Paper / Proposal Title:
21st Century Winter Journey: Exploring Comics, Adaptation and Community Art Education

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Abstract:
This visual essay describes a collaborative comics-based research (CBR) (Kuttner et al., 2020) project between a homeless charity and a cohort of 2nd-year university students. The 21st Century Winter Journey project explores the status of community art education (CAE) in Middlesbrough UK, and the ways making comics impacts communities locally and internationally.

I have been teaching comics for seventeen years to students across Canada, the US and the UK and I suggest that forms of comics such as comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels are recognized worldwide. Creative practices of making comics and cartooning are transferrable to schools, studios, and universities everywhere. As such, the medium of comics functions as a transversal language and participatory culture that links people and communities together.

My analysis of the project widens conversations in CAE through Research Informed Teaching (RITT) (Brew, 2012), Just-In-Time Teaching (JITT) (Sinner et al., 2017) and Freire's (1996) "conscientização" (awareness). RITT, JITT and awareness triangulate and locate learning in a community's relational and public spaces. In applying these theories with cartooning practices, a powerful pedagogical tool emerges. When students become researchers and make comics they negotiate their understandings of community, their identities, and their futures. These observations are evidenced in the reflections students
wrote at the conclusion of the project. RIT, JITT, awareness and cartooning guide the flow of artistic practice through shared group experiences within community spaces. Tragically, the global pandemic hit as we were developing the comic, and all teaching migrated on-line. Thus the value of the life world community and the sharing of space became even more precious. By making comics with a local charity, students develop an awareness of their community and the relational spaces they share with others. However, with increased pressure to self-isolate, socially distance, and learn online in what ways will CAE negotiate a virtual relationality?

REFERENCES


• Author(s) Biography:
Julian Lawrence (Senior Lecturer Comics & Graphic Novels, Teesside University) is an award-winning cartoonist and educator specializing in comic books. Born in England and raised bilingual English-French in Québec, his work has been published and displayed internationally by Fantagraphics Books, Les Editions des Plaines, Conundrum Press, National Film Board of Canada, Penguin Books, Cartoon Network and The Aboriginal Peoples Television Network.

Julian’s research concentrates on ethnographic investigations into the ways comics transmit narratives. His research explores freehand narrative drawing and its impact on representations of artist identity. Investigations of these topics led him to combine theories of authorship with semiotic analysis of comics and create lessons that support students in developing a voice, improving literacy, and negotiating conceptions of identity. As a bilingual artist/researcher/teacher, Julian delivers comics and cartooning lessons in both English and French.

His most recent works include the publication of three graphic novels as well as contributions to the book The Bliss and Blisters of Early Career Teaching: A Pan-Canadian Perspective. He is currently working on a book chapter that investigates the ways comics and collaboration engage university students with community art education.

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