic novels outside the “usual” or traditional textual practices that characterised their pedagogy. This contrast was manifest in the participants’ descriptions of the time afforded the graphic novel unit of work compared to the longer time given to the study of traditional prose texts and also in the small number of graphic novels studied within the curriculum. As case in point, most participants indicated the graphic novel unit of work at the centre of this study was possibly the only occasion on which students would access the format as a class text in their six years of secondary school.

Participants who had experience of comics as recreational readers also found the rules of engagement changed when graphic novels were used in an educational setting. They remarked that when reading comics for pleasure it didn’t matter if you didn’t fully “get it,” but when teaching students in the classroom to make meaning of, and critically
analyse, graphic novels, you have to be fluent in the nuances of the format. While the participants’ “first” language, the language of traditional prose and visual texts, went some way to assist them in their teaching of graphic novels, it was insufficient to enable participants to fully foster the development of a graphic novel metalanguage in students. Teaching requires an entirely different and new level of expertise. To this end, participants had sufficient knowledge to understand graphic novels, but not to communicate that understanding to others. Their subsequent feelings of concern, anxiety and nervousness typify the pilgrim wandering in a foreign landscape and signify the pilgrim’s loss of control and ineptness in dealing with the unfamiliar rhythms of the pilgrimage (Frey, 1998).

While the changed context in which participants accessed graphic novels and their changed rationale for using them rendered the participants’ experiences foreign, “foreignness” was also evident in the graphic novels per se. Several participants explicitly noted that graphic novels themselves had changed and the texts they were now using bore little resemblance in terms of content or artistic style to the comics of their childhood. Participants indicated that contemporary graphic novels are complex and sophisticated and raise the level of knowledge required to skilfully navigate them. As David noted through a biological metaphor, such skills do not occur naturally.

Beyond the participants’ descriptions of teaching with graphic novels as new and unfamiliar, the foreign nature of their graphic novel practice was also evidenced in the participants’ expectations that their students would find them unfamiliar. While participants general expressed a perception of their students as members of the “Eye Generation” (Kate) and thus visually literate, they also expected some resistance from students to the introduction of graphic novels as texts. Recognising that graphic novels might be external to their students’ “usual” classroom experiences with visual texts, participants, therefore, placed an emphasis on frontloading them with the codes and conventions of graphic novels. The participants’ explicit defence of graphic novels in their classrooms as legitimate texts for study added further weight to the notion that teaching and learning with graphic novels was considered outside the classroom norm and therefore foreign practice.
The foreignness of the participants’ experiences with graphic novels was evident not only in the *what* of their experiences, but also in *how* they described them, vis-à-vis the language they used in their descriptions. Of particular note were the varied definitions participants ascribed graphic novels and their reliance on the use of the more familiar language of visual texts, such as film and picture books, to describe various characteristics of the graphic novel format. Pauses in some participants’ descriptions suggested they were struggling to find the desired term, while others resorted to the use of fairly nondescript language when describing graphic novel codes and conventions. “Groping for the right words,” notes van Manen (1997, p. 112), provides a sense of “the limits of our personal language,” and, in this study, appeared to reinforce the participants’ lack of familiarity with graphic novels as classroom texts.

In my efforts to understand teachers’ experiences with graphic novels, the contrast between the participants’ experiences and their experiences with traditional prose texts continued to crystallise and confirmed the notion of teaching with graphic novels as a foreign experience. Coupled with the derivation of the term “pilgrim” from the Latin word *peregrinus*, meaning “foreigner,” it seemed appropriate, therefore, to use the sententious phrase “pilgrimage to a foreign land” to capture the essential meaning of the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels as classroom texts was revealed through the holistic exploration of the participants’ experiences. Related literature and research on the phenomenon of teaching with graphic novels were considered alongside these experiences to encourage reader insight and to help locate the lived experience in its broader context.

Of note across the participants’ experiences were the varied ways in which graphic novels were employed in the classroom to encourage the development of multiliteracies in students and the complexity of the experience of teaching with graphic novels in terms of the challenges involved, challenges generated from both outside and within the classroom.

The challenges faced by participants endorse the notion expressed in the literature that teaching with graphic novels involves an element of risk in terms of destabilising the traditional position of the teacher as the expert in the room. As well, the challenges faced highlight the tensions experienced by teachers who, in using graphic novels as texts, step outside the traditional norms of the classroom to provide
students with relevant and authentic learning experiences. In meeting these challenges, however, participants demonstrated a preparedness to become “lost,” and to and to enter “the mist of swirling uncertainty” (Macken-Horarik, 2009, p. 33) that may confront English teachers when embracing new texts and practices. In doing so, participants exhibited signs of what Macken-Horarik describes as the *protean mind*; that “teacherly disposition to explore different forms of semiosis in new ways” (p. 35). For participants, the rewards of this “teacherly disposition” were manifest in their professional growth; the affective, behavioural and cognitive engagement of their students; the development of multiliteracies in their students; and enhanced teacher-student relationships.

In summary, through their willingness to be innovative, adventurous, and adaptable, the participants in this study stand as champions of Biesta’s (2016) notion of *the beautiful risk of education*, wherein authentic education necessarily involves the risk of loosening one’s ties with the regulatory pressures of education to “help our children and students to engage with, and thus come into, the world” (p. 5).

In the final chapter, *Gazing Back, Looking Forward*, the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels within the context of this study is reflected on and the significance of the study’s findings are considered.
CHAPTER TEN
GAZING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

The road in the end taking the path the sun had taken,
into the western sea, and the moon rising behind you
as you stood where ground turned to ocean: no way
to your future now but the way your shadow could take,
walking before you across water, going where shadows go,
no way to make sense of a world that wouldn’t let you pass
except to call an end to the way you had come,
to take out each frayed letter you brought
and light their illumined corners; and to read
them as they drifted through the western light;
to empty your bags; to sort this and to leave that;
to promise what you needed to promise all along,
and to abandon the shoes that had brought you here
right at the water’s edge, not because you had given up
but because now, you would find a different way to tread,
and because, through it all, part of you could still walk on,
no matter how, over the waves.

*Finisterre* by David Whyte, 2012. Used with permission.

Finisterre. Once considered the end of the earth, an ancient place to celebrate new beginnings. Now considered the “real” end of the Camino for the pilgrim seeking a physical and spiritual conclusion beyond the hype and officialdom of Santiago. It is here in the company of the waves that crash onto the *Costa da Morte* that the serious pilgrim seeks the opportunity for reflection on the journey past. It is also here that pilgrims, like their ancient counterparts, divest themselves of the accoutrements of their journey in purification rituals that symbolise new beginnings. Backpacks are emptied, boots hurled into the sea, and, when the eyes of authorities are turned away, letters and notes of intent and support are burnt. But perhaps the most important ritual for pilgrims is that of watching the sunset over the sea and reflecting on the experience past while watching one’s shadow walk across the waves towards the future.

This final chapter is my Finisterre, the point where I celebrate the end of my research journey and throw my boots into the ocean. It is the point where I pause to
reflect on whether I have achieved my goals and ponder the path ahead. It is the point, therefore, where I consider the questions, Have I answered my research question? and, if so, So what?

My use of the phrase “gazing back” within the heading for this chapter and to describe the process by which the above questions are considered is deliberate. Not only does the notion of “gazing” connote a process of directed and sustained looking (Oxford University Press, 2017), but, befittingly, it describes a way of looking that connects to my own position in this study as a pilgrim or traveller. “Gazing,” according to Urry and Larsen (2011) is the particular way in which the traveller/tourist directs their attention to features of a landscape that are distinct from those of their everyday experience. In describing the “tourist gaze” (p.2), Urry and Larsen note:

Gazing is not merely seeing, but involves cognitive work of interpreting, evaluating, drawing comparisons and making mental connections between signs and their referents, and capturing signs photographically. Gazing is a set of practices. Individual performances of gazing at a particular sight are framed by cultural styles, circulating images and texts of this and other places, as well as personal experiences and memories. (p. 17)

Applying the notion of the tourist gaze as a lens through which to reflect on my research journey is a reminder of the social constructedness of my interpretation of the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels. In particular, it signposts the influence of my background experiences and assumptions, as well as my connections with the literature and the research of others, on my work of interpreting the participants’ experiences.

**Gazing Back on the Research Question**

This study was driven by the research question, “What is the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels?”; a question designed to extend and enhance understanding of a relatively little-researched phenomenon. By addressing this question, it was hoped that my shedding of light on the experiences of teachers who are using graphic novels in their classrooms would help close the distance between what *could* be happening with graphic novels, in terms of facilitating students’ multiliteracies, and what *is* happening, in terms of the slow uptake of graphic novels as classroom texts by teachers. While it is acknowledged that the facilitation of literacy is not the sole domain of English teachers, a number of reasons were outlined earlier in this report to explain
this parameter of the study. These reasons included my own interest and experience with graphic novels in the secondary English classroom and the ongoing recognition in policy and curriculum documents of literacy as a specific area of focus in English.

Central also to this study was consideration of the question, “Who is this research for?” and while it is hoped that the reach of this study’s findings will extend beyond the classroom, the study is, first and foremost, driven by my intent to inform and enhance teachers’ praxis with graphic novels. To meet this objective, I chose hermeneutic phenomenology as my methodological approach, an approach designed to provide insight into individual teachers’ experiences with graphic novels and to also reveal the hidden and shared meaning of those experiences when considered holistically. As well, the manner in which hermeneutic phenomenological research is presented as a thoughtful reflection that invokes the arts in its telling appealed to me as a means to report my research and to engage the teacher-reader, and is also acknowledgement of the English classroom as the context of this study. Taking this approach is commensurate with the suggestion that teachers are more likely to engage with research and have it inform their practice when it is accessible “physically, conceptually, linguistically, and practically [and is] credible, useable, and interesting” (Borg, 2013, p. 99).

Rich descriptions of individual participants’ experiences of teaching with graphic novels were generated in this study through the use of in-depth and open-structured interviews with participants. Through my interpretation of these descriptions, which was enhanced through my interactions with the literature and through reflection on my own horizon of knowledge and understanding, the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels as texts in the secondary English classroom was revealed.

Gazing Back on the Lived Experience of Teaching with Graphic Novels

Like the numerous paths of the Camino, there is no one way to teach with graphic novels. Teachers may venture forth on the relatively simple and straightforward path whereby graphic novels are used to engage students and bolster their understanding of alphabetic literacy. Yet others may diverge from this path to take less travelled and circuitous roads to prepare students for effective participation in a communication landscape that is increasingly visual. For these more intrepid travellers, there is great power lying within the covers of graphic novels, and teachers’ willingness to venture beyond the border of the traditional practices of their classrooms and thus, outside their
pedagogical comfort zone, to look between those covers reaps due reward, both for them and for their students.

Paradoxically, what is common to teachers using graphic novels in their classrooms is the uniqueness of the experiences that support them in their journey. Some carry backpacks brimming with comics capital, yet others come with little support for their journey other than a firm conviction that what they do is for the benefit of those whom they teach. Moreover, some come with a great personal passion for the graphic novel format, while others acknowledge graphic novels as not something they would engage with outside the classroom. Common amongst them, however, is a commitment to the use of graphic novels by way of recognition that visual texts are embedded in the “everydayness” of their students’ lives. Furthermore, teachers using graphic novels as texts acknowledge it is their responsibility as teachers to ensure their students are properly equipped to consume and create such texts to the highest level. To achieve this, teachers using graphic novels recognise the importance of onboarding their students with the knowledge and skills of multiliteracies that include visual, cultural and critical literacy.

While altruism underpins teachers’ use of graphic novels as classroom texts, the personal investment of teachers in their practice with graphic novels cannot be overlooked. Enjoying the content of what is taught, securing their position at the advancing edge of pedagogy in the English classroom, being able to forge positive relationships with students around a common interest, and procuring a sense of pride and satisfaction from the engagement and learning of their students all enhance the professional growth and sense of wellbeing in those teaching with graphic novels. The achievement of such, however, is not attained without some discomfort.

Using graphic novels as texts involves an element of risk as teachers pit personal and professional beliefs in the educational value of the format against institutional priorities that continue to privilege alphabetic literacy and prose texts. In their efforts to be innovative and provide students with authentic and relevant learning experiences, teachers using graphic novels face challenges generated from within and without their classrooms. Starting with self, a lack of mastery of the graphic novel metalanguage is not only a cause of frustration, but also serves as a barrier to teachers’ ability to provide the necessary overt instruction in said metalanguage to their students. While possible assistance might come from those students with a proclivity for reading graphic novels, such assistance is more in the shape of engagement with the format rather than in
expertise with its technicalities and the ability to critically analyse texts. The role of the teacher is thus heightened by the necessity to expand and extend the ways in which students’ access the texts of their lifeworlds.

At the other end of the scale, a major hurdle to be overcome in teachers’ use of graphic novels in the classroom is the lack of support from policy and curriculum making agencies. Teachers are frustrated with an English curriculum, already resembling a crowded Japanese bullet train, at having yet another passenger thrust hastily through its doors. Teachers do not have, nor are given, the time to give this new passenger the attention it warrants. Furthermore, the foreign appearance of this new passenger and its incompatibility with prevailing tests and measures used to evaluate the efficacy of traditional literacy pedagogy only adds to teachers’ frustrations. Tensions are yet further exacerbated by the scarcity of formally organised professional development opportunities to support teaching with graphic novels, thus forcing participants to largely rely for support on local and self-sourced resources that are acquired on a just-in-time and point-of-need basis.

The ability of teachers using graphic novels as classroom texts to look beyond the challenges of such use to its rewards exemplify an innovative, resilient and adaptive mindset. Rather than succumbing to the pressure of being destabilised as the “expert” in the room, teachers using graphic novels instead welcome the opportunity to engage with texts and students in new and different ways, ways that provide a bridge between the world of school and students’ lifeworlds, and ways that play with the dynamics of the classroom. Thus, at various times in the graphic novel classroom, the listener becomes the speaker, the speaker becomes the listener, the teacher becomes the learner, the student becomes the teacher, and, together, the teacher and students become explorers.

Looking Forward: The “So What?” Question

Having called forth the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels in the secondary English classroom, the question that must be answered is, “So What?” (Selwyn, 2014). What is the significance of this study and for whom?

As noted in the earlier discussion of the philosophical foundations of the study, the drawing of conclusions in hermeneutic research is neither desirable nor warranted. Urry and Larsen’s (2011) highlighting of the individuality of “performances of gazing” (p. 17) by tourists is also a reminder of the point that my interpretation of the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels is but one interpretation of potentially many. While it is my journey today, it might well be someone else's journey tomorrow. And,
as any pilgrim who has walked the Camino will attest to, conditions on the Camino can change between days and within them. A hermeneutic phenomenological study, therefore, is much like a photograph before it is digitally enhanced; it captures an experience as it happened, albeit it through a linguistic filter, and locates the experience within a specific context. The viewer of the photograph gains an idea of what the captured experience is like and familiar aspects of that experience may well resonate with the viewer, but ultimately, the viewer cannot expect that a visit to the same place at a different time and in different company will necessarily be the same.

The acknowledged ephemeral nature of this research does not detract from its significance in advancing understanding of a little-researched phenomenon. In recognition that meaningful research must push beyond its implications for the researcher and the research participants (Selwyn, 2014), the significance of this study can be considered in the first instance in terms of its contribution to educational practice.

Significance of the Study for Educational Practice

As research by a teacher, for teachers, it is hoped this study goes some way to address “a mismatch between teachers’ narrative experience of classroom life and the portrayal of learning and teaching they encounter in research papers” (Borg, 2013, p. 79). By way of my chosen methodology, teachers’ individual voices are frequent and loud in the study, and the phenomenological text, through its connections to literature, poetry and linguistic devices, is designed to present the unfamiliar experience of participants in a way that will resonate with my intended audience. Furthermore, the methodological warrant of hermeneutic phenomenology to avoid the temptation to generalise or theorise on the lived experience of phenomena ensures this research remains grounded in a “real” context with which teachers are familiar.

My description of the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels highlights a number of essential features of that experience: the positive and passionate mindset of teachers using the format, the challenges they face in terms of the local and institutional challenges of graphic novel use, and the rewards they reap in terms of the cognitive and affective outcomes for both them and their students. In the first instance, the significance of providing insight into the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels lies in the participants’ enhanced awareness of the influences on their classroom practice with graphic novels and the ensuing sense of empowerment they acquired in regard to their future practice with graphic novels.
Beyond the significance of findings for those directly involved, however, this study offers a rich description of what it is like to teach with graphic novels in anticipation that others might walk in the shoes of the participants and be encouraged to reflect on their own practice which may, or may not, currently include the use of graphic novels as classroom texts. As Paris and Combs (2006) note:

The contextualised and dynamic nature of the teachers’ lived meanings gives them a more open quality that invites others into the journey, rather than simply describing the destination…. For teachers and others … lived meanings provide entry points and illuminate details of the journey that are often obscured in academic definitions. (p. 590)

In broad terms, my hope that this research will resonate with teachers is founded on the theory of the diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 1995), which highlights the power of peers to influence the adoption of new, as in not previously experienced, practices. Rogers notes that for a person to adopt an innovation, seeing or hearing about similar individuals who are using that innovation successfully encourages adoption by stimulating awareness of, and reflection on, the innovation, and by encouraging conversations about the innovation between colleagues.

More specific to the significance of this research for classroom practice, Borg (2013) notes the value of teacher research undertaken in classrooms in terms of helping teachers make deeper sense of their work and exposing them to innovative practice. Research that resonates with teachers, suggests Borg, also provides them with a defendable justification for what they do and offers them the impetus for discussions of pedagogy. By extension, it is anticipated that teachers engaging with this study will be encouraged to foster new ways of seeing, doing, talking, knowing and thinking about their practice with graphic novels. The value of this research, therefore, might well be “more facilitative than determinative” (Borg, 2013, p. 98), its impact more cognitive than practical and more long-term than immediate. Even if this study does not inspire teachers to include graphic novels in their classroom practice, but instead progresses their awareness of the format, then it will have gone some way to achieve its objective.

Drawing on a number of studies into the impact of teacher research on teachers’ practice, Borg (2013) also notes that the influence of the research will depend to a significant extent on the applicability of the research to teachers’ context, the degree of congruence of the research with their current practice, and the ability of the research to “stand up” against the competing influences on teachers’ work. In this regard, the
Significance of the Study at the Classroom Level

The significance of this study at the classroom level lies in the finding that teachers with a willingness to be innovative and flexible in their classroom practice can, in tandem with appropriate support, teach successfully with graphic novels despite the constraint of a curriculum that continues to privilege alphabetic literacy and the study of prose texts. Furthermore, this study indicates that teachers are willing to place themselves in positions of vulnerability in order to stay true to the “soft” values they hold as teachers: “thoughtfulness, hope, and integrity” (Williamson, 2013, p. 198). The participants were thoughtful regarding the most effective way to address the literacy demands of a changing textual landscape, hopeful that their persistence to embrace a multiliteracies pedagogy would bear fruit, and honest by engaging in pedagogy that they perceived as being relevant and appropriate to meet the diverse needs of their students.

**Significance of the Study for Educational Decision-Making**

While it is clearly acknowledged that this study’s findings cannot, and should not, be considered a platform from which to advocate for systemic change to render greater recognition of, and support for, the teaching of graphic novels, this description of the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels cannot be divorced from the broader context of institutional decision-making. The significance of this study at this level comes by way of adding weight to the broader discourse on the disconnect between the traditional literacy agenda sponsored at the institutional level and the multiliteracies agenda that is championed by many literacy educators and academics.

One of the most clearly articulated challenges encountered in the lived experience of teaching with graphic novels focused on the lack of support provided by educational policy-makers and curriculum designers. Participants provided descriptions of a crowded, narrow and prescriptive curriculum that offered little time and support for the use of graphic novels in the classroom and which forced teachers to work within a culture of testing that was oriented to traditional literacy and prose texts. Despite the implementation of the *Australian Curriculum: English 7-10* (ACARA, 2017) over the course of this study, with its nod to the multiliteracies agenda, the instability of the curriculum agenda is unlikely to provide a stable platform from which teachers feel confident in launching a venture focused on graphic novels. Since its initial release in 2010 and up until June 2016, there have been 20 iterations of the key elements of the Australian Curriculum. In the *Review of the Australian Curriculum: Final Report* (Australian Department of Education, 2014) that prompted the 2016 revision of the curriculum, the Australian Government indicated an important motivation for the
review was the performance of Australian students in “the international context as measured by tests” (p.1). As well, the review was somewhat critical of curricula shaped around student interests and also reinforced a back-to-basics notion of literacy. This ongoing focus on literacy testing that privileges traditional literacy can only serve to unsettle schools and teachers who acknowledge the changed textual landscape and are striving to enact a multiliteracies approach in their classrooms.

This study might also be viewed as significant in terms of the attention afforded graphic novels in pre-service teacher education programs. Such programs provided only one participant with any form of support or encouragement regarding the use of graphic novels as classroom texts, despite a number of participants undergoing their initial teacher education within the context of the twenty-first century “social turn in literacy” (Saudelli & Rowsell, 2013, p. 46). That said, research published since my data collection suggests that the visibility of, and attention to, multimodal texts in teacher education programs has improved (Honan, Exley, Kervin, Simpson & Wells, 2014). Saudelli and Rowsell (2013) caution, however, that providing instruction for preservice teachers in the technicalities of multimodal texts alone will be an insufficient response to a multiliteracies agenda unless it is couched within the broader discussion of how students learn best and is delivered from a multimodal, not traditional, literacy perspective.

As evidenced by research that indicates pre-service teachers are willing to use graphic novels as texts, but may be dissuaded to activate their intentions by the negative attitudes towards the format of their future colleagues and school communities (Clark, 2013a; Mathews, 2011), changes to teacher education cannot, in isolation, bring about change in the classroom. Decision-making, therefore at the school and subject department level regarding the inclusion of graphic novels as texts must also be reconciled with the research that highlights the value of such inclusion for both students and teachers.

**Significance of the Study for the Existing Discourse on Teaching with Graphic Novels**

This study’s exploration and illumination of the experience of teachers using graphic novels adds to the growing body of research and literature into the educational value and use of graphic novels as texts. In particular, the study acknowledges the role played by teachers in closing the gap between what-could-be and what-is happening with graphic novels in our classrooms. The pathic emphasis of this study’s description
of teachers’ lived experience with graphic novels adds another dimension to the growing body of work that encompasses teachers’ and pre-service teachers’ perceptions of graphic novels (Annett, 2008; Block, 2013; Clark, 2013a; Lapp et al., 2012), how teachers might use graphic novels (Rhoades et al., 2015; Boerman-Cornell, 2015), and how students learn through graphic novels (Connors, 2015; Jimenez & Meyer, 2016). In providing insight into not only the way teachers use graphic novels as multimodal texts to facilitate students’ development of multiliteracies and the challenges and celebrations that such use brings, but also into the wellbeing of teachers in regard to graphic novel use, it is hoped that the research will connect with readers on more than a practical level.

**A Final Reflection**

This research study provides insight into individual teachers’ experiences with graphic novels as classroom texts, but also situates those “parts” of the phenomenon of teaching with graphic novels into the context of the “whole”; the broader institutional and programmatic environments in which teachers must operate. The study’s findings highlight the complexity of influences on teachers using graphic novels, ranging from the personal to the institutional, and provide the reader with the opportunity to reflect on how participants worked with, through and around those influences.

For me as the researcher, perhaps the most significant finding was the sense of hope and optimism that participants held in regard to the use of graphic novels as texts. I will long hold on to Megan’s claim that,

>This is something that if we don’t get our head around it now, it’s something that we’re definitely going to be teaching in a few years and we might as well try and be at the forefront of it, to try and develop an expertise…. It’s only going to grow, it’s not going to go away. (Megan)

Since the data for this study were gathered and interpreted, a national curriculum in English that makes explicit mention of graphic novels as texts has been implemented. When considered alongside the literature and research, and the integration of a multiliteracies agenda into programs for pre-service teachers, there is cause for optimism that Megan’s prediction is becoming a reality and that graphic novels will be increasingly afforded greater attention as classroom texts by English teachers.
Postscript

It's a week before my thesis submission and some years after the “reluctant teacher” incident reported in my Introduction. A familiar scenario starts to unfold in my school library...

I’ve just finished reading aloud a passage from one of our newest acquisitions in young adult fiction to a class of Year 8 boys in one of my regular fortnightly StoryLines lessons in the library.

Me: Okay boys, it’s time to go and find yourselves a book to settle in with for the rest of the lesson.

The boys wander off to the shelves and return a few minutes later, a number of them with some of our ever-so-popular graphic novels. Shoes are kicked off as they plonk themselves into a comfy chair to enjoy some time with a good book. It’s then that the boys’ English teacher, who has been actively involved in the lesson approaches me with a copy of the graphic novel version of Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet.

Teacher: I’m really interested in using graphic novels as a means to help my class study Shakespeare. I think they’ll be really engaged by the graphic novel.

Me: That’s fantastic. There’s even a website to support the teaching of this version. Would you like to talk more about how we could work together on this?

Teacher: Thanks. That would be great.

Times have changed!
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APPENDIX A

ETHICS APPROVAL: UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Ref: IM/PE

2 March 2011

Associate Professor Alyson Simpson
Faculty of Education and Social Work
Education Building - A35
The University of Sydney
Email: Alyson.simpson@sydney.edu.au

Dear Professor Simpson

I am pleased to inform you that the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) approved your protocol entitled "Graphic novels in the NSW secondary classroom: Teachers’ perceptions, attitudes and practice" at its meeting held on 1 March 2011.

Details of the approval are as follows:

Protocol No.: 13547
Approval Period: March 2011 to March 2012
Authorised Personnel: Dr Alyson Simpson
Ms Dianne Laycock
Dr John Callow

Documents Approved:
Participant Information Statement Version 1.3.2.11
Participant Consent Form Version 1.3.2.11
Letter to Principal Version 1.3.2.11
Online posting Version 1.3.2.11
Interview Schedule Version 1.3.2.11

The HREC is a fully constituted Ethics Committee in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans—March 2007 under Section 5.1.29.

The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans. A report on this research must be submitted every 12 months from the date of the approval or on completion of the project, whichever occurs first. Failure to submit reports will result in withdrawal of consent for the project to proceed. Your report is due by 31 March 2012.
Special Conditions of Approval

Please note any requirements required in the following guideline:

Chief Investigator/Supervisor's responsibilities to ensure that:

1. All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC within 72 hours for clinical trials/interventional research.
2. All unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should be reported to the HREC as soon as possible.
3. Any changes to the protocol must be approved by the HREC before the research project can proceed.
4. All research participants are to be provided with a Participant Information Statement and Consent Form, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee. The following statement must appear on the bottom of the Participant Information Statement: Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Manager, Human Ethics, University of Sydney on +61 2 9351 8176 (Telephone); +61 2 9351 8177 (Facsimile) or m.humanethics@sydney.edu.au (Email).
5. You must retain copies of all signed Consent Forms and provide these to the HREC on request.
6. It is your responsibility to provide a copy of this letter to any internal/external granting agencies if requested.
7. The HREC approval is valid for four (4) years from the Approval Period stated in this letter. Investigators are requested to submit a progress report annually.
8. A report and a copy of any published material should be provided at the completion of the Project.

Please do not hesitate to contact Research Integrity (Human Ethics) should you require further information or clarification.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Associate Professor Ian Maxwell
Chair
Human Research Ethics Committee

Copy: Dianne Laycock  dlay5255@uni.sydney.edu.au
For posting to: ETA (NSW) Forum; AISTL & OZ_TL listservs (with request to pass on to English colleagues)

Subject Line: Invitation to participate in graphic novel research

My name is Di Laycock and I am seeking expressions of interest to participate in my research into secondary English teachers’ experiences with graphic novels. This research will form the basis for my Doctor of Education at The University of Sydney and will be conducted under the supervision of Dr Alyson Simpson and Dr Jon Callow of the Faculty of Education and Social Work.

The purpose of the study is to gain insight into the nature of, and influences on, secondary English teachers’ experiences with graphic novels. My interest in this topic is grounded in my work over the last 5 years with teachers and teacher librarians to include graphic novels in school libraries and in classrooms.

I am a fulltime teacher librarian in Sydney and therefore, for reasons of time and travel, I am seeking participants from amongst secondary English teachers in the area extending south to Wollongong, north to Newcastle and west to Blackheath.

Should you wish to participate, I will be asking to meet with you for two interviews, each of which will take approximately 30-45 mins. The interviews will be conducted at a time and place convenient to you, and will be recorded to enable analysis.

There is no requirement for you to have teaching experience with graphic novels prior to your participation in this study. You will, however, need to be teaching with graphic novels during the 2011 school year in order to record reflections on the experience. It will be up to you as to how you do this (e.g., hand-written journal, blog, or audio diary), and it is expected that it should take no longer than 30 minutes per week of out-of-class time. A discussion of your reflections will form part of my second interview with you.

I’d be delighted to hear from anyone interested in working with me in this study. It is anticipated that by taking part, participants will gain a deeper understanding of their practice. As well, it is hoped that teachers with whom the research findings are shared will be supported in their endeavours with graphic novels. Further, it is hoped that the research findings will provide direction for future literacy initiatives regarding professional development for teachers, pre-service teacher education, and in curriculum construction.

Your reply to this invitation with an expression of interest to dlay5255@uni.sydney.edu.au is not an agreement to participate, but rather an indication that you would like more information. On receiving your reply, I will forward more details about the study and your role within it. Should you then wish to participate, you and your principal will be asked to provide consent. Even then, and at any time throughout the study, your participation will be voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

Regards
Di Laycock
APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

The focus of this study on secondary NSW English teachers’ experiences of graphic novels as texts reflects a growing educational interest over the last decade into the use of graphic novels to address the varied literacy needs of students in the 21st century. A significant body of research indicates that teaching and learning focused on graphic novels can facilitate the development of alphabetic, visual and critical literacies in students. However, the research also suggests that teachers are cautious in their willingness to incorporate graphic novels into their teaching programs. To address this sense of caution, the aim of this research project is to illuminate and deepen understanding of teachers’ practice with graphic novels as texts, and to gain insight into the perceptions and attitudes of teachers that contribute to this experience.

(2) Who is carrying out this study?

This study is being conducted by Ms Dianne Laycock and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Education at the University of Sydney under the supervision of Dr Alyson Simpson, Associate Dean, and Dr Jon Callow, Lecturer.

(3) What does the study involve?

The study will require you meet with the researcher for two interviews at a mutually agreed time and location. To ensure accuracy of the data, and to facilitate data analysis, audio recordings of the interviews will be made.

For analysis purposes, the researcher will make a partial written transcript of the audio recording of each interview. The transcript of the first interview will be made available to you for discussion at the second interview. You will also be given the transcript of the second interview for consideration.

During a unit of work in your classroom, where the focus is on teaching and learning through graphic novels, you will also be asked to record your reflections on the experience of teaching with a graphic novel. You will be given a choice as to how you do this – hand-written journal, blog, or audio recording. A discussion of your reflections will form part of the researcher’s second interview with you.
(4) How much time will the study take?

It is anticipated that each of the two interviews will take approximately 30-45 minutes. It is also expected that the reflection exercise will take no longer than 30 minutes per week for the duration of the teaching experience.

(5) Can I withdraw from the study?

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to consent and may withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with either the researcher or the University of Sydney.

During your interviews, you may ask for them to be stopped at any time if you do not wish to continue. The audio recording of the interview will be erased and the information provided will not be used in the study. Similarly, if you choose not to continue your participation, any written reflections you have provided the researcher will be destroyed and the information excluded from the study.

(6) Will anyone else know the results?

All aspects of the study, including the results, will be strictly confidential and only the researchers will have access to the information. In the final written report of the study, and in any publications or presentations arising from it, you and your school will not be identified.

(7) Will the study benefit me?

It is expected that you will benefit professionally from the opportunity provided through this research to reflect deeply upon your practice. As well, it is hoped that the research findings will have transferability to the practice of those with whom the research resonates. Further, it is anticipated that the research findings will provide direction for future literacy initiatives with regard to the professional development for teachers, pre-service teacher education, and curriculum construction.

(8) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes.

(9) What if I require further information?

After you have had the opportunity to read this information, Dianne Laycock will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Dr Alyson Simpson on 9351 6344 or alyson.simpson@sydney.edu.au.

Best wishes

Alyson Simpson

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact The Manager, Human Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on +61 2 8627 8176 (Telephone); +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile) or ho.humanethics@sydney.edu.au (Email).

This information sheet is for you to keep.
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, [PRINT NAME], give consent to my participation in the research project:

GRAPHIC NOVELS IN THE SECONDARY ENGLISH CLASSROOM: TEACHER'S PERCEPTIONS, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICE

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement with the researcher/s.

3. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher/s or the University, now or in the future.

4. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

5. I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary – I am not under any obligation to consent.

6. I understand that I can stop the interviews at any time if I do not want to continue and that the audio recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.

7. I understand that if I withdraw from the study any other information provided to the researcher will be destroyed and will not be included in the study.
Dear Principal,

My name is Ms Dianne Laycock and I am a student at the University of Sydney. I am undertaking a research study for the degree of Doctor of Education and I am writing to outline the nature of the research and to seek your permission to include teachers from your school as research participants. I am also seeking your permission to conduct interviews with these teachers on the school premises after the conclusion of the school day.

My research project aims to explore the experiences of secondary English teachers using graphic novels as classroom texts. The research will involve approximately ten participants from secondary schools in the Greater Sydney region.

Much has been written about the changing nature of literacy and the need for schools to address such change by increasing the diversity of texts used in the English classroom. A growing body of research indicates that graphic novels, a format of the comics medium, can play a significant role in the development of multiliteracies in students. The research also suggests, however, that teachers are hesitant to include graphic novels in their teaching and learning programs. To address this sense of hesitancy, the aim of this research project is to deepen understanding of teachers’ practice that focuses on the use of graphic novels as texts, and to gain insight into the perceptions and attitudes of teachers that contribute to this experience.

A teacher on your staff, [name], has expressed an interest in being a participant in my study. In my reply to their expression of interest, I indicated the need for them to seek your approval to participate. Their participation will be on a strictly voluntary basis and they will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Further, strict confidentiality will be maintained at all times concerning both the participant’s identity and the identity of the school in which they teach.

I need to conduct two interviews with participants, with each interview lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. To minimise any inconvenience, I would like to conduct the interviews outside of school hours at a location, such as a classroom, within your school. If this is not possible, then the interviews will be conducted at a venue agreed upon by the participant and me. To enable data analysis, both interviews will be recorded and partial written transcripts will be made of the recordings. These transcripts will be made available to participants for validation. Participants will also be asked to keep a journal of their experiences with graphic novels in the classroom.

Your approval for [name] to participate in my research would be gratefully appreciated. It is expected that participants in the study will benefit through reflection on their practice. As well, it is anticipated that the research findings will have transferability to the practice of those with whom the research resonance. Finally, it is hoped that the research findings will provide guidance to providers of professional development for teachers, to educators involved in pre-service teacher programs, and to curriculum developers.
If you require further information, please contact me on 0415256939 or at dlay5255@uni.sydney.edu.au. If you consent to [name] participating in my research, could you please indicate this to me via email.

Alternatively, should you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact my supervisor, Dr Alyson Simpson, at the University of Sydney on 93516344 or alyson.simpson@sydney.edu.au.

Kind regards,

Dianne Laycock
University of Sydney

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Deputy Manager, Human Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on +61 2 8627 8176 (Telephone); +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile) or re.humanethics@sydney.edu.au (Email).
Dear Mrs Laycock

I refer to your application to conduct a research project in New South Wales government schools entitled Graphic novels in the NSW secondary English classroom: Teachers' perceptions, attitudes and practice. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved. You may now contact the Principals of the nominated schools to seek their participation. You should include a copy of this letter with the documents you send to schools.

This approval will remain valid until 31/03/2012.

The following researchers or research assistants have fulfilled the Working with Children screening requirements to interact with or observe children for the purposes of this research for the period indicated:

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Approval expires</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dianne Laycock</td>
<td>02/05/2012</td>
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I draw your attention to the following requirements for all researchers in New South Wales government schools:

- School Principals have the right to withdraw the school from the study at any time. The approval of the Principal for the specific method of gathering information for the school must also be sought.
- The privacy of the school and the students is to be protected.
- The participation of teachers and students must be voluntary and must be at the school's convenience.
- Any proposal to publish the outcomes of the study should be discussed with the Research Approvals Officer before publication proceeds.

When your study is completed please forward your report marked to Manager, Schooling Research, Department of Education and Training, Locked Bag 53, Darlinghurst, NSW 2010.

Yours sincerely

Dr Max Smith
Senior Manager
Student Engagement and Program Evaluation
24 June 2011
APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

Interview #1

- Thank you for participation; reiteration of its voluntary and confidential nature
- General professional background: Training/ experience
- Inclusion of graphic novels in training/experience
- Definition/ description/ understanding of a graphic novel
- Personal experiences with graphic novels; influence of professional experience
- Rationale for using graphic novels
- Graphic novels in the curriculum: recognition of the format; outcomes addressed
- Professional development in multimodal texts/ graphic novels: in-school, external, personal
- Perceived issues around graphic novels as texts

Interview #2

- Follow-ups from Interview #1
- Reiteration of unit aims
- General feeling about teaching the unit
- Strategies used
- Challenges
- Successes
- Support for teaching the unit
- Achievement of aims
- Future use of graphic novels
APPENDIX H
WRITING ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

Dear

Here are some guidelines that might help you write the reflections I’ve asked you to do whilst teaching the graphic novel unit. I don't want this to be an onerous task and would not expect you to spend more than around 30 minutes per week on it.

As I indicated on the information sheet about my research, feel free to choose how you record your reflections - on paper, blog, audio recording on your iPhone etc. (just as long as I can have a copy when the unit is over).

Please don't feel restricted in what you write in your reflection, but, if possible, could you please include comment on:

a) The main strategies used with the graphic novel (feel free to annotate this on a copy of the unit outline that you can give me)
b) Your objectives in using these strategies
c) Strategies that worked/ didn't work in terms of teaching and learning outcomes
d) Factors that influenced why they worked or didn't, e.g. time, accessibility to computers etc.
e) Any significant teaching moments with the graphic novel (could be ones that confirm your decision to use the GN, or something that might affect your future use)
f) Students’ responses to the GN as a text
g) Your general feelings as to how the unit is going

Many thanks
Di
APPENDIX I

WRITING ACTIVITY EXEMPLAR (THOMAS)

Week 1–Monday, July 18, 2011

Well this has been my first week teaching with the graphic novel Maus. As it was the first week, we did a number of introductory activities to slowly break into the text. It is such a big text in itself as we are looking at both books 1 and 2 within it, and I also need to get through some related material, I think this could indeed be quite full on. I am also a little worried that students often comment that English is 'ruined' for them as they are often required to analyse texts which in turn has the possibility of taking all the enjoyment out of studying the text. As I have such a respect and appreciation for Maus, I will do my best to really not be too over the top that the students lose their enjoyment of the text, but we shall indeed see.

At Parent Teacher evening in Term 2, I had encouraged my students and their parents to read Maus over the holidays before we commence the unit, so they would have a head start. This meant that most students had already read the text which was great. I think it was more than great actually, I think having those students actually helped my own teaching practice in that it meant I had to be on my A- game to cater to different paces of student learning and interest.

As I had explicitly asked students to read the text before this Term, I have asked the students to read Maus in their own time at home. This was their only homework for this first week of school at least, so I should follow this up next week and see how those who did not read it are progressing. They also have the first ten minutes of each English lesson as wide reading so that is not to be too much of concern in that respect either. In fact, I think I might use the wide reading time really well this term and let the students know in advance what part of the text we are studying and then they can reread that if they have time.

The main activities I used this week were quite simple in their nature but quite effective in terms of laying a foundation for the Unit. I asked specific questions relating to graphic novels and student experience. I was surprised at how little of my class had come across graphic novels before. just three out of 26 students had read a GN in their life! But that's actually ok- as it means that this will (hopefully) be a positive experience for them. There is a lot of positivity and buzz around the text so I am looking forward to making the most of that.

Positivity in terms of students reading Maus over the term 2 holidays and really enjoying it.

The main strategies that I used to teach the graphic novel this week was with a focus on vocab building. This meant exposing students to new words and ideas-
panels, shading, text boxes and so on. I got the students to skim through the text as we went and point out examples of the key words. This was helpful and they were engaged. This was also helpful in terms of teaching outcomes as it was equipping students to use the language of the text, but it was not the most engaging of activities to get into. Why this was not so engaging I think came down to the teaching delivery- teacher led.

I have spent a bit of time on the context to *Maus* as setting up information of WWII context is also important in the text. This was done independently by students using computers.

**Week 2- Monday, 25 July, 2011**

It’s always exciting teaching something that is new to the students. Yesterday, we were looking at a part in Chapter 2 of *Maus* and one of the questions that the students had to answer was relating to what effect did the different panel shapes and sizes have on telling the story? This started some really great discussion as at first many students were unsure, but later as it turned out, they began to make connections with the panels and emphasis and what is significant on the page etc. That also meant helping them consider how you could tell the story flashes between the past and the present. Another encouraging moment was talking about the representations of humans and animals and the significance of that. This was the first time it had come up in the unit (week2, day 1) and also due to my lack of knowledge about the specific technique; we did not go into it with too much detail. Today in class discussion, we were looking and discussing different ideas presented in the text. When I asked the students to turn to page 30 and account for the connotations of using the word 'our' capitalised and bolded in the last panel. This question also many students had trouble with ...! think partly because they did not understand the word connotations, but also because they did not quite know what to make of words being capitalised and bolded in a graphic novel context before.

*A specific moment in class...*

**Teacher:** "Today we will be continuing on with some more Maus."

**Student:** [raises hand pulls through body] yes.

**Reflection:** It is so refreshing to be studying a text that the students are enjoying and engaged with- and I honestly think that is because of the graphic novel text type. They can all hook into it at whatever level if learning/reading they are at.

In the first term of this year, all students completed a unit on visual literacy. It was great to be able to build on students’ knowledge of visual literacy skills and how it was present in the text. The hand out was also helpful (the one that lists the visual literacy techniques) as it meant that students could continue to refer
back to them.

**Week 3- 1 August, 2011**

Unfortunately, due to sickness, I was absent from class for nearly all of this week. In my absence, I set students to work independently (silent reading, making own notes on representations of war etc). I also left some worksheets (see resources 2/3) which were aimed at developing the learners’ ideas in the text relating to themes and character. As an important part of their upcoming assessment component will be their identification of technique and analysis, I wanted to guide students in their direction of these terms and examples.

**Week 4- 8 August, 2011**

It is the conversations with colleagues that are often most fruitful. This week in the staffroom a couple of staff members had mentioned how rich they were finding *Maus* as a text. Some teachers said that actually they used it in Year 12 English for the History and Memory module as a related text because it is so detailed and sophisticated in its understanding. Some other teachers actually put forward the argument that there should be no related texts at all in this Unit, and that the whole unit should be one of a focus on *Maus* as a sole core text. I am actually not opposed to this as I do feel that I am not quite doing justice to the text- we are flying through it is a class, trying to scramble our ideas together and go over the work that was set last week in my absence.

We had not done much detailed analysis in terms of geography of the setting and so on, so we took a bit of a break from that and directed our attention towards the timing and setting (4). This is also helpful as students will be heading on an excursion to the Sydney Jewish Museum next week.

**Week 5- 15 August 2011**

This has been such a big week with organising and facilitating a whole year excursion to the Sydney Jewish Museum in Darlinghurst. We did this to build on students understanding of the ideas in *Maus*, particularly in terms of the survivors’ experience and wider Jewish context. The following lessons for the week, we as a class talked about the recount text type and the elements of this. I attached a student's work (5) of this recount. Nearly all students in their recounts were able to make connections with what they had studied in the text with the experience that they had at the Museum.

It is this sort of rich, deep learning experience...and having the students then reflect on that and make connections with the text is the sort of learning that is made possible by graphic novels! Yeah!

**Week 6- Monday, 22 August, 2011**

This was our last week looking at *Maus*. We rounded up some discussions of
characters, plot, themes and the dynamics of the text. The article "a novel concept" (6) was an excellent resource to engage learners in their approach to the texts.

This was a great resource to use with students as it was more consolidating in their thinking and learning about the GN text type.

Students were getting more and more anxious about starting GMT, so this has been the topic of much conversation.

**Week 7- 29 August, 2011**

This week we have been exploring the representations of War as it is present in related texts, namely *Goodnight Mister Tom*.

In some preliminary conversations with students, a couple had commented on the challenging nature of the text. When I probed further, it was revealed that in comparison to *Maus*, GMT did not have images and as such, made it harder to visualise.

**Week 8- 5 September 2011**

This week we have been continuing in our study of *Goodnight Mister Tom*. There is a lot to get through in terms of substance in the text and it is taking quite a while. Students are stressing with their essay next week so that will very much be the focus.

**Week 9- 12 September, 2011**

This week students completed their essay task assessment on Maus and Goodnight Mister Tom. They were so anxious about the assessment that I had one girl in tears at the end of the lesson because she was so upset with her response (she felt she managed her time poorly). In Year 8! I was even feeling stressed for them. Oh well, we shall see. I attached an assessment notification and a sample student response (unmarked) for archival purposes.

For the remainder of this week, we will be watching *Tomorrow When the War Began* the film to reward the students.

**Week 10- 19 September, 2011**

Unit conclusion, summing up and reflecting on the unit.

This has been the final week of the Term and I have just been tying up all the loose ends with the Unit. We had a whole class discussion to debrief and I was conscious of enabling students to make their own connections with the texts and develop their own opinions on the Unit. We had a great discussion about what they had learnt and how their understanding of war had changed as a result of exploring different texts and text types. Students commented that they had
developed an understanding of how different text types can use their conventions to present different ideas- and referred to *Maus* as a text that did this. Although they were not explicit in their communication, what they were referring to was that because war is such a graphic concept, having the graphic novel use the combination of words and images meant that quite a distant concept was now becoming alive.
Field Notes from Interview #1 with Kate

4.00pm, 9th August 2011
Kate’s Office

“Please excuse the mess on my desk” asked K as we entered her office for our interview. It’s funny how teachers, including me, feel the need to justify the evidence of their busy-ness. And as I sat down and waited while K fetched me a cup of tea, it was obvious how busy she was… with syllabus documents, teaching programs and text books occupying every available space. K’s lack of time to smell the roses, was further confirmed when I commented on the beautiful eucalypt tree outside the window, and K announced that she didn’t have much time to look and appreciate it. Welcome to the world of the Head of the English faculty in a large independent Catholic boys’ school.

As I noticed a number of graphic novels lying around I felt that here was someone teaching graphic novels from a basis of passion in the format, rather than from an externally imposed mandate. This feeling was reinforced by the fact that K and I had met coincidentally just a few days earlier at a workshop on graphic novels that I gave for English teachers.

K was very happy to talk to me about her personal and professional experiences with graphic novels and I could see that comics were important to her in both these dimensions of her lifeworld. The evolution of the graphic novel format had provided a ripe environment in which her teenage interest in Mad magazine and superhero comics could flourish. As she grew older, physically and intellectually, so did the comics she was able to read.

K’s conviction that graphic novels had a place in the English curriculum was very clear and we discussed the appropriateness of the term ‘The Eye Generation’; a term I had used in my workshop just days earlier. That K was keen to have another member of her staff, who’d be teaching a graphic novel at the start of 2012, involved in my research was further indication of the importance that K gave to the use of graphic novels in the English classroom.

Our interview was shorter than the others and I worried that perhaps I’d missed something. But then I realised that K spoke with enthusiasm and with a good knowledge of graphic novels and there was little time spent pausing to find the right words… they were there, ready on her lips.
YEAR 10 ENGLISH
UNIT: Introduction to Graphic Novels - Maus (Terms 3 and 4, 2011)
Stage 5
DURATION: 3 weeks

RATIONALE:
RATIONALE: This unit introduces students to the graphic novel as a distinct genre, utilising the text, Maus. Students will learn the conventions of graphic novels, examining layout, form and specific visual and language features relevant to the genre. The emphasis will be on analysing how composers employ visual, narrative and structural features to shape meaning and influence response. They will use the enhanced knowledge gained from this study of Maus to inform their own compositions of graphic novels within a specific chosen context.

Objectives: Students will:
- Develop skills, knowledge and understanding in order to use language and communicate appropriately and effectively
- Identify and utilise specific visual and language features in order to shape meaning
- Reflect on and respond thoughtfully to their reading in close discussion and in their written analyses of texts
- Employ their analytical understandings of graphic novels to assist in the composition of their own creative texts

By the end of the unit students will be able to:
- Use their knowledge of graphic novels to inform their own compositions
- Evaluate how their study of texts has shaped their own compositions for a variety of audiences, purposes and contexts
- Draw on experience, information and ideas to imaginatively and interpretively respond to and compose texts
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<td>1. A student responds to and composes increasingly sophisticated and sustained texts for understanding, interpretation, critical analysis and pleasure</td>
<td>1.2 respond and compose more sustained texts in a range of contexts. 1.3 Analyse the effectiveness and impact of texts on responders in terms of ideas, perspective and originality. 1.8 The features of increasingly complex imaginative and factual and critical texts including the cognitive, emotional and moral dimensions of the text and its linguistic and structural features. 1.11 their own emerging sense of style, personal preference and discernment in responding to and composing texts. 1.12 How inference and figurative language can be used in complex and subtle ways.</td>
<td>Class discussion of graphic novels and comics in literature and pop culture. Introduction to the Holocaust – key events, context and personalities. Discussion of symbolism and its function in texts.</td>
<td>Students write about their basic assumptions and knowledge of graphic novels and comics. Students create a visual timeline of key events of the Holocaust. Students create their own avatar to represent aspects of their personality and experiences. Students find a favourite page in Maus and create a panel-by-panel blank page that looks just like the one they find. Next, they used their avatar panel by panel to explain their observations and what was important about each panel in their eyes. These avatar panels are to examine what moved them about the book and what they thought was important to notice and why. Students complete Graphic Novel Creative Task (see appendix)</td>
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<td>OUTCOMES</td>
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<td>4. A student selects and uses language forms and features of texts according to different purposes, audiences and contexts, and describes and explains their effects on meaning; 4.6 adopt and justify language use appropriate to spoken, written and visual texts; 4.8 the ways in which spoken, written and visual texts are shaped according to personal, historical, cultural, social technological and workplace. 4.10 the meta-language for describing, exploring and justifying the composer's choices of language forms and features and structures of texts in terms of purpose, audience and context. Composer 4.12 the significance of the relationship between purpose, context and audience.</td>
<td>Introduction to key conventions of graphic novels. Glossary of conventions provided and discussed. Slide presentation used [What is a Graphic Novel? From <a href="http://dw-wp.com/">http://dw-wp.com/</a>].</td>
<td>Guided reading of “Maus”. Students read the graphic novel, stopping at key spreads to discuss and examine the use of text, layout and visual devices. Students to read Shaun Tan’s ‘The Arrival’, ‘Eric’ and ‘Untertow’, analysing the effectiveness of the language used in conjunction with the visual devices.</td>
<td>Students to compose their own original graphic narrative or digital story, including a justification of how meaning is created through the imagery chosen &amp; language devices employed in the task. Study guide questions used to lead students through the text (see appendix). Students answer key questions: Questions for discussion: What tone do the visuals give to the story? If the visuals were omitted, would the story have the same appeal for the audience?</td>
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<td>OUTCOMES</td>
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<td>5. A student transfers understanding of language concepts into new and different contexts.</td>
<td>5.3 adopt their own of familiar texts into different forms, structures, media and media for different purposes, audiences and contexts 5.4 identify, describe and explain the differences emerging as a result of such adaptations 5.9 the selection, organization and coherence of information and ideas in texts</td>
<td>Close study of 5 double page spreads in &quot;Maus&quot;. Examine in detail the relationship between text, layout and visuals. Discussion of events and themes in &quot;Maus&quot;; complexity of representing such a traumatic subject</td>
<td>Students compose a double page spread graphic representation of a significant emotional experience in their lives. Empathy Task: Imagine you are Vladek. Select significant ONE event from the graphic novel, Maus. Write TWO journal entries describing the details of that event and why it was of significance to you in the formation of your identity and understanding of others during the Holocaust. (Write approx. 500 words)</td>
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<td>8. A student investigates the relationships between and among texts</td>
<td>8.3 identify and describe the recurring features of particular genres such as western or science fiction, focusing on their storylines, iconography, value systems and techniques 8.4 track and explain the treatment of a common theme or idea in a range of</td>
<td>Reading of a variety of different graphic novels from Library's collection. Final review of text</td>
<td>Class discussion of form, genre and style. Online Jeopardy game played in small groups: <a href="http://www.superteacherworks.com/jeopardy/usergames/Mar201110/camel129959664.php">http://www.superteacherworks.com/jeopardy/usergames/Mar201110/camel129959664.php</a></td>
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APPENDIX L
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT EXEMPLAR (ANDY)

Interview#1 JTH  
Wednesday 11th May, 2011  
Participants’ school  
Interview commenced: 9.35am

DL: Thank you for coming and it’s really good that you were so willing to take part; that’s great.

JTH: No worries

DL: As I said, we’ll probably take about three quarters of an hour. Is that alright?

JTH: Yes

DL: So we’ll finish about a quarter past. Before doing the interview proper, I still need to confirm that you’re still okay to be a voluntary participant, and if you feel at any stage you don’t want to answer anything or withdraw, incriminate yourself- the 5th amendment [laughter], you may do so.

JTH: Yes

DL: Also I need to confirm that you’re okay to do the two interviews, one today and one after you’ve done the teaching, and to also do a journal reflection of your experience when you’re actually teaching the unit. And we can talk about that a bit more at the end of the interview.

JTH: Yeah, that’s fine. I sort of jot down ideas anyway.

DL: So, can I first ask you a little bit about your teaching experience, just to get some background on how long you’ve been teaching etc.?

JTH (1:13): Okay, I’ve been teaching sort of full-time since about 2007, but on and off, full-time and temporary as I went travelling in 2008, and then taught over in England for about a year, and then came back and started teaching full-time, I guess from the end of 2009 but in an all boys’ school until I got to Barker at the start of 2010. Last year? Yes, 2010.

DL: It seems much longer than that. And have you always been an English teacher?

JTH (1:47): Yes, always English. Well, in a prac placement I taught Geography and Legal Studies, because my other stream is Social Sciences, but that was only for four weeks during my course in 2006 or so. Otherwise, it’s been English all the way.

DL: And that was what your training was in?

JTH: Yes, that what I wanted to do all the way to ideally be; I just had to take two subjects through.
DL: That’s great. So, in this first interview, what I’d like to ask you about is the sources of your knowledge about graphic novels. And then in the second interview we’ll actually talk about your practical experience with them. So firstly, let’s have a look at the graphic novels themselves. If I was a student in your class and you were going to introduce graphic novels for the unit, how would you actually describe or define a graphic novel?

JTH (2:39): I brought my little cheat sheet as well [laughter]. I’ve got a main resource sheet that I hand out, but it’s mainly techniques and things. Last year was actually the first year I’ve come across graphic novels really, as far as teaching, going through The Hobbit with the Year 7 group, and… I mean, I’m personally always been interested in anime, but that’s obviously not the graphic novel itself, …the TV version and things. So I find it quite interesting to use it as a teaching resource… I’m digressing now. But as far as describing or defining it, I talk about it as a text that communicates predominantly through a visual medium. Obviously there’s text involved as well, but certainly it’s, particularly when we’re talking about The Hobbit, it’s actually quite useful comparing and contrasting it with the actual novel version because there’s a significant difference between the two. Additionally I talk about it as a text that makes use of a range of techniques they might not have come across considering we’ve just been studying a novel and we’ve just been studying poetry. So things like motion lines, speech bubbles and thoughts, and I like the idea of talking about it in light of the fact that it can break out of its frames, and have things in the gutters, having that different style of meaning depending on what we’re seeing, but also what we’re seeing out of the main body of the text. That’s not a brilliant definition [laughter]. Yeah, I mean, I guess defining it as a text type that’s… I always bring it to the idea of it’s similar to comics because that tends to be a form that they’re all sort of aware of. They’ve all seen comics in newspapers and kids’ books and things. And defining them in that regard at least makes them appreciate, sort of, as opposed to a cartoon which they typically think of as on television or just a picture, which is one thing, giving it as a set of images like a comic, they may understand that way.

DL: So, do you see them as different from comic books? For example, your flimsy leafed Batman comic or something?

JTH: (5:01): Yeah, I think… well for me, the main difference between a graphic novel and a comic is the depth of the graphic novel. So the comic tends, well the comic strip typically is one tiny moment, whereas the graphic novel covers a significant number of tiny moments to make it… well, I mean it’s a novel, to make it cover a significant amount of… significant period of time. So that’s the main sort of… I mean, the way I, when I taught it last year, we had a sheet and on the PowerPoint as well, which sort of changed. You had your individual image or picture. So your comic image or something. And then you had your comic and then you move up to the graphic novel. So it’s a kind of a progression moving from the one panel to the five panels to the 5 million panels, or however it goes.

DL: So given that progression, or sequential art, how would you, if a student asked, say it’s different to a movie for example, which is also sequential art?

JTH (6:11): Well, I think in this instance, because of the fact that it is within… I mean it’s tangible. It’s not on a screen. It’s something that gives them time to read through, so
you can actually pause on cells. And there’s always so much going on, particularly with, as I say *The Hobbit* is the only graphic novel I’ve ever taught, there’s so much going on on each page that you can actually pause and look at it and draw out each meaning. And if you look at the page again later on, there might be something else that pops to mind. Whereas the key difference between that and film is that film doesn’t give you the time to process; your director’s setting the pace. I suppose you could think to pause it all the time, but that’s going to break up the sense of continuity that the film maker wants, whereas with graphic novels it gives you the chance to read it through at your own pace, to draw as much meaning or as little meaning as you want, so you could skim through it and just read the thought bubbles and just get an idea of what’s happening in the story, but you certainly won’t get the nuances of the actual story itself. So that’s the main difference.

*DL:* And what about, and I get this one at conferences, the difference between graphic novels and picture books for example?

JTH (7:31): Picture books I tend to think of, and again there aren’t that many picture books that I’ve taught. We had *The Rabbits* last year, but picture books tend to be for me that idea of not as much information is happening. Well, pardon me, let me rephrase that. There’s still a lot of information typically on the pages, but the division between sequences, so I know in the graphic novel you can have a full page and there’ll just be one cell to typically highlight just one significant moment, but with the actual progression of the narrative, there tends to be a sequence of images. Picture books tend to have that similar concept I talked about before – one set image per page. Sometimes there’s an image within the image, but it’s definitely not as detailed in regard to the number of images as graphic novels.

*DL:* Do you find there’s a different relationship between the text and the image?

JTH (8:40): From my perspective, with the graphic novel the difference between the speech bubbles compared to the actual narrative- there isn’t that much narrative. The story is told largely through the actions and the thoughts of the characters. Whereas with the picture book there’s more narrative; there tends to be a narrative box or a narrative description on each page, if they are using words at all in the picture book. There are some picture books that don’t have any text at all. I think some Shaun Tan ones that I’ve come across. But, the graphic novels tends to... dialogue is a key part of it to pose meaning, obviously there’s significant meaning coming through the images, but I think dialogue tends to be a stronger element, at least the whole thought balloon, speech balloon tends to be a stronger element in the graphic novel.

*DL:* I’m interested in where you’ve managed to get your understanding of graphic novels from. And I’d like to look at your own personal experience and then your professional experience. So firstly in terms of your outside-of-school experiences up until this point, can you tell me any influences on your understanding of what graphic novels are?

JTH (10:06): Well as I said, I never really read them in my own time. I’ve always read novels and things, as opposed to the graphic novel. My main sort of influence was, as I said, I was really into anime when I was younger, not so much the manga, which I guess is the equivalent of the graphic novel, just the Japanese style. But I do have a couple at
home at home I haven’t looked at for years. But during high school, I was certainly very interested in that.

DL: Is that the anime or the manga?

JTH: The anime. But the manga supported that, as it was manga and anime that I liked. So I had a few. So I had a base when I actually came then to teaching. I had a base understanding of what at least I thought they were. And I guess I’ve just always, I guess implicitly just by the title graphic novel and then seeing one straight away, and by knowing what comics are – I had a friend who was really into comics, sort of *Footrot Flats* things from my Dad that I used to read through, so knowing that sequence of cells and things, it was just implied when I got the graphic novel. I said “okay it will be similar to that but much longer”. And so that’s really the only experience I had. I never really had read graphic novels until this stage and particularly the library having so many and the students finding them so interesting. Otherwise, when I actually came to teach *The Hobbit* unit, just talking to other colleagues who, talking to Alastair who looked at this and that through *The Hobbit* before, I didn’t even know *The Hobbit* had been made into a graphic novel until… I actually thought when I first started that we were going to be teaching *The Hobbit* as a novel itself until I found the graphic novel amongst all my books. And so I spoke to Alastair a bit about it and there is quite a lot of information on the web. I found one website which had that sort of distinction. I can’t for the life of me remember what the website was called, but it had that distinction that was going through the difference between a simple cell comic image to a comic and then to a graphic novel. And so I got quite a bit of my information and graphic novel resources from there.

DL: We’ve merged into your professional influences. So there’s nothing more you can think of in your childhood or teenage years?

JTH (12:56): As I said, I did enjoy reading, but I never went through that phase of getting comics and then getting graphic novels. My best friend had so many X-Men comics, Superman comics, that sort of thing, because he really liked the whole Marvel comics thing, but I was never particularly interested. I think because I’m terrible at art and terrible at drawing and so it didn’t… whereas I was good at writing and so reading would help boost my writing, whereas looking at a graphic novel, well there are these images, but it just didn’t really impress me [laughter] as much because it didn’t seem to have any relevance to me. And I guess my mother really imbued into me a real enjoyment of reading. And to be honest, one of the things that I personally, as someone who likes reading novels and who likes engrossing myself and getting lost in the word, graphic novels can often really frustrate me because you have to keep jumping about and your eye has to keep moving from bubble to bubble to bubble to get the whole story. And so when I first looked at *The Hobbit* graphic novel, and I thought “oh this will be great to get Year 7 into this story, but I really don’t like reading it” [laughter]. It’s just really… I was a bit annoyed by it just because it was making me move my eyes in different, not just the whole left to right as reading a novel. But I think that was what happened as a child and that’s why I didn’t like comics so much. And I’m not, I mean it was always comics as opposed to graphic novels. Once I started teaching, at my first school they had *V for Vendetta*, the graphic novel, and that was taught in tandem with the film and then mixing with *Animal Farm*. They had it as a related text to that. And that was really the first experience, and I didn’t actually teach the unit, but there were texts everywhere in the staffroom that I skimmed through. Otherwise I guess I never
really [emphasis] knew that they were out there as a younger reader. It was always thinking as comics. It’s only as I matured and got into teaching that I appreciated the difference between the two text types, the comic versus the graphic novel.

DL: They really have only come into their fore I guess in the last [pause] maybe five years, especially in Australia where... Perhaps in the states, where they’ve got that history of comics, every kid in the States reads comics. I was going to ask, but maybe we’ve already covered it, other than the graphic novels you’ve used, or will be using, have you read any others?

JTH (16:23): Well The Hobbit’s the only one I read fully. I’ve had a skim through, one of my students was reading the Macbeth ones from here, and I had a look through one in Boys and Books, and I’ve skimmed through the V for Vendetta, but I haven’t looked at a huge number of them just because, as I say, they frustrate me at times reading through them.

DL: Is there anything that appeals to you about them?

JTH (16:51): Well I like the idea that it can engage reluctant readers. I think that’s the appeal for me. That for students who really find a page of text intimidating, having so much action on a page and when you’ve got limited text and the meaning is coming through just looking at them images and seeing the progression of characterization through those images and sequences of events, I think that’s the appeal. But I guess that’s more of an appeal I’m thinking as a teacher, as opposed to appealing to me. I certainly do appreciate the artwork. I know I mentioned before that it didn’t resonate with me just because I can’t draw to save myself, but looking through some things, I mean that was one of the reasons I really liked the anime because the characters were so cool, and I think that some of the graphic novels really have some great representations of characters. I mean Macbeth, some of the images of him were fairly startling. It was great and really gets the students into it. So I guess I can appreciate the visual qualities of it, but it doesn’t appeal to me as a reader so much.

DL: So, is there anything you don’t like about them?

JTH (18:25): Well it is that idea that I… the reason that I like reading is that I can lose myself in the text and I find… I mean it’s an interesting experience of having each time you look at a page there’s a whole range of meanings and things that you might have missed beforehand, and you’re seeing something sticking out into the gutter or noticing a particular character, how he appears, can be very interesting. And it’s only when I’ve actually been setting tasks for the class that I’ve often noticed that, that I’ve really looked at it closely and then by setting the task you make sure that they notice it. So it’s interesting to look through, but as I said, it can frustrate me at times when I just want to sit down and get stuck into the story because I find that I have to keep bouncing around and the story is obviously there, but it doesn’t flow as easily as if I were reading. Whereas I think the opposite is true for many students because they find it difficult to actually read. They find a page of text really confronting. And that’s where they stop and get lost. Whereas they can just follow the images and get through that straight away, it’s the opposite for me.

DL: So would you say it’s a challenge or a frustration rather than something you don’t like about them?
JTH (19:49): Yes, it’s not that “I hate these” because of that, but it just frustrates me, just because when I’m reading something I want to get lost in the story and read a book, and have someone talk to me and not realize it because I’m not aware. Whereas with this [the graphic novel] I’m always thinking about the next move and can’t just fully immerse myself. So it’s not a dislike, but it can get frustrating at times.

DL: We’ve covered some of the professional influences on your experience with graphic novels, but I just want to ask a broad question about how important is it to teach with image-based texts?

JTH (20:42): Very important. I think getting students to have that understanding that English is more than just the stereotypical big novel that they have to wade through, and recognizing the variety of texts, particularly just building early on the base skills to analyze written texts, visual mediums, all different types of visual mediums as well, whether it be the single image, the graphic novel, and I mentioned film before as well, especially once they move to the HSC, it’s fact that they’re always going to be tested. In Area 1 Paper 1, there’s always going to be an image, and so they need those skills to read into images. So I think the graphic novel is an interesting way to get into that because there’s such a wide variety of images in there and that you can start building on those skills. And it’s also, I mean the thing I found with *The Hobbit*, and I guess this links to what you were saying before, is that, and it’s something I really hadn’t thought of before, is the fact that some of the dialogue and the metalanguage for analyzing it, is very much like film if you’re talking about the way that people are framed in the actual panel – if it’s a close-up of the person, and so it is quite similar. And so I guess I’ve never thought of that. I suppose in essence it’s almost like a storyboard for a film. I imagine that when they are trying to determine films, it can get quite detailed and look like a graphic novel. So I think it is very important, just by virtue of the fact that our subject is predominantly written text, but it is so much more than that.

DL: And can you see that, I mean you talked about having images in their assessment, can you see that there’s a bigger picture?

JTH (22:46): Oh yes, I’m limiting it to the school. But yes, so much of life is visual now days, but just to grab people’s attention, to be able to read visual cues and, I taught an advertising unit in the UK and it was really, for the kids, it was fascinating to appreciate the strategies that advertisers use to grab your attention and persuade you to buy their product or engage in their service just through the way they contrast visuals and with catchy slogans and things, and the way that those visuals can draw you in have various connotations that you don’t have or associations that you don’t even realize are happening. And just the fact that our society, particularly now with so much technology, so much of that is visual. All their ipods and whatnot, and everyone watches television and things now, so having them being able to at least recognize and read meaning into the various signs that they’ll see around, but also hopefully to be discerning viewers. I don’t now how much it does help them to be really, as in when they’re watching things at home I don’t know that they’re thinking “oh he’s done that because of this” and I almost don’t want them to think objectively because it can often ruin the experience. But it does give them that base to appreciate the things around them, which is obviously very important.
DL: I’m not expecting you to rattle off specific curriculum outcomes, but generally can you tell me about some of the outcomes that the use of graphic novels will address?

JTH (24:33): This is good to come back to because I’m setting the actual assessment task for this. I think we’re actually having a meeting later today after our English meeting about it. But one of the key objectives is to represent things visually, to be able to represent ideas effectively and that will come into play throughout their schooling and also, as we just mentioned before, in life where there are so many visual things. Writing what you think is one thing, but being able to convey it symbolically through images or convey it through a sequence of images as you see in the graphic novel can be very important. So one of the outcomes is certainly being able to transfer meaning into a visual element. Another outcome is being able to use the language, or rather not so much the language, but the technical side of the graphic novel, to be able to employ the various techniques of the graphic novel effectively, and that’s adding to the same idea of building meaning through image, but building meaning through various strategies, being able to show the various specific ideas that you want through whether you do a close-up or whether you do a long shot, through the way that people are framed and things. One of the outcomes is certainly about having students being able to appreciate the range of choices they have available to them in presenting a particular scene. [Participant then had a bout of coughing ]. Now I’m lost… outcomes…

DL: That’s alright. What I’ll do after the interview is make a transcription and give it back to you, so if you’re looking and say “I should have said that”, you’ll have a chance next time we meet to go back to it.

JTH (26:44): Well they’re the top two off the top of my head. That I’m getting them to appreciate the importance of making choices in the visual medium and getting them to appreciate how you can represent meaning through visual images. So both of those kind of dovetail into one another.

DL: Looking at the people or events that have influenced your teaching with graphic novels, you briefly mentioned a colleague before. Have there been other colleagues that have helped you get into teaching with the graphic novel?

JTH (27:21): Not a huge amount, simple because I’ve only had the one time teaching it. So it was a five or six week unit, I think it ended up being about five weeks for me because I took a bit longer going through poetry with my group, and so it was initially an idea talking to the Head of Year 7 just to get an idea sort of thing…

DL: Sorry, this was at your previous school?

JTH: No this was last year, so talking to Alastair about the unit and what the general focus of it was and the culminating activity was to have the students, as I mentioned before, represent their ideas and events in the graphic novel in their own visual way and for them to be able to write a reflection and justify their choices – why they used certain techniques, why they portrayed characters in particular ways. So initially talking to him about how to approach the unit. But then it was more a case of me looking at various pages and various main scenes and thinking about how I could engage the students. So that was mixed in with some general analysis questions to get them understanding how the techniques were being used. There were some other activities where I took an actual page, before we got the graphic novel I photocopied some pages from the original
novel, and had them put it into a graphic novel form, then we’d compare with the actual graphic novel and how they presented it. So lots of it was just my own thoughts coming through and it was engaging the students. They didn’t seem bored and as far as I was concerned it was hitting the targets that we needed to. So there was never that situation where I felt “oh I’m not sure what to do here”, so I didn’t feel the need I guess to converse with others. It will be interesting this time around because, as I’ve said, I’m setting the actual assessment task and there’s three of us together on the assessment team to actually set that. So they’ll be a lot more dialogue happening over the next couple of weeks and I guess I’ll report further in the next interview. Yes, it was more of I just went down my own path and… I mean, I sent some resources to the Year 7 group and Alastair was always responding with “great resources, thanks very much” and there never seemed any need to discuss it.

DL: You talked about V for Vendetta in your previous school, was there any discussion amongst people in your previous school as to how you would teach them?

JTH (13:26): Well I think it was quite interesting because the V for Vendetta graphic novel wasn’t a compulsory part of the unit. It was more an extension part for the upper classes. The unit itself was Animal Farm about ideas of power and totalitarianism, then comparing it to the film version of V for Vendetta, but as an extension for the more able classes they had the graphic novel to test their ability to analyse that different text type as well. So, I found that quite interesting that it was used there as an extended tool as opposed to one used with lower classes who were uncomfortable with reading into a topic. Again, I never engaged in a significant amount of dialogue with people. It was more that I stumbled across them in the resource room and was interested because it probably was the first sort of graphic novel that I’d seen. And so I started talking to the teachers about it and was mentioning that it was for that extension purpose and just using it as a supplementary idea as to how the same sort of concepts can be presented but in a different for. I wasn’t teaching the unit with the top class there, so I was never actually involved in teaching the graphic novel.

DL: Sometimes the corridor conversations are the ones that are really valuable aren’t they, such as when you bump into them in the resource room?

JTH(31:59): Yes, even over lunch sometimes. I mean, as I said, it didn’t really happen as much over The Hobbit by virtue of the fact that it was a shorter unit and I didn’t have a huge issue with it. But often, just over lunchtime, we’ll chat about what we’re doing in different classes and things.

DL: What about things like professional learning? Have you had the opportunity to go to anything on graphic novels?

JTH (32:31): I really haven’t seen anything around. Lots of the things that tend to be focused on professional learning are all Year 12 topics and making sure we’re going to things to do with Hamlet and Frankenstein and Blade Runner. I know there are other junior sort of things, but again they tend to be based around literacy and grammar, but as opposed to visual grammar. So I haven’t attended any professional development involving graphic novels. There was something I wanted to go to on the teaching of film, but there wasn’t enough space as tends to be the way, and so I had to go to one or the other and so I went to one of the more senior things. So, no I haven’t had that experience and I haven’t spoken to anyone who has. The people around me have all
gone to Year 12 ones and just basic literacy and encouraging the reluctant reader. I’m not really sure if that would have involved graphic novels or not.

DL: Informally you said you got onto the website and onto the Net and looked things up, so that would be a form of informal professional learning.

JTH (34:02): Just to supplement my own understanding. It’s always useful to get an idea of what people think about and just thinking about it, as I’d never taught a graphic novel before, just thinking about it the dialogue that can be used, or the metalanguage. And this is what I was saying before, I’ve never really thought of it as almost like a storyboard for a film where you want to make use of those film techniques in your analysis of it, as well as some of the visual techniques and just finding resource sheets and I constructed my own resource sheets from that. It was useful because I’d never taught a graphic novel before, I’d never analyzed a graphic novel before and needed to have that sort of understanding to go in and show the Year 7s how to engage with it.

DL: And lastly on professional influences. School policies and curriculum. Have they had any influence on the way that you’ve become aware of graphic novels? Have they inhibited or encouraged...

JTH(35:19): Syllabus and text types?

DL: Yes. And even the school policy here. I guess you could say that because it’s in the teaching program, it’s encouraged you to teach the graphic novel.

JTH: As far as in text types and things, I don’t really have a choice over that. It’s more that someone, and I’m not sure when The Hobbit started being taught here, but it’s certainly a choice that’s been made and as you recognize, it’s meant that it’s the first time I’ve actually taught a graphic novel. And even in my past school, as I say they had V for Vendetta there, but it wasn’t a set text, but more an extension text that teachers could make use of if they wanted to. It’s quite interesting that that choice was made as a way to teach visual literacy and to get students to start thinking about how a film can be analyzed as well, and perhaps also to encourage reluctant readers to get them moving through. My Year 7s actually over the last few months, I’ve given them ten minutes reading time at the start of each lesson and lots of them have started reading The Hobbit over the last few months just because we’ve finished our novel in class, and they all get involved in it. I haven’t heard any complaints about it. So it’s interesting that we have that as part of our teaching unit now, but as I say I just teach what I’m told to teach [laughter].

DL: Given the choice, if you’d had the text version as against the graphic novel version?

JTH (37:02): Well I think… well that’s interesting. I would like to teach the text version, but not just after we’ve done the novel, because we do Pharoah, Jackie French’s novel in term 1, doing a novel back-to-back just wouldn’t be suitable for Year 7, so I think it’s a good choice having the graphic novel where it is if that’s what we’re studying. But what I, and I spoke to Alastair a bit about this last year, what I think would be a really useful tool, but because the unit would need to be larger if we went down this path, is to actually compare the actual novel to the graphic novel. So have a few key scenes, I guess we’d have to start with an overall summary of what the story’s
about because there probably wouldn’t be time to read through it all, they could at least read through the graphic novel version, but keep a focus on how the graphic novel interprets a novel, compare passages, how they’re visually represented. And that could even be extended because in the future I think they’re producing a Hobbit film, I think Peter Jackson is doing it, similar to his Lord of the Rings, so you could go novel to graphic novel to film and just the comparison between the different text types, I think that’s what really fascinating. It gets them to practice those skills. And that’s something I’d like to see, but I don’t know if it will happen. I don’t know if we have enough time in the year to extend the unit out because Year 7 have so many little “get to know you camps” and what not, that time gets taken up.

DL: Just a final question then. Have you any concerns about using the graphic novel version of the Hobbit?

JTH (38:44): Not really, I think it’s useful for visual literacy and getting them used to a different text type. My class seemed to enjoy it last year and didn’t seem to have any complaints, they found it interesting. As I say, I would like that comparative basis to come through as well because then it gets them seeing how meaning can be transformed depending on, even though it’s the same story, depending on the images and things, there can be a different emphasis placed on certain events. But no, I think it works well.

DL: So you’re really getting into the whole critical literacy side of things.

JTH (39:26): Yes, it extends the thinking hats [or perhaps?] more than year 7 need, but I wouldn’t be doing it in any major depth, but it’s just an interesting comparison that they’d be able to appreciate. It’s such an obvious difference between the written text and the visual.

DL: Well I think I’ve covered everything I was interested in hearing from you today. Have you any questions?

JTH: No, I think I’m all out.

DL: So thank you very much, and I’m looking forward to speaking with you again after your unit on The Hobbit.