

【原著】

Manga Literacy and Its Implications for Teaching EFL in Japan

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日本の EFL 教育における漫画リテラシーとその影響

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Introduction

There is an extensive history of creating manga in Japan that dates back to the temple scrolls of the 12th century (Schodt, 1986). Manga has served as a form of entertainment and social critique, and there is a vast assortment of titles that cater to all types of readers, from children to adults and from adventure stories to pornography (Lent, 1989; Schodt, 1986, 1996; Takeuchi, 1995). One reason for the popularity of manga is that they are inexpensive and quickly read. Although book sales have been decreasing steadily in Japan over the past 10 years or so, manga sales continue to dominate Japanese publishing. In 1995, manga accounted for 40% of all book and magazine sales in Japan (Schodt, 1996). Now that I teach English in Japan, having knowledge of the reading habits of students could prove greatly beneficial when developing a reading curriculum.

Manga Literacy: A Literature Review

The diminishing interest in reading is an area of much public concern in Japan, a nation that is in fact highly literate. Even though manga is extremely popular and ubiquitous in Japan, “it is not accepted in schools because many parents and teachers believe reading manga is too easy and may have adverse effects” (Allen & Ingulsrud, 2003). English teachers Allen and Ingulsrud (2003) conducted an annual survey at a small liberal arts college in southwest Japan between 1995 and 1999 that focused on students’ reading habits. As well as conducting this annual survey, they also regularly interviewed students about their reading preferences. Their focus increasingly moved towards the reading of manga, because over the years students indicated a preference for reading magazines and manga over reading books (675).

The Setting

The data presented in the study done by Allen and Ingulsrud (2003) on reading manga was taken from a survey given in 2000 to all first- and second-year college students, as well as the third- and fourth-year students that they taught at the liberal arts college in southwest Japan. 70% of the student body were women and 30% were men. The students at the college came from the

city and the surrounding towns and farming communities. Most of the students at the college were the first in their family to receive a college education. The survey given to a total of 297 students was bilingual in both English and Japanese with questions that focused on the reading of manga, such as when the students started reading manga, how often they read them, and which were their favorites. The survey contained open-ended questions about reading preferences and the characteristics of different kinds of manga. As a follow up, 10 students from various year groups at the college were interviewed that were known to be enthusiastic manga readers and agreed to share their opinions. Finally, in 2001, 10 students from a university in a Tokyo university manga club were interviewed individually and in a group. These interviews were used to get their reactions to the data that was collected in southwest Japan previously. Data from the open-ended questions were coded to reveal patterns in student reading preferences and their reasons for reading manga.

Reasons for reading manga

There is a vast variety of types of manga. The respondents in this survey read two specific categories primarily; *shonen* (boys) and *shojo* (girls). Shonen manga directed towards boys have far more titles available than the shojo manga that are geared towards girls (Allen & Ingulsrud, 2003, p. 675). Shonen manga deal with subjects such as adventure, action, sports, and science fiction, while shojo manga focuses primarily on romance (Schodt, 1986). In the surveys among the male and female participants in the study, their reasons for reading manga were arranged into four distinct categories which were 1) to pass the time, 2) for pleasure, 3) to learn something new, and 4) manga's accessibility. The study concludes by giving possible classroom applications of manga, which I will discuss a bit later on in this analysis.

Why Is This Interesting to Me?

Manga literacy interests me because now that I reside in Japan, it could be potentially useful for developing techniques to teach reading, among other skills, to Japanese students in the university, or even high school setting.

I incorporated material that was relevant in students' lives at the ESL school I taught at in the U.S., so why wouldn't I try to do the same here teaching Japanese students? My ESL students were interested in finding cheaper accommodations, finding native-speaking English partners, and discovering interesting sites to visit nearby. Therefore, I included websites like craigslist.org, local newspapers, and meet-up websites in the class syllabus that the students really seemed to appreciate.

I also took the time to survey my students to find out what kinds of books, movies, music, and activities they were interested in so that I could incorporate some their interests in the daily lessons. If students are using authentic material that they are actually interested in and might use outside of the classroom, they are much more motivated to learn and much more appreciative in general. Here in Japan, I want to facilitate learning in the same way as much as possible,

even if I have to adhere somewhat to a handed-down curriculum.

After reading the fascinating study about manga literacy in Japan (Allen & Ingulsrud, 2003), I felt energized and more hopeful about teaching EFL there. I realized I could apply what I have learned in community-based literacy teaching in my new environment, which I will go into more detail about in the next section.

Why Are We Comfortable with Manga Literacy?

I think that we as educators are comfortable with this notion of manga literacy because of the work on literacy practices by Barton and Hamilton (2000), on out-of-school literacy by Hull & Schultz (2001), and on the idea of multiple literacies by Lam (2009). These authors redefined the traditional ideas of what literacy is and what it means to be literate.

In an article by Barton & Hamilton (2000), the theory of literacy as a social practice is presented as “the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives. In the simplest sense literacy practices are what people do with literacy” (p. 7). The article also states that there are different literacies associated with different domains of life and that literacy is historically situated (p. 8). Manga is culturally embedded in the social literacy practices of Japan. Teachers and parents do not feel that manga has anything to offer in the realm of education, but if manga were viewed through the lens of social practice, I think that the overall value of manga might be elevated in Japanese society and might even find a place in school curricula. In Barton & Hamilton’s article, it is said that “there are different literacies associated with different domains of life, so perhaps the idea of these domains not being so clearly defined could really benefit learning reading and writing in Japanese classrooms if those with the power in Japan looked at the applicable uses of manga.

This brings me to the article by Hull & Schultz (2001) on out-of school literacy. In their article, they review research on literacy in out-of school settings that was conducted from various theoretical perspectives with various populations in various contexts but with the common focus on nonschool practice. Hull & Schultz discuss the false dichotomy between in-school and out-of-school learning. By emphasizing physical space or time in this way, we as educators may be ignoring important aspects that might shed light on what accounts for successful learning. Teachers should try to incorporate students’ out-of-school interests and preferences into the classroom and try to extend the range of the literacies in which students are familiar. Manga could play a worthwhile role in education in Japan as it would help bridge students’ worlds with classroom practice (p. 298).

Lastly, in Lam’s article on Multiliteracies among adolescent immigrants in the U.S. (2009), instant messaging is examined in how it is changing literacy use and learning and how Chinese youth use digital media to negotiate social relationships with diverse linguistic and cultural communities across countries. The article states that “the multiliteracies perspective has emphasized the need

to broaden our understanding of literacy to account for the multiplicity of textual practices associated with cultural and linguistic diversity and multimedia communication in a globalizing society” (p. 393). If this is the case, then what is the difficulty in taking into account other literacies that play a major role in students’ lives outside of the classroom? Towards the end of the article, Lam says:

An expanded view of the literate or textual resources of young people of migrant backgrounds would lead us to reconsider how our educational practices may enhance the literacy development of these young people and leverage their linguistic and cultural repertoire as resources for learning (p. 394).

This is meaningful in that we should find ways to enhance the literacy development for all young people, whether they are immigrant youth in the United States or high school or college students in Japan. This can be done by making learning more relevant to the experiences and interests of the students.

I feel that all of these theories should open us up to the possibilities and applications of different literacies and how they can be used in the classroom to improve students’ learning and increase motivation by taking into account their interests, thus bridging the gap between in-school and out-of-school practices.

How Will Manga Literacy Affect My Own Teaching Practices?

First of all, I think that I might select classroom materials differently after reading Allen & Ingulsrud’s article on manga literacy (2003). As I have done in the past teaching ESL, I will find out what kind of reading students do outside the classroom and incorporate that into my lessons as much as possible. If my Japanese EFL students are indeed manga readers, I think that there could be many useful applications of manga in the classroom that students could really profit from.

Possible classroom applications of manga

In Allen & Ingulsrud’s article, they found that many manga readers are highly motivated and have developed a range of strategies to help them understand texts. We as teachers should not ignore this kind of reading. Manga reading could be used by teachers to develop students’ awareness and understanding of multiple literacies (New London Group, 1996).

One area that could be examined is using manga to develop reading strategies. It has been said that reading strategies are considered difficult to teach and demand long-term investment (Guthrie & Anderson, 1999). Allen & Ingulsrud say that “rather than relying solely on a single classroom text, manga could provide a rich additional source for students to develop strategies such as word recognition and problem solving” (p. 680). Manga combines illustrations with oral (through speech balloons) and written text, so manga readers become very skilled at analyzing meaning in different modes. These kinds of skills will continue to gain importance as technology

and different kinds of texts become components of our everyday lives.

In Japan, manga has been used to introduce classic works of literature and history (Allen & Ingulsrud 2003, p. 681). Teachers could use manga to introduce students to the idea of dealing with different kind of texts. Manga could also be used to reinforce what has been read in books, giving the students another point of view perhaps. Students might also better understand a manga version of classic literature or history because the format is simpler to digest. Implementing the resources we have available in the SALC, I could use translations of manga to better illustrate different aspects of language use, including code switching and the use of registers. By focusing on the differences between English and Japanese translations of manga, students could think about the reasons for these changes and learn to critically evaluate texts as readers in different languages (p. 681).

I could also use manga to focus on the pragmatics of language use by using the conversations in the speech balloons. Students could analyze the speech acts being used and notice conversational standards.

I think I should also take into consideration that not all students enjoy reading manga, the same as not all students enjoy discussing sports or reading news articles. Manga should be used carefully and thoughtfully in the EFL classroom.

Conclusion

Allen & Ingulsrud's survey shows that manga holds the dominant position in the reading practices of college-age people in Japan. As teachers and curriculum writers, we need to realize that reading manga is not a mindless activity. On the contrary, manga can be used to enhance the language classroom when teaching English in Japan. It can be used to bridge the gaps between students' out-of-school interests and school practices. That is not to say that manga should be used haphazardly. Rather, manga should be incorporated into a lesson when it can expand upon a reading or indicate the different uses of language. I think manga can be a useful tool in the EFL classroom, like a good textbook can be. But like a textbook, it should be used carefully and in a way that best promotes learning and classroom success. I look forward to using manga to liven up my classroom when the situation calls for it.

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