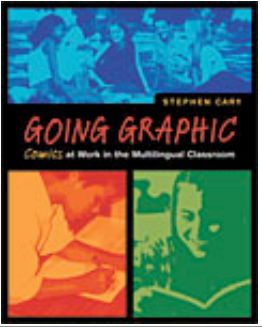


***Going Graphic: Comics at Work in the Multilingual Classroom***

<b>Author:</b>	Stephen Cary (2004)		
<b>Publisher:</b>	Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann		
<b>Pages</b>	<b>ISBN</b>	<b>Price</b>	
Pp. vi + 224	0-325-00475-7 (paper)	\$23.00 U.S.	

**Introduction**

In *Going Graphic: Comics at Work in the Multilingual Classroom*, Cary has written a useful resource for language teachers eager to supplement typical textbooks and graded or simplified readers with less traditional authentic materials. *Going Graphic* will provide teachers with a theoretical framework, handy responses to skeptics, a wealth of useful classroom activities, and plenty of recommended comics. Teachers new to comics will find enough here to make good use of them with second language learners. If you are already using comics, you will probably find some new ideas.

**Style**

Cary is serious about advocating the use of comics for second language learning, but this book is not overly academic in tone. In keeping with both the medium and the author's personal connection to the subject, he writes in the first person, keeping the language direct and accessible. Cary also works in instructive anecdotes from his own reading and sharing of comics. He believes comics should be a joy for learners and teachers, and that comes through loud and clear in this book.

A reader who wants to get a quick overview of *Going Graphic* will find sprinkled throughout the book short text boxes containing testimonials from both teachers and students. These testimonials come from a wide range of classrooms and can quickly give teachers an idea of ways that comics may be used effectively in a wide variety of teaching situations.

The writing is very well supported by plenty of artwork. You will find a few photographs of comics-in-action in the classroom, but more examples of comics themselves. Even teachers who are comics fans will probably find a new artist or a book to add to their list of useful titles.

Without this book, I never would have found the charming works of Brian Ralph, *Cave In* and *Climbing Out*. A broad range of styles and content is represented in these examples. Some of the most intriguing comics reproduced are not those by professionals, but the comics contributed by second language students. Such samples can be used to encourage students to create delightful comics of their own.

## Contents

*Going Graphic* is divided into four main sections. "Theory and research" opens the book with a clear rationale for the use of comics in the language classroom. The two practical sections, "Questions" and "Activities", make up the bulk of the book and should prove very useful to teachers. The closing section, "Resources", is an annotated list of recommended comics and other related resources.

## Theory and research

Teachers with little background in comics will find useful definitions of comics jargon and terms in this opening background section. Cary sticks with Eisner's (1985) brief definition of comics as "sequential art". Although this is useful, readers should also refer to Scott McCloud's very thorough and accessible exploration of comics, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. McCloud has defined the vocabulary (1995, pp. 24-59) and discussion of comics in a way that teachers can use to articulately explain comics to colleagues. The absence of any mention of *Understanding Comics* in *Going Graphic* is an oversight, but it is more than outweighed by the rest of the book.

As readers might expect in a book for language teachers, Cary is on much stronger ground in his concise summary of communicative language teaching ideas. He emphasizes Krashen's theory of comprehensible input and his subsequent ideas about free voluntary reading. He also explains how comics may fit content-based teaching practices and focuses on comics' appropriateness from the progressive literacy perspective. According to Cary (p. 24), comics readily fulfill the requirements of progressive literacy: un-excerpted whole texts, learner-centered communication, and rich content and language. The author is correct to state that the book is relevant for teachers of any language. (The text is in English, but the ideas could be used equally well to teach, for example, Spanish or Japanese. Cary also gives some non-English comics resources in the final section.) Nevertheless, *Going Graphic* is clearly rooted in the author's ESL teaching practice and research in California.

## Questions

The questions and answers section for teachers will be very helpful for instructors wanting to try comics in a classroom or self-access center--but anticipate opposition. Comics are sometimes viewed as a trashy genre filled with unacceptable language and imagery, but *Going Graphic* gives ready answers to concerns about the applicability and appropriateness of comics. Teachers will find concrete advice on how to be selective in using comics and how to respond professionally to others who may question their judgment. Heinemann has made this entire chapter available as a free sample download from <http://college.heinemann.com/shared/products/EOO475.asp>.

With these questions out of the way, Cary addresses the applicability of conventional reading scales, transfer of comics' reading skills from L1 to L2, and how images may or may not aid readability. Readability is central to his argument to use comics. If you have ever asked yourself how to get reluctant students interested in reading authentic L2 English and how to keep them motivated to continue, Cary answers these tough questions head on. Comics reduce the amount of text on a given page, reduce the total amount of text in a complete story to a manageable level, and give students whole stories that they can complete in a reasonable amount of time (pp. 64-65).

## **Activities**

There are thirteen fully explored activities, with sub-sections between two and sixteen pages within each. All activities include the required materials, a brief description, topics and strategies, background, step-by-step process, and illustrative comics. Relevant theoretical underpinnings are briefly presented for each activity, but the emphasis is on the process. Teachers should be able to read over these activities easily and apply them successfully in many classroom situations. Sample professional or student created comics for each activity make the lesson's ideas concrete for both teachers and students.

In my classes, I incorporated several of Cary's ideas as is, or with slight modifications. The Make-A-Title (p. 72), Add-A-Panel (p. 74), and Missing Panels (p. 88) activities were all useful and enjoyable for students. These reading and writing activities also call upon students' imaginations and should trigger stimulating discussions. Interactive Journal offers advice for using comics (p. 98), specifically addressing teacher concerns about workload with this kind of exercise. I found journals focusing on comics worked very well in my elective English classes at Japanese universities. Using an overhead projector in the classroom, I displayed examples of journal responses to specific comics, giving students the visual and text support for later oral presentation. Students collected weekly comic strips from newspapers or websites in a small notebook and responded to the content or the language forms on the facing page. This preparation made it easy for them to present their comics to the class each week.

The Activities section closes with twelve Quick Takes: one- or two-paragraph explanations of ideas for teaching with comics. These brief explanations elaborate on the ideas in the preceding Activities. All are illustrated with example comics and narratives from teachers who have tried the Quick Takes in the classroom. I found Between the Panels (p. 145) and Character Interviews (p. 149) worked especially well with my classes. In the former, the images and text on the page support students as they imagine what went on offstage (between any two panels), which can be narrated aloud to a partner. Character Interviews are a variation on old-fashioned role plays. Students take on the persona of a comic character and are interviewed by classmates. The key is to allow students time to explore the characters' personalities and statements, but reading comics is not perceived as arduous research.

## **Resources**

The final section is an extended appendix listing various resources for teachers. The many lists are useful, but could be even more so if they were available on the publisher's website. Lists such as "Comics Made into Films" become out of date quickly. Websites move and typing URLs into browsers can be tiresome. Heinemann should consider putting these resources online and

keeping them up to date. This would in no way detract from the value of the printed book, but instead would add to it.

## Conclusion

*Going Graphic* reads like a labor of love. Hence we should not be surprised that Cary's enjoyment of comics as both teacher and reader is infectious. That he was prompted to use comics to teach ESL via his own experience of them as a door to reading in his first *and* second languages is very refreshing. Cary remarks that "lots of teachers have forgotten what it is like to be overwhelmed and demoralized by L2 reading" (p. 65); but he has not. *Going Graphic* is not just a well written teacher resource book, but also strongly reflects the experience of language learners--including the author. Though he is quick to point out that comics are not appropriate for all situations, Cary combines his own perspective as a second language learner with his experience as an instructor and researcher to make a convincing argument that more teachers should give comics a try. In *Going Graphic*, Cary gives teachers the resources they need to make that attempt a success.

## References

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