



Avdeling for Lærerutdanning

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Master's Thesis

**How can Graphic Novels serve as a Source
of Insight into Life Skills?**

Hvordan kan grafiske romaner være en kilde til innsikt i livsmestring?

**Språk og kulturfagenes didaktikk, med fordypning i
engelsk**

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I have always loved comic books and graphic novels. Therefore, I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to explore the educational potential of graphic novels, especially within the area of life skills. In truth, I have evolved and grown immensely both professionally and personally during the entire process, and I have found great enjoyment in the writing of this thesis.

While it lasted, this project has been a lifeboat in an extremely challenging and tumultuous time in my life. Now that I have reached the end of the journey, I find the end bittersweet. On one hand I feel great relief because the project has required an immense amount of time, energy, and effort. Still, handing in the project is accompanied by a feeling of great sadness, as its absence will leave a void that will be challenging to fill.

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Norsk sammendrag

Norsk tittel: Kan grafiske romaner være en kilde til innsikt i livsmestring?

Målet med denne master oppgaven er å undersøke om grafiske romaner kan være en kilde til innsikt i livsmestring. Jeg har analysert tre grafiske romaner skrevet av tre forskjellige forfattere. Disse romanene er *Noughts and Crosses* av Malorie Blackman, *Persepolis* av Marjane Satrapi og *American Born Chinese* av Gene Luen Yang. Jeg analyserer disse romanene med bakgrunn i teori som kjennetegner livsmestring, og derfor fokuserer jeg på mestringsevne, tankesett, anerkjennelse, mangel på anerkjennelse, identitet og resiliens. Det tverrfaglige emnet livsmestring er del av den nye læreplan som tredde i kraft i 2020, og i læreplanen i engelsk er dette emnet koblet til tekster.

Handlingene i romanene jeg analyserer finner sted i forskjellige politiske, historiske, sosiale og kulturelle kontekster. I *Noughts and Crosses* beskriver Malorie Blackman et forelsket par som lever i et rasistisk og segregert samfunn som viser hvordan rasisme og segregering påvirker mennesker på begge sider av konflikten. I *Persepolis* møter vi en persisk jente som blir sendt til et fremmed land for å studere og hvordan hun opplever hjemkomsten. Her får vi innsikt i hvordan et restriktivt samfunn kan påvirke mennesker som må forholde seg til det og hvordan mangel på rettigheter som kvinne får hovedpersonen til å forlate landet til slutt. I *American Born Chinese* blir vi kjent med en kinesisk superhelt figur, the Monkey King, og en kinesisk amerikansk gutt som sliter med å finne sin identitet. I min analyse belyser jeg aspektene ved hovedpersonene som viser noe om livsmestring, hvordan hovedpersonene lar seg påvirke av andre og hvordan det å oppleve å ikke få anerkjennelse påvirker dem.

Som en oppsummering til hver analyse, belyser jeg hvordan hver enkelt roman kan brukes i undervisning med søkelys på tverrfaglige emne livsmestring. Her foreslår jeg aktiviteter som er egnet før lesing under lesing og etter lesing, samtidig som jeg presenterer muligheter for hvordan romanene kan brukes som inngangsport til diskusjon om temaer som rasisme, politisk undertrykkelse, undertrykkelse av kvinnens rettigheter, mobbing, og identitet.

Abstract

My aim for this thesis is to answer the question: How can graphic novels serve as a source of insight into life skills? To answer this question, I analyse three graphic novels: *Noughts and Crosses* by Malorie Blackman, *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi and *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang. I analyse the graphic novels with the aim of bringing forward aspects of life skills, employing theory about how life skills are defined, therefore I focus on self-efficacy, mindsets, recognition, nonrecognition, identity and resilience. The interdisciplinary topic of health and life skills is part of the new curriculum implemented in 2020, and the interdisciplinary topic is linked to the study of texts in the English curriculum.

The three graphic novels I analyse take place in different political, historical, cultural, and social contexts. *Noughts and Crosses* describes a couple in love that live in a racist and segregated society. That society shows how racism and segregation affect people on both sides of the conflict. *Persepolis* describes a young Iranian girl sent to live in a strange country by herself and how she experiences the return to her home country. The novel shows how restrictive societies affect the people living in them and how lack of women's rights in the society force the main character to leave the country for good. *American Born Chinese* we meet the Chinese superhero character The Monkey King and a Chinese American boy, who both struggle with coming to terms with their identity. Although all the main characters are very different, the graphic novels expose how all three characters are affected by people and society around them.

In the didactic potential section for each graphic novel, I suggest some prereading, during reading and post reading activities that support the core curriculum elements of acquiring knowledge of language, culture, and society, as well as activities that support the development of life skills. In these sections, I present how the graphic novels may be employed in the discussion themes like racism, political oppression, oppression of women, racial microaggression and identity.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Thesis Question

According to Koreen Geres (2016), stories are a powerful force for learning, healing, and social change. Across cultures, stories are used to teach powerful lessons and to shape human development (Geres, 2016, p. 64). Anniken Telnes Iversen (2017) notes that in Norwegian society, novel and short stories are the primary written form of storytelling (Iversen, 2017, s. 212). In many communities, science, religion, proper behaviour as well as history are taught through stories. In addition, human beings order their communal lives, history of the world and their personal identities through stories (Geres, 2016, p. 64). Reading short stories and novels can offer a perspective into other people and cultures, a chance to “meet others”. For young readers, it offers an opportunity to meet someone like themselves, encourage cross-cultural understanding and enhance empathy (Iversen, 2017, s. 212). The nature of stories is such that they often provide an intimate way into new experiences, perspectives, and emotions. Since learning in general can take place through storytelling, it is possible to imagine that important life skills may also be accessed through novels and stories. This intimate approach to experiences and emotions can be consciously used to transform the reader.

As a child, I used to love comic books. My favourite thing in the world was to cuddle up with a bunch of *Asterix and Obelix* comic books and read for hours. Yet, just like Gene Luen Yang (2018), I noticed that comic books seemed to “not belong in the classroom” (TED, 2018, 0:37). When I became a teacher, and especially after I started teaching English in upper secondary, I noticed that all teachers employed novels in the teaching of English literature, so I did the same. But I also noticed that students would always complain about the number of pages they had to read, no matter how short the novel was. One of the complaints I always heard was: “There are like no pictures at all!!” By that time, I had almost forgotten my own love for comic books, but during this project I started looking for literary material to employ in the teaching of the interdisciplinary topic of health and life skills, with emphasis on life skills.

I knew instinctively that teaching life skills through English literature was extremely relevant, as I noticed that students experience increasing pressure on both on personal, academic, and social front. In my opinion, it is increasingly important to focus on the personal development

and the wellbeing of students. As an English teacher, I believe that it is relevant to employ storytelling in the teaching of interdisciplinary topic of health and life skills. But how could I get the students more interested in stories and the insight stories can provide? After looking through a lot of material, it seems logical that the only material that really appealed directly to me was graphic novels. Graphic novels can tell complex stories, but they can be easier to read and comprehend, since they also contain images to aid the reader in comprehension and interpretation. The graphic novel has revolutionized popular culture over recent years. Graphic novels are accessible for all types of readers, and they are fun as well as motivating. In addition, they offer a variety of genre and stories. Taking the students complaints into consideration, I decided to approach the interdisciplinary topic of health and life skills through use of graphic novels. In this thesis, I would like to explore the following:

How can graphic novels serve as a source of insight into life skills?

To be able to answer this question, I have done a close reading of three graphic novels with the aim to identify aspects of the graphic novels that deal with the interdisciplinary topic of life skills. In the theory section of the thesis, I identify the concepts that embody life skills. Furthermore, I explore these concepts in the graphic novels and discuss how they affect the behaviours of the main characters involved. The concepts that embody life skills I focus on are self-efficacy, mindsets, recognition, nonrecognition, identity and resilience. The aim of the thesis is to present how to approach the interdisciplinary topic of life skills using stories and characters presented through graphic novels. By exploring the graphic novels, I illustrate how students can develop a greater awareness of what life skills are necessary to cope with challenging emotions, life situations and relationships. In the following section, I explain why I have chosen to focus on the interdisciplinary topic life skills.

1.2 Relevance of life skills

Most children and adolescents in Norway thrive and have good mental health. Quality of life studies show that the vast majority are satisfied with their lives. However, many people are diagnosed with mental disorders during their childhood or adolescence, and sometimes these disorders become chronic or lifelong conditions (NIPH, Norwegian Institute of Public Health,

2019). As a result, it is important that teachers focus on students developing awareness of life skills.

Juliet Munden and Christina Sandhaug (2017) refer to Ungdata 2016, where Anders Bakken states that there are many wonderful aspects of growing up in Norway and most teens are active, optimistic, well behaved and content. Still, teenagers' thoughts and emotions can often be complex and volatile. Many teens report feeling stressed and worried. Munden and Sandhaug also refer to Trond Diseth's statement, where he claims that there has been significant change in the health of Norwegian teens in the last ten to twelve years and some of these changes have to do with stress-related conditions, such as fatigue, pain, digestive disorders, in worst cases cramps and paralysis. These health changes have increased by 400% in the last five years, and they affect teenagers' bodies, intellect, emotions, and social health. There are far more girls than boys in this group, and about 30% of young people in Norway do not have good mental health. Diseth claims this is due to school culture of frequent measuring and testing. He suggests that teachers should allow time for trial and error, and he suggests that the health services and the education system work together to promote welfare of young people (Munden & Sandhaug, 2017, pp. 29-30).

In addition, according to national findings by Ungdata 2018 girls report struggling with psychological conditions, such as depression, in all grades and levels. These symptoms increase amongst girls as they come into their teens. 13% of girls in the eighth-grade experience these types of health problems, but the number increases to 32% in upper secondary school (Bakken, 2018, p. 81). Similar findings apply for stress symptoms related to schoolwork. Whereas a very small percentage of students in general report being stressed because of schoolwork in eighth grade, the number of students experiencing school related stress increases in upper secondary. Differences between boys and girls experiencing depression increase and become more apparent in upper secondary, with 30% boys and 62% girls experiencing schoolwork related stress symptoms (Bakken, 2018, p. 35).

Furthermore, the development of modern technology has transformed teens into experienced users of social media. The article on psychological disorders among teens and increased use of social media by Siw Christine Brattøy, Åshild Rosvill and Trude Fløystad Eines (2019) argues that the increase in use of technology amongst teens may be enhancing the psychological disorders they experience. Increase in mental health and behavioural issues amongst young people in the last ten to fifteen years may in part be due to the increase in

social media use. At the same time, there is also an increase in people under the age of 30 that receive disability benefits with psychological disorders being the main source of disability (Brattøy, Rosvoll, & Eines, 2019).

Brattøy, Rossvold and Eines also claim that social media has different effects on boys and girls. The more time spent on social media, the more affected the teens become. While girls feel more anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and low body image, boys become more frustrated, aggressive and suffer from loss of concentration. Girls are more emotionally affected by social media and the girls' use of social media is highly emotionally driven compared to boys. This has a damaging effect on their psychological health. In addition, studies also show that use of social media is highly addictive. Teens tend to develop a fear of missing out on something important on social media, so this fear affects their performance in school and the quality of their sleep. It is important that healthcare workers and teachers cooperate in raising awareness amongst young people and teach them to create healthy boundaries when it comes to social and digital media (Brattøy, Rosvoll, & Eines, 2019).

There may be a link between the increased use of social media amongst teens and psychological disorders experienced by teens in lower and upper secondary. The increase in disability cases in people under the age of thirty can also be linked to teens use of social media. As stated by Norwegian Institute of Public Health, in some cases these disorders become chronic conditions, even lasting a lifetime. This is an unfortunate outcome for society and the individuals that are affected. Therefore, it is important that preventive work take place in all aspects of the lives of teenagers.

Moreover, we have faced very uncertain and difficult times lately with the spread of the Corona virus in the spring of 2020. The Corona virus and its effects on the world have left many people experiencing feelings of helplessness and insecurity. In the spring 2020, Norwegian government closed all school activities and many extracurricular activities. What followed was a period of isolation that was difficult for most of the population. During this period there was an increase in psychological disorders, and the period of isolation has had negative effects on many people. Everyone had to adjust to a very different life situation than they were used to earlier. This must have been a very uncertain and scary time for many. The period of isolation that spring has affected many young peoples' school performance and social life. Many young people were able to handle the situation, but some just did not possess the skills to deal with the fear and uncertainty. This has probably also increased young peoples' use of social media, and that again may have increased the feeling of fear and stress. The

Coronavirus may still be an issue that we all need to deal with in the future, in addition to other uncertain situations that may occur. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on how to help young people acquire useful life skills.

The cooperation between mental health services, school health services and teachers is vital to the preventive work. Koreen Geres claims that although teachers are not counsellors or are encouraged to take that role, what they do in the classroom can still have a great influence on their students' well-being. Teachers spend more time with the students than the school health workers and counsellor and are therefore able to impact students' wellbeing. In fact, teachers can be a major factor in building resilience, and creating opportunities for adjustment (Geres, 2016, p. 62). It is also necessary that teacher focus on raising students' self-awareness and actively teach students how to deal with difficult life circumstances, emotions, and relationships.

1.3 Life skills in English curriculum

The Norwegian upper secondary school system includes the study of general subjects, often referred to as "studieforberedende" or SF. Vocational education and training is referred to as VET. The program for general studies requires a three-year education, where the first year is referred to as VG1, the second as VG2 and the third year as VG3. In this thesis I focus on the curriculum for students attending the first year of the general studies program, VG1 SF. This section of the thesis will firstly focus on aspects of what the core curriculum expresses about life skills, and secondly on what the curriculum conveys about teaching life skills in upper secondary, specifically VG 1 SF.

In the *Core Curriculum - Values and Principles for Primary and Secondary Education*, the core curriculum claims that school shall facilitate for learning in the three interdisciplinary topics health and life skills, democracy and citizenship, and sustainable development. The interdisciplinary topic of health and life skills is included in various of the competence aims of the English subject, especially competence aims linked to texts (Ministry of Education, n.d.). Within the topic health and life skills, the curriculum states that:

The school's interdisciplinary topic health and life skills shall give the pupils competence which promotes sound physical and mental health, and which provides opportunities for making responsible life choices [...] Life skills refers to the ability to

understand and influence factors that are important for mastering one's own life. This topic shall help the pupils learn to deal with success and failure, and personal and practical challenges in the best possible way (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

I have chosen to focus on the mental health aspect of life skills, the ability to influence factors that are important for mastering one's own life and the ability to deal with success and failure. The curriculum addresses the relevant areas within the topic:

Relevant areas within this topic are physical and mental health, lifestyle habits, sexuality and gender, drug abuse, media use and consumption and personal economy. Other issues that come under this topic are value choices and the importance of meaning in life and relations with others, the ability to set boundaries and to respect others' boundaries, and the ability to deal with thoughts, emotions and relationships (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

This thesis will not address the importance of physical health, although it is often noted that physical and mental health are strongly related to one another. The thesis will focus on life skills that may enhance the ability to deal with difficult thoughts, challenging situations, emotions, and relationships.

The curriculum for VG1 SF points out that “in the English subject, the interdisciplinary topic health and life skills is about expanding the students’ ability to express themselves both orally and in writing. This entails to be able to express thoughts, emotions, experiences, and opinions” (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020). The interdisciplinary topic is linked to several of the competence aims in the English curriculum in VG 1 SF, amongst these are the competence aims: “to read, discuss and reflect upon the content and devices used in different types of texts, including texts of choice.” Another competence aim is: “read, analyse and interpret English literature” (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020). The interdisciplinary topic is explicitly linked to all competence aims related to texts.

Furthermore, the English core elements for the curriculum in GV1 points out that language learning happens in the interaction with texts.

Texts can be oral or written, printed or digital, graphic, or artistic, formal, or informal, literary texts or essay texts, modern or older texts. They can include writing, drawings or pictures, sounds, graphs, numbers, and other expression forms that are designed to express and convey a message. Working with different texts provides knowledge and experience with linguistic and cultural diversity. The acquisition of English language and knowledge of English-speaking culture and society is made possible through reflection, interpretation and evaluation of texts (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

This thesis will focus on the use of graphic novels in the teaching of life skills in upper secondary VG 1. Since language, culture and society are thought through literature, it is logical to assume that it would be possible to learn life skills through studying graphic novels, thus it is possible to use graphic novels in English to focus on the teaching of life skills. By employing characters in graphic novels as examples, discussing why they act a certain way and what motivates or discourages them, could serve to encourage students in developing awareness of why they act as they do, which might aid them in dealing with challenging situations.

Because schools are a setting where children and young adults spend a great amount of time, they are distinctly positioned to foster positive development. It is increasingly recognized that in addition to teaching academic skills, promoting important life skills and students' psychological wellbeing is part of the Norwegian curriculum. The English subject should naturally provide education through texts in the areas of language and culture, as well as within the area of life skills. This may aid the students in developing awareness of how they can deal with difficult circumstances, emotions, and relationships in their own lives. It is important that all teachers attempt to help students in achieving awareness about what life skills really are and what it takes to master their lives. Through English texts, the students can see how characters deal with the challenges and why they deal with challenges in a certain way. By studying literature, they might become aware of their own reaction patterns, and learn how to deal with failures and personal challenges.

1.3.1 Life skills

There is some disagreement about whether the school setting is suited to the teaching of life skills explicitly. In the following section, I will present a viewpoint that opposes the teaching of life skills in a school setting.

In his book *Livsmestring på Timeplanen*, (*Life skills on the timetable*) Ole Jacob Madsen (2020) claims that the idea of life skills in school comes from a growing trend in the field of psychology. The movement, that started to spread in the being of the 1960, wanted psychology to be accessible to everyone, not only the ones that could afford private sessions with a professional. The main belief was that if people had access to psychology, they would be able to live better lives and master their education, health, and carriers. Spreading psychology to people was believed to be the solution to the increasing mental health problems in society. Madsen says that it is very easy to find arguments for the inclusion of life skills in schools and the new curriculum. Although health and physical education have been taught in schools for quite some time, students' mental health has not been addressed in the same way as physical health. It is about time that the mental health of the students got the same acknowledgement as on the same level as their physical health. If the effects of psychology are assumed to be only positive, there is no reason to not give students the tools that they need to use to deal with their thoughts and emotions so that they can make the right choices later in life (Madsen, 2020, pp. 44-48). Nevertheless, Madsen fears that in the current cultural climate, the interdisciplinary topic of health and live skills puts the responsibility for successful lives on the individual, mainly the young students, and that politician and the government are relived from taking any responsibility for the mental health of teenagers (Madsen, 2020, pp. 148-151).

If we take a closer look at the actual meaning of life skills and how it is presented in the core curriculum, it becomes quite apparent that life skills refer not only to the students ability to acquire certain skills like being able to do one's own shopping, cooking a meal for oneself or paying the bills.

Phrases like “promotes...mental health”, “understand and influence factors that are important for mastering one's owns life” “Help pupils learn to deal with success and failure, and personal challenges” “ and the ability to deal with thoughts, feelings and relationships” (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020) make it clear that what the students are required to learn more than simple life skills. They are supposed to acquire the ability to live skilfully

or the ability to cope with their own life and the challenges that may arise. This is undoubtedly a challenging lifelong process that schools are now obligated to address within most subjects.

Madsen translates the word skills to coping or mastering, which is a more accurate translation for the Norwegian word “mestring”. What does it mean to cope with or master one’s life? If we look at the concept of coping and how psychology professor Frode Svartdal (2018) defines it in *Det store Norske Leksikon*, we find that it consists of several concepts (Madsen, 2020). These are psychological concepts and they are used to define what it means to master life. The first concept that Svartdal introduces is resilience, positive evolution in children’s or young adults’ despite of stress and challenges. The second concept is self-efficiency, the belief that one can cope with certain challenges and situations. This belief may vary depending on the task and situation, as it is possible for a person to believe that they can reach their goals within one area, but not in all areas. The third concept concerns the ability to change. For change to take place one must be able to believe that change is possible, in other words, be able to acquire a so called “growth mindset” (Svartdal, 2018). Although it is not mentioned in Svartdal’s definition, I believe that recognition, nonrecognition and identity are essential to the development of life skills because recognition from people and society that surrounds the individual is important in the development of a positive identity, and therefore essential when it comes to coping or mastering life.

Madsen claims that although all of these qualities may be inevitable in individuals that master their lives and achieving their goals despite of challenges, it is another matter to actually believe that these qualities can be taught at school and developed in children and young adults through the interdisciplinary topic of health and life skills (Madsen, 2020, p. 12). I agree with Madsen. Teaching life skills as part of an interdisciplinary topic in a school setting may be challenging indeed, thus politicians and the government cannot be completely relieved of responsibility. Nevertheless, mental health has entered the schools and curriculums through the interdisciplinary topic of life skills. In the English subject curriculum health and life skills is strongly linked to literature and texts. It is our responsibility as teachers to approach this challenge and attempt to convey some useful aspects of life skills through use of literature. Texts can be employed to point out how the characters in novel deal with the challenges they face and thus attempt to raise awareness about the students’ own lives and challenges. To raise awareness and facilitate learning is all teachers can do, yet this, as I see it, is a significant and relevant contribution.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

In the introduction of the thesis, I present my thesis question, as well as a brief explanation of the relevance of the teaching of life skills in society and school setting today. In the following, the thesis is divided into five main chapters. Firstly, I present the theoretical background for the thesis, which deals with several aspects relevant to life skills and how these aspects are interconnected. Secondly, I include a discussion of different perspectives to the reading of literature and what graphic novels can offer. This section is followed by three chapters that include the analysis of three graphic novels. Firstly, I analyse *Noughts and Crosses* by Malorie Blackman, followed by *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, and finally *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang. These analysis focuses on the aspects of life skills mentioned in the theoretical section of the thesis. The analysis is aimed to identify aspects of the graphic novels that address self-efficacy, mindsets, recognition, nonrecognition, identity, and finally resilience. At the end of each analysis, I include a didactic potential section, where I discuss how the graphic novel can be employed in a teaching context, and how they can be used to explore the interdisciplinary topics of life skills, as well as the core elements in the curriculum. In two of the novels I include the possibility of exploring the interdisciplinary topic of democracy and citizenship. Finally, I include a brief conclusion to sum up the thesis.

2. Theoretical background

In this section I present the theoretical background for the thesis. I have decided to use a sociocultural perspective because it emphasizes social interaction and mediation for development and learning to take place. In Norwegian Government report 28 the government stated that the interdisciplinary topic of health and life skills reaches beyond an individualistic perspective and should be considered within a sociocultural perspective (Ministry of Education, (2015–2016), p. 39)

In his book *An Introduction to Vygotsky* Harry Daniels (1996) explains that Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory claims that human development and cognition are socially mediated processes. Vygotsky writes that every function in the child's cultural development appears twice, first between people, or during social interaction, then within the individual child. An interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one. Thus, learning takes place first on the social level (interpsychological), and later, on the individual level (intrapsychological) (Daniels, 1996, p. 6). Sociocultural resources are created and transferred through communication. Therefore, the teaching of life skills requires that the schools and educators consider the importance of social interaction in the development of children and young adults. Assistance from teachers is a valuable resource that are accessible to children only at school.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory also includes the concept of "zone of proximal development", which suggest that what children can do with assistance from a teacher today, they will be able to do by themselves tomorrow. The zone of proximal development defines the functions that are not yet matured within a child, but are under the process of maturation (Daniels, 1996, p. 172). Social interaction is a critical aspect of situated learning. This is applicable for the child's academic as well as social development. If a child is made aware of certain concepts, skills and qualities that are necessary to foster to reach her goals, she might be able to cultivate these qualities within herself without assistance at a later stage. Knowledge about students' zone of proximal development is invaluable in facilitation of mastery experiences. Vygotsky's theory is relevant for this thesis because learning is a social activity and students are dependent on both teachers and peers in their social, as well as academic development. This is relevant for the thesis because it is possible for students to become aware of concepts that are relevant for the development of life skills through literature. With guidance from teachers, as well as assistance from peers, they will be able to internalise these concepts and employ them in the

future. Learning about these concepts in a teaching context may aide them in relating them to their own lives later. Although Vygotsky's theory is mainly aimed at small children, I believe that teenagers could benefit just as greatly from being made aware of certain concepts, dynamics and situations that determine the behaviour of individuals.

2.1 Self-efficacy

In this and the following sections I present central aspects of life skills, starting with Albert Bandura's theory of perceived self-efficacy. Bandura presents four main sources that develop self-efficacy. These four sources are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physical and emotional states.

In his social cognitive theory Albert Bandura (1995) claims that people strive to exercise control over the events that shape their lives. This makes them better able to realize desired futures and avoid undesired ones. Bandura writes that through mechanisms of personal agency, people make causal contributions to their own psychological functioning. The most central mechanism of agency is people's beliefs of self-efficacy, perceived self-efficacy. Bandura explains perceived self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1995, p. 2). Self-efficacy beliefs control people's actions, levels of motivation and affective state, and are also part of people's self-image. Perceived self-efficacy also helps determine how much effort people will expend on an activity, how long they will persevere when confronting obstacles, and how resilient they will prove in the face of adverse situations. The higher the sense of self-efficacy, the greater the effort, persistence, and resilience. In general, Bandura provided a view of human behaviour in which the beliefs that people have about themselves are key elements in the exercise of control and personal agency and in which individuals are viewed both as products and as producers of their own environments and of their social systems (Bandura, 1995).

Bandura claims that self-efficacy is developed through four main sources. The first and the most effective source for creating a strong sense of self-efficacy is through mastery experiences. Mastery experiences provide the most authentic proof of whether one has what it

takes to succeed. Experiencing success establishes a strong sense of self-efficacy, while failure, especially if failure is experienced before a strong sense of efficacy is firmly established, undermine it. The development of self-efficacy through mastery experiences requires acquiring the behavioural, cognitive, and self-regulatory tools for creating and executing appropriate courses of action to be able to manage life changing situations. If people are accustomed to experiencing easy success, they are often easily discouraged by failure. Therefore, a resilient sense of efficacy requires experiences in overcoming obstacles through effort. When learning that success requires persistent effort, people can quickly bounce back from failures and persevere in the face of adversity. Bandura says that “by sticking it out through tough times, they emerge stronger from adversity” (Bandura, 1995, p. 3).

Vicarious experiences provided by social models is the second influential way of creating self-efficacy beliefs. Witnessing people like themselves succeed through perseverant effort creates the belief in the observer that they too can master similar activities or experiences. Subsequently, watching someone like themselves fail despite high effort lowers their self-efficacy beliefs. This is strongly linked to the perceived similarity of the model, the greater the perceived similarity, the more persuasive are the models’ successes and failures. If the models are perceived as very different from themselves, the models’ behaviour and produced results do not have any effects. People seek competent models that possess the skills and competencies that they desire. Models that show persistence as they cope with challenges that are thrown their way, can be more enabling to others than the actual skills that are being modelled (Bandura, 1995, pp. 3-4). These models could be people close to the students, family members or friends, but they could also be main characters in found in literary texts. Literary texts often deal with characters that are influenced by people close to them, as well as characters that manage to overcome great hardships and difficulties before achieving their goals.

The third way of strengthening peoples’ self-efficacy beliefs is social persuasion. If people are verbally persuaded that they possess the capability to master a certain task, they are likely to show greater effort and sustain the effort if they are harbouring self-doubts when challenges are encountered. However, Bandura claims that it is easier to undermine efficacy beliefs than to install high efficacy beliefs. If the boosts of efficacy are unrealistic, they are quickly disconfirmed by disappointing results of peoples’ effort. To build efficacy successfully, people must do more than convey positive praise. They need to create situations that bring success,

avoid situations where people are highly likely to fail, and encourage individuals to measure their success in self-improvement (Bandura, 1995, p. 4).

According to Bandura, people also rely on physiological and emotional states when they judge their capabilities. Peoples' judgement of personal efficacy is also affected by their mood, as a result positive mood enhances perceived self-efficacy, while negative mood diminishes it. Bandura refers to these as affective states. It is not the state of physical and emotional reactions, but rather how these reactions are interpreted by the person experiencing them. People that have a high sense of efficacy, interpret these reactions as positive and energizing, while people with self-doubt regard these states as debilitating. Bandura claims that the fourth way of altering perceived self-efficacy is to reduce stress and negative emotional activity and enhance physical status because affective states have generalized effects on perceived self-efficacy in different areas of functioning (Bandura, 1995, pp. 4-5).

Bandura writes that several factors, mainly social, personal, and situational factors, affect how efficacy experiences are interpreted. The extent to which performance achievement alters perceived efficacy will depend on the perceived difficulty of the task, peoples' preconception of their capabilities, the effort that they extend, the amount of aid they receive, the situational circumstances under which they perform, and their physical and mental state at the time (Bandura, 1995). Perceived self-efficacy does not depend on the skills that the individual possesses, but rather on the belief of what they can achieve under the circumstances. If an individual believes that they can solve a certain task, it is easier to start dealing with the task, expend effort on the task, and show persistence when challenges arise.

Coping with or mastering life is to be able to deal with challenges that arise. To be able to deal with challenges in life, it is important that one believes and expects to be able to deal with challenges. If an individual has negative experiences in dealing with certain challenges, it is then easier to avoid the challenges or give up in the process. By contrast, if the individual has positive experiences in dealing with challenges, it is highly likely that the individual will extend both efforts, show persistence and resilience. Banduras theory is relevant for this thesis because it explains how people can develop perceived self-efficacy. Through literature students can become aware of how characters develop perceived self-efficacy and transfer that awareness to their own lives.

2.2 Mindsets

In this section I explain what mindsets are and that mindsets can be fixed or malleable. The mindset of an individual, whether it is fixed or malleable, has a significant impact on the individual's resilience when facing challenges.

In their research paper *Mindsets That Promote Resilience: When Students Believe That Personal Characteristics Can Be Developed*, David Scott Yeager and Carol S. Dweck (2012) show that mindsets have a significant impact on students' resilience when they face academic and social challenges. The article shows that students that believe, or are taught, that intellectual abilities are qualities that can be developed, show better academic results than students that believe that academic qualities are unchangeable. Later research also shows that believing or learning that social attributes can also be developed, can lower students stress and aggression levels when dealing with exclusion or victimization by their peers, which in turn enhances their academic achievements. Prominent in this psychology are students' implicit theories (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Yeager and Dweck state that implicit theories are defined as assumptions about the malleability of personal qualities. They are rarely made explicit and are often called naïve or lay theories because, unlike scientific theories, they are people's common-sense explanations for everyday events. These theories create a framework of predictions and judgements about the meaning of events in the world and in the students' lives. Implicit theories can involve any personal attributes, and students can vary in their theories, from an entity (fixed) to a more incremental (malleable) theory of intelligence or personality. Therefore, students with a more of an entity theory about intelligence, view intellectual ability as something fixed, unchangeable. Students with a more incremental theory, view intellectual ability as something that can grow or be developed over time. Similarly, students with a more malleable theory about social attributes believe that these can be developed or change over time, students with more of an entity theory about personality believe that personalities are fixed and unable to change. These theories seem to create two different inner realities for students, one that enhances resilience and one that does not (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Students mindsets or implicit theories about the malleability of human characteristics have implications on whether they show resilience and respond positively to both academic and social challenges. Yeager and Dweck write that even when students are taught the academic

and social skills to be resilient, they may not be able to employ them unless they believe that academic and social adversities have the potential to improve (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). This is consistent with Bandura's theory of perceived self-efficacy. Students' mindsets and perceived self-efficacy are crucial to whether they will extend effort and show persistence and resilience if they believe that they are able to achieve their goals.

In their research, Yeager and Dweck show that students that are thought that intellectual and personal attributes are changeable, show greater resilience and are able to achieve better results academically and socially (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). In literature the characters' mindsets determine their beliefs about their reality, and these beliefs then determine their trajectory in the story. Their actions and reactions are determined by their mindset and what they believe about themselves. Through literature students could become more aware of how their own mindsets also determine their resilience and persistence. This could, again, help students develop a positive identity and become productive members of society.

2.3 Recognition, nonrecognition and identity

In this section I present Axel Honneth's social theory of recognition. In Honneth's theory, the very formation of identity depends on the development of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. This way of relating to oneself can merely be obtained and maintained intersubjectively, by being given recognition by others as well as recognizing others. Therefore, conditions for self-realization are dependent on relationships of mutual recognition.

In his book *Axel Honneth, A Critical Theory of the Social*, Christopher F. Zurn (2015) claims that Axel Honneth's theory of recognition explains that individuals can only gain subjectivity through intersubjectivity. A self-efficacious sense of self can merely be obtained when individuals receive positive acknowledgement from others and their abilities, personality traits and points of view are recognized. Honneth claims that because individuals are dependent on recognition for their sense of themselves as distinct and worthy people, the very construct and maintenance of their identity is dependent on recognition. Therefore, built into intersubjectivity is a moral demand to be appropriately recognized by others and to recognize others appropriately. Honneth argues that there are three levels of recognition that form identity: self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem (Zurn, 2015).

In his book *The Struggle for Recognition, The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* Honneth (1995) claims that the development of self-confidence is dependent on relationships that provide love and care. The first relationship is the relationship to parents, friends and loved ones. The relationship to the primary caregiver, the mother is crucial in the formative years. It is this relationship that will determine the quality of other relationships (Honneth, 1995, p. xiv). Although Honneth emphasises on the mother as the primary caregiver, today it is clear that this could refer to any primary caregiver, regardless of gender or familial status. Zurn states that the individual, the child, forms an identity by receiving care and recognition from others. It is through friendships and special relationships that the individual discovers that they are unique and develop a positive image of their abilities and skills. If the individual experiences love and care, the individual learns to love and care for others (Zurn, 2015).

The second relationship to self that is developed is self-respect. Honneth argues that this has less to do with the individual's opinion of oneself and more to do with the sense of universal dignity. To have self-respect is then to be able to participate as a member of society. This is when a person is recognized as a legally mature person and respect is shown to the individual by treating her according to her rights. Honneth emphasizes the importance of rights because the rights that an individual possesses ensure the opportunity to become a productive and contributing member of society. An individual can have self-respect without rights, but the fullest form of self-respect can only be realized if the individual possesses the capacities of a legal person. These capacities, Honneth remarks, have changed and continue to change over time. He claims that there has been an increase in people who are treated as full-fledged citizens, as well as the actual content of what it means to be a full-fledged citizen (Honneth, 1995, p. xv) Women's role in society is a good example in this case. A century ago, women did not have the right to vote, however, today women are full-fledged citizens in many countries, and they are considered productive members of several societies.

The third and final form of self-relation is self-esteem. Self-esteem involves a sense of what makes the individual special or unique, and the distinction of one individual from another must be something valuable. Self-esteem is often achieved through the individual's contribution to the society through performing a function that is considered valuable to that particular society. Honneth uses the term "solidarity", and claims that societal solidarity is achieved only when the "common values would match the concerns of the individuals in such a way that no

member of society would be deprived of the opportunity to earn esteem for the contribution to the common good” (Honneth, 1995, p. xvii). This implies that people with high self-esteem will mutually acknowledge each other’s contributions to society and through this there is a growth of loyalty and solidarity (Zurn, 2015). However, it is important to keep in mind that expectations of recognition are often violated on the individual as well as social level.

In many cases individuals’ expectation of appropriate recognition are often violated through destructive forms of misrecognition or nonrecognition. This occurs through abuse in personal relationships, denial of basic rights in societies, and exclusion by different communities (Zurn, 2015). Honneth claims that negative emotional experiences of disrespect, when expectation of appropriate recondition are violated, are considered a violation of self-confidence, self-respect, or self-esteem, and thus provide the motivation for struggle to overcome misrecognition or nonrecognition. These struggles apply for interpersonal relationships, societies, and different social, cultural, and different groups. These emotional experiences of misrecognition or nonrecognition are also catalysts for social movements that often change society (Zurn, 2015). The potential for collective action aimed at expanding social patterns of recognition arises once it becomes clear that the experiences of disrespect are not only experiences by one individual, but an experience shared by others (Honneth, 1995, p. xix). Honneth’s theory of recondition is relevant for this thesis because both students and characters in literature take part in personal relationships as well as in society. All individuals long for recognition and may revolt against nonrecognition. It is possible to use literature as an example of how nonrecognition leads to a struggle for recognition and thus may lead the character to become more resilient.

2.3.1 Microaggression

In this thesis I will be dealing with racial and cultural microaggressions as experiences of nonrecognition because the main characters in the graphic novels I analyse are subjected to such experiences. Therefore, I will very briefly explain the term racial microaggression and explain why these experiences are of nonrecognition.

According to Tori DeAngelis’ article *Unmasking 'Racial Microaggressions'* (2009), microaggressions are everyday insults or derogatory messages directed toward people of racial and cultural minority. Any minority group can experience microaggression because these may

be based on gender, ethnicity, disability, nationality, or religion. These insults are often presented by people who have the best intentions in mind and do not necessarily mean to be offensive. In addition, some of these experiences of microaggressions can be so subtle that they are hard to detect by both victim and perpetrator.

In her article, DeAngelis states that psychologist Derald Wing Sue presents three types of racial microaggressions. The first is microassaults, where the action or words are deliberately meant to degrade or hurt the receiver. Microinsults are rude or insensitive comments that undermine someone's culture, race, or identity, but unlike microassaults, microinsults may be unconsciously presented and may not intend to hurt, yet they are insulting and hurtful. The last is microinvalidations, like the term implies, these comments or actions invalidate a person's thoughts, feelings, and experiences of reality. Sue claim that although these incidents can appear small, insignificant, and trivial, they do influence the mental health of the people subjected to them. He says that: "Microaggressions hold their power because they are invisible, and therefore they don't allow us to see that our actions and attitudes may be discriminatory" (DeAngelis, 2009).

Microaggressions are relevant for this thesis because in the novels I analyse, all the characters experience racial or cultural microaggressions, and as a result these experiences affect their self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. Therefore, I will refer to these experiences as experiences of nonrecognition in my analysis.

2.4 Resilience

In this section I will discuss the meaning of resilience, how it is defined in research and how the enhancement of resilience can be fostered in a school setting.

In her literary review in VicHealth (2015), Mandie Shean says that in the 1970's, researchers investigated children at risk for psychopathology and discovered that despite of being exposed to risk, some children had good outcomes. This discovery generated a field of research on resilience as well as research on children that thrive despite adversity, where the concept of resilience proved to be significant because it presented a change in focus from mental illness to mental health. Shean writes that "This changing focus created a surge of research on

protective factors that promote mental health and positive development in the face of risk” (VicHealth, 2015, p. 4).

In her book, *Resiliens – risiko og sunn utvikling, (Resilience – risk and healthy development)* Anne Inger Helmen Borge (2010) confirms that this can be observed in children and young adults that effectively adjust despite of crisis and challenging surroundings. Children and young adults have individual reactions to stress and risk. To illustrate resilience, Borge claims that we can imagine the different reactions stretching from a positive end to a negative end of a scale. Some people manage to stay on the positive end of the scale despite challenges. That is considered a positive evolution for children or young adults at risk and can resemble resilience. Others react negatively and find themselves closer to the negative end of the scale. That is defined as a problematic evolution. Resilience is therefore the positive evolution in children’s and teenagers’ reaction to stress and challenges. It does not seem to be helpful to add material assets to children experiencing challenging situations in the hopes that they will function better and thus approach the positive end of the scale. It is vital to understand that resilience is something different or more than the avoidance of challenges in everyday life (Borge, 2010, p. 17).

To define resilience, Borge uses Michael Rutter’s definition that is the following: “An interactive concept that is concerned with the combination of serious risk experiences and a relatively positive psychological outcome despite those experiences” (VicHealth, 2015, p. 5). Rutter makes the point that resilience is more than social competence or positive mental health; “competence must exist with risk to be considered as resilience” (VicHealth, 2015, p. 7). Borge claims that risk can be defined as danger, loss, challenges or responsibilities, all depending on the situation (Borge, 2010, pp. 69-70). Therefore, educators can safely assume that most, if not all, children and young adults experience some sort of exposure to risk in their daily lives. This exposure can increase their stress levels and affect their learning and development (VicHealth, 2015).

In their article *Supporting Children’s Resilience: Early Childhood Educator Understandings*, Kerry Archdall and Anna Kilderry (2016) confirm that without appropriate strategies to cope and to manage daily stressors, children and young people’s learning and development may be affected; therefore, skills and strategies need to be taught as soon as practicable so that children and young adults are prepared for potential adversities, and can make the most of future learning opportunities. Since all individuals may experience stress differently depending on

the situation, many issues that adults do not place significance upon can be important for young people, and adult expectations of young people can become a further weight upon their shoulders. Therefore, it is important for adults to note that the cause of the upset or stress might be significant for the young adult and should not be dismissed. Consequently, it is the adult's and educator's role to provide the knowledge and buffering techniques to diminish children's and teenagers' anxiety and increase their resilience (Archdall & Kilderry, 2016, p. 59).

In Archdall and Kilderry's research, they consider resilience as a multifaceted construct. They also consider the question why children's and young adults resilience should be a focus for educator practice and the role of educators in supporting children to become resilient. Findings in their research illustrate that educators in the research had varied understandings of the notion of resilience and how to support children's resilience. However, spontaneous, and unplanned teaching strategies were revealed as the educators' main approach of supporting children's resilience. Findings from the study also illustrate that some educators were waiting for particular social and emotional incidences to occur before they initiated emotional teaching and learning strategies. There was also some uncertainty about how to identify resilience according to educators. Research findings raise critical implications and questions, a few of these being:

Is the fostering and supporting of children's and teenager's resilience too important an educational issue to be left to the fate of spontaneous incidents to arise in practice? And, how can educators intentionally plan for children's emotional learning along with supporting their resilience across the curriculum? (Archdall & Kilderry, 2016, p. 64).

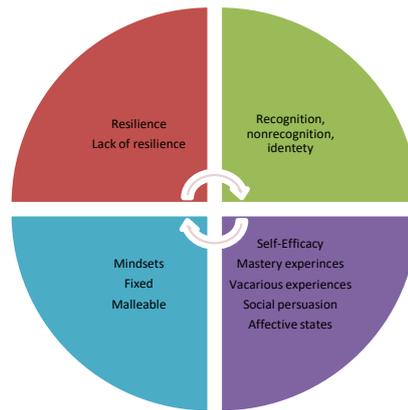
I believe that resilience is too important of an educational issue to be left to mere chance, spontaneous situations, and unplanned teaching strategies. By integrating the teaching of life skill through literature, educators can intentionally plan for children's emotional learning and support their resilience.

The term resilience has been widely adopted to signify the capacity to cope, learn and thrive in the face of change, challenge, and adversity. It is also described as the ongoing and dynamic process of coping. Everyone encounters challenges, and everyone possesses a certain degree of resilience, however some people are more resilient than others. An explicit focus on students' mental health has entered the classroom through the interdisciplinary topic of health and life skills. As mentioned in the introduction, the topic health and life skills are now part

of the English curriculum, currently linked to texts. Perceived self-efficacy, mindsets and recognition from others are important in developing a positive sense of identity, increasing resilience, and persistence when facing challenges. Those with higher resilience are more likely to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. In addition, research by Archdall and Kilderry shows that in addition to the varied understandings of the notion of resilience by educators, there is also some confusion about how to support children's resilience. The teaching strategies and methods employed by educators were spontaneous and unplanned (Archdall & Kilderry, 2016). Educators should regard resilience as a life skill that can be addressed through literature. In my thesis I suggest that literature can be used to explore how characters' perceived self-efficacy, mindsets, and level of recognition or nonrecognition affect their sense of identity as well as their resilience.

2.5 Interconnectedness

Admittedly, all these aspects related to life skills are obviously interconnected. Self-efficacy beliefs, mindsets and the development of our identity are all created in social interactions. As we interact with others, we are formed as individuals in the world, and form our own view of ourselves and the world around us. If the main experiences in our lives are positive and we are recognized, we perceive ourselves as capable of accomplishing goals, develop a positive sense of identity as well as malleable mindsets, and this results in the ability to be resilient in challenging situations. When our experiences are mainly negative and we experience nonrecognition, we may believe that we are not capable of accomplishing challenging goals. We may develop a negative sense of identity and struggle for recognition, our mindsets may become fixed instead of malleable, as a result we may experience a lack of resilience and become incapable of overcoming challenging obstacles. I present this connection in a model on the following page. The model shows that recognition, nonrecognition, identity, self-efficacy, mindsets are interconnected and depending on the experiences of the individual, positive or negative, result in resilience or a lack of resilience.



Model of elements that constitute life skills

2.6 Different approaches to the reading of literature

In this section I will present three different approaches in the reading of literature, as well as how literature is viewed in a teaching context. Kathleen McCormick (1994) presents three models or theories of reading. These models are the cognitive model, the expressivist model and socio-cultural model. These theories see the role of the reader, the text and social context in different ways and provide different approaches to the reading of literature.

McCormick (1994) states that the cognitive model, which is rooted in an objectivist tradition, focuses primarily on reading comprehension, where the meaning of the text is created by adding up the meaning of the individual words and sentences. This view assumes that reading is a strictly mental capacity that has nothing to do with the student as a social being, with the classroom context, or the nature of the reading task. However, there is one branch within cognitive research that has stressed the importance of the readers' prior knowledge in making sense of a text. This is also referred to as schema theory (McCormick, 1994, p. 17). Aud Marit Simensen (2007) defines a schema as a generalized pre-existing knowledge structure, "a mental representation of experience that is typical for definite situations and circumstances" (Simensen, 2007, p. 88). This theory is based on studies that show that background information about a text not only facilitates, but also influences both our comprehension and memory of the text. According to this theory, it is important to provide the reader with background information to activate their pre-existing schema so that they can understand the meaning of the text, as the text is viewed as "a container of meaning" (McCormick, 1994, p. 24).

However, this approach to literature is problematic because this tradition in cognitive theory assumes that “there is a universal foundation or ground which underlines knowledge, and which guarantees its truth or accuracy” (McCormick , 1994, p. 18) The readers prior knowledge depends on the readers age, background, culture, knowledge and education. Students approach text with different schemata, and they interpret different meanings into the text. This means that students with different gender, age, race, culture, or religion will interpret texts differently. The cognitive model works toward giving the reader the “correct” schema so that they can interpret the text “correctly” (McCormick , 1994, p. 30)

The expressivist approach or model has a different view on the text and the reader. McCormick claims that the expressivist model emerges from an individualistic and student-centred view of education. This model emphasizes the richness and uniqueness of students background, and “encourages them to develop their own interpretation of the text” (McCormick , 1994) This model does not view the text as an objective “container of meaning” (McCormick , 1994, p. 24). But it also fails to provide an exact explanation of what the text really is. The reader response movement emerged in America in the 1970’s due to the expressivist approach, which in turn brought about changes in teaching methods in the U.S. The pedagogical technique of this movement was a text created by student, where they express their initial thought, feelings, and opinions after reading a text. While this model might be satisfying to teachers because it encourages students’ investment in learning and involvement, critics argue that it is hard to understand exactly what is being taught by this approach. This approach also fails to take into consideration the fact that the individual is part of a society, therefore it fails to take into consideration that social and cultural conditions that influence the reader’s interpretation of the text. McCormick sees the socio-cultural approach as the solution to these issues that are presented by the expressivist approach (McCormick , 1994).

In the social-cultural model, reading is considered “a social process” (McCormick , 1994, p. 69). The idea of critical literacy was developed within this model. In contrast to the two earlier approaches, where the focus was on reading comprehension and expressivist subjective interpretation, critical literacy consists in both being able to read and understand the texts and link them to one’s own worlds. In other words, develop the ability to “perceive the interconnectedness of social conditions and practices, and to possess the critical and political awareness to take actions with and against them.” (McCormick , 1994, p. 49). In this approach the focus is on the historical context of the text and how the reader understands his/her own historical context. The reader has then an active role in the construction of meaning, but “not

as a free individual” (McCormick , 1994, p. 57). The meaning is constructed within the individual’s historical context, “as a subject in history who nonetheless possesses some degree of agency” (McCormick , 1994, p. 57). McCormick suggests that reading is never just a subjective or individual experience. Resembling other acts of cognition, reading always occurs in a social context. She refers to Gerald Graff who states that: “as readers we are both concerned with the questions posed by the text and the questions we bring to the text from our own differing interests and cultural backgrounds” (McCormick , 1994, p. 69) This is an interactive model of reading that, firstly, focuses on the fact that both texts and readers offer something to the reading process, and secondly, that both text and reader are ideologically situated (McCormick , 1994) This approach incorporates both the cognitive and the expressivist models and it can be applied in the analysis of literature that I will be using in this thesis.

How do these theories relate to the teaching of L2? According to Simensen, most research on the role of schemata has been done in relation to the teaching of L1, but most of the results in L2 point out the same results as those of L1. It has had significant influence in the teaching of literature in L1, however its significance in the teaching of literature in L2 are modest. Finally, the sociocultural perspective of learning has to some extent influenced ideas about L2 learning. However, these perspectives are more commonly applied in other areas of teaching than the teaching of L2, because the bases of L2 learning is considered a cognitive process, while the social and cultural aspects can be regarded as a favourable addition to this process (Simensen, 2007, pp. 85-88).

Simensen also states that there are three levels to text comprehension in L2 teaching. The primary level is the comprehension of the superficial meaning of the actual text, understanding of the language or text on a surface level. This requires a level of knowledge of language, grammar, and discourse, and is more of a cognitive approach. The second level of understanding is the ability to understand the implications in the text, that the students can read between the lines. This requires the students to possess a certain general knowledge about the world and previous experiences, which can resemble the expressivist approach to literature. The last and the third level is the kind of understanding that makes it possible for the students to evaluate and interpret the text because of their personal knowledge and experience. This requires knowledge about the context in which the text is produced, which is required for the social-cultural approach. The first level can be reached by asking “what, who and when” questions. The second level can be reached by asking why questions, and the third

level can usually be reached by asking “what/why do you think...”, and “discuss on the bases of your point of view or your own personal experience” (Simensen, 2007, pp. 149-151).

Amos Paran and Pauline Robinson (2016) note that literature in language learning does not take anything away from the language learner because literature is part of the human experience. Literature enriches the language learners learning and increases their knowledge about English speaking countries. It not only provides insight into different cultures and ways of life; it also provides a portal into a different world. The new worlds are populated by characters, often human but also animal characters or invented beings, like in fantasy or science fiction. These characters inhabit a world, society, country, or landscape that is described in the novel (Paran & Robinson, 2016). Iversen claims that when analysing literature, it is important to bear in mind that the literary text exists within a context, within certain external factors. These factors are political, historical, cultural, and social context as well as the literary period the text belongs to. This is where the elements of fiction, such as setting, plot, characters, themes and motifs, exist (Iversen, 2017, s. 213). It is important to make the students aware of these factors when working with literature. The aim of this thesis is to focus on how external, as well as internal factors affect individuals in literature.

Paran and Robinson use the term “shared knowledge” (Paran & Robinson, 2016, p. 48) about basic linguistic aspect, as well as the interpretation of utterances that are not explicit. Most, if not all, literary works, the writer assumes that the reader possesses some knowledge that the reader brings to the text. However, the reader can appreciate the literary work even if they do not possess all the knowledge needed to understand the literary work completely. Paran and Robinson note that very few readers possess all the “shared knowledge” needed to understand everything (Paran & Robinson, 2016, pp. 48-49). Whereas the cognitive model focuses on giving the reader the “correct” previous knowledge so that the reader can interpret the text “correctly”, Paran and Robinson state that it is possible to enjoy and understand a literary work even if one does not possess previous knowledge required. Although previous knowledge can aid in the understanding of a literary work, I do not believe it is vital to understand everything when working with literature.

Amos Paran and Pauline Robinson also mention three approaches to literature. The first approach is the view of literature as a body of knowledge and content. This could be done by studying the history of English literature or studying specific styles of literature. The second approach is an approach that focuses specifically on the language and language skills. Here it

is common to focus on the actual language. In this case, often shorter texts are used and there is little discussion of the text as literature. The last approach views literature as a way to stimulate personal development in the learner. Here the focus is on activities that activate students' personal experiences and thus develop their understanding of their own emotions (Paran & Robinson, 2016, pp. 27-28). The two first approaches can be compared to the cognitive approach, where the emphasis is on the content of the text and language learning. The third approach could be compared to the expressivist and the socio-cultural approach because in this approach students are part of the reading process and have something to offer the text as readers. In this thesis, I will be focusing on the last approach when I consider the didactic potential of the graphic novels. My aim is to employ literature in the personal development of students, using the characters in literature to expand the students' knowledge about both internal and external factors that may affect their emotions and their lives.

2.6.1 Graphic Novels

In this section I will address the genre graphic novels and explain more in depth why I have chosen to employ graphic novels in my thesis. I will very briefly address the history of graphic novels, the definition of a graphic novels, some of the tools needed in the analysis of a graphic novels and the benefits that come from the employment of graphic novels in the L2 classroom.

From the earliest of times, mankind has been telling stories using symbols and images. However, it was not until the 1930 that the first "comic book" appeared. In his Ted Talk *Comics belong in the classroom* (2018), Gene Luen Yang explains that while working on his master's thesis, he discovered that the growth of comic books and graphic novels as an educational medium was stunted in 1954 by child psychiatrist Dr. Fredric Wertham, who, in his book *Seduction of the Innocent*, claimed that reading comic books caused juvenile delinquency. Yang explains that Wertham's book inspires the Senate of the United States to hold a series of hearings that lasted for two months, where the results were inconclusive. Unfortunately, these hearings ruined the reputation of comic books amongst respectable teachers and thus the medium of comics stayed out of the classrooms for decades (TED, 2018, 6:07). Even though comic books may have been labelled as garbage by respectable teachers, Will Eisner recognised the potential of this medium, and with a group of talented friends he began producing new material. Eisner transformed this medium into longer, more complex

works that are today known as “graphic novels” (Inge, 2011, p. 9). Eisner dedicated his life to transforming the comics genre into an educational tool, using comic books on television to teach children how to read. He also began to publish adaptations of world literature into graphic novels in 1999 (Inge, 2011, p. 10). Hege Emma Rimmereide (2017) makes a distinction between comics and graphic novels. Whereas a comic book usually consists of thirty pages or so, a graphic novel can be several hundred pages long. One of the definitions Rimmereide refers to is by Will Eisner. He states that a graphic novel is: “an arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea” (Rimmereide, 2017, p. 133).

When discussing graphic novels, Rimmereide notes that there are some genre specific features that are important to consider. The story or the narrative is told in images, presenting one image after another. The reading pattern is reading the images from top left to down right, where each image is called a panel. Every panel has a visual or implied boundary, and a piece of the story is told within that panel. Word panels are used to tell the story only in words, while image panels use only image to convey a piece of the story. The reader must connect the visual illustrations and the text to be able to create relations between the panel, and the whole page. Word and image panels use both words and image to tell the story, while the space between the panels is referred to as the gutter. In this space the reader can participate in the creation of the meaning and experience, create his or her own interpretation of the literary work, in accordance with the reader response theory. Here the text does not give answers and so the reader must take part in the interpretation of the action. A splash page is a full-page image, while speech bubbles is the text that indicates that a character is saying something, also referred to as word balloons. Thought balloons is text that indicates what a character is thinking. A text box contains narrative text, not spoken by characters, but where the character can be the narrator of his or her story. Lines that indicate movement are referred to as motion or radiation lines, while are an onomatopoeic representation of a sound and they are presented as part of the artwork (Rimmereide, 2017, pp. 135-139). It is vital that students acquire vocabulary they can employ in the discussion of the graphic novel, as this will aid them in analysing the graphic novel, as well as the ability to express their thought and opinions about the illustrations.

Graphic novels are growing in the field of children and young adult literature. Rimmereide claims that graphic novels are highly motivating, and they can not only help develop important literacy skills, they can also allow young readers into new spaces through bringing new themes

and topics to their attention. They also employ both visual and verbal modalities. The ability to decode both visual and verbal expressions is regarded as a necessary skill in modern society, so since graphic novels consist of both visual and verbal expressions, they are highly suited to train the ability to decode both verbal and visual modalities. As it may be easier to comprehend a text when it is supported by visual expression, the graphic novel is suited for both competent readers as well as reluctant readers. The combination of visual and verbal modalities allows the students to see the whole situation. While reading, they are offered additional information including facial expressions and body language (Rimmereide, 2017).

Yang, the author of *American Born Chinese*, worked as a math and computer science teacher for 17 years at Bishop O'Dowd High School in Oakland, California (TED, 2018, 1:10). He discovered that his students liked both reading and learning from comics, even more than they liked video lectures, or learning from a screen. In a Ted Talk, he explains why he believes that comics and graphic novels belong in the classroom. Yang notes that this is because the students are used to taking in information visually, however, unlike other visual narrative, like film, animation or video, comics and graphic novels are, as he phrases it, "permanent" (TED, 2018, 5:08). He claims that "in comics, past present and future are situated side by side on the same page" (TED, 2018, 5:10). As a result, the readers can control the information flow. This means that the reader can reread sections of the comic or graphic novel at their own pace. As a result, the visual and permanent nature of comics and graphic novels make them "an incredibly powerful education tool" (TED, 2018, 5:50).

Madsen claims that it is very likely that the students that will benefit from the inclusion of life skills in the school system are the students that are already resourceful and that have developed coping mechanisms (Madsen, 2020, pp. 36-37). When dealing with life skills through literature, graphic novels might be highly suitable for students that are reluctant readers and might also be motivating for advanced students as well. I have chosen novels that I believe are suited for both competent and reluctant readers.

The novels I have chosen to analyse are *Noughts and Crosses* by Malorie Blackman, *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, and *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luan Yang. These graphic novels deal with the issue of perceived self-efficacy, different mindsets, recognition, nonrecognition, identity, and resilience in both in personal relationships and society. I have chosen these novels because they present different political, cultural, social, and historical contexts. They contain language that is cognitively accessible for students in VG1. In addition,

the main characters presented in the novels are about the same age as the students themselves, which might make it easier to relate to them. This can help the students see themselves in these characters, which can make it easier to identify with the characters, and, as a result, the students can learn from their experiences. The characters in all three novels go through different life challenges and experiences that have different effects on their lives. I have chosen to include information about the author and the graphic novels because in these graphic novels, the authors' life experiences are relevant in their creation. I begin by analysing *Noughts and Crosses* first, then *Persepolis* and finally *American Born Chinese*, in the order of the complexity of the graphic novel. The structure of the chapters is organised around each main character and their experiences. I focus on certain parts of the novels that I believe deal with the main characters' perceived self-efficacy, mindsets, recognition, nonrecognition, identity and finally resilience.

3 *Noughts and Crosses*

In this section I analyse the graphic novel *Noughts and Crosses*. Firstly, I include a brief presentation of the author and the graphic novel *Noughts and Crosses*, then I present a plot summary. Furthermore, I analyse and discuss the graphic novel, again with the aims of bringing forward the parts of the novel that reflect self-efficacy, recognition, nonrecognition, identity, mindsets, and resilience.

3.1 About the Author and the Graphic Novel

Malorie Blackman was born February 8th, 1962 in London. She became a system programmer and debuted as a writer in 1990. Since then she has written more than 50 books for children and young adults (Wikipedia, 2021). *Noughts and Crosses* is a book series written for young adults, which consists of five novels and three novellas. Unlike the other two graphic novels I analyse in this thesis, the novel *Noughts and Crosses* was adapted into a graphic novel in 2005. The adaptation is made by Ian Edginton, and the graphic novel was illustrated by John Aggs (Blackman, 2015). Malorie Blackman has received several prizes for her work, among these the Red House Children's Book Award and the Fantastic Fiction Award (Blackman, 2015). Now, she lives in Kent with her family (Wikipedia, 2021).

In her interview with Channel 4 News, Blackman specifically notes that the first book in the series *Noughts and Crosses* was inspired by the Stephen Lawrence case. Stephen Lawrence was a black teenager who was murdered on 22 of April 1993 when he was waiting for the bus in Eltham, South East London. He was attacked by a group of white boys and stabbed to death, and the murder was racially motivated (BBC NEWS, 2018). Blackman herself, being of African, Caribbean, and British decent, says that she was motivated and felt that she was finally ready to write about racism because of the story of how Stephen Lawrence's parents were treated by the police. Her aim and focus when writing the novel were to make the message accessible to teens, without being pushy (Channel 4 News, 2019, 0:43).

Blackman explains that she has drawn a lot of inspiration from her own experiences when writing *Noughts and Crosses*. In fact, she claims that Callum's character from the novel is the character that she identifies with the most. Of course, she does not identify with terrorism, but

she says that many of the incidents experienced by Callum are in fact incidents from her own life, and that Blackman dealt with these experiences as she was writing the series *Noughts and Crosses*. Blackman explains that while in school she asked why she never learned about people of colour that had made great contributions to society, she was then told that there were none, so she put it in the novel as one of Callum's experiences (Channel 4 News, 2019, 2:45). She also explains that the whole series may not have existed if she had not met her husband, who is white. In *Noughts and Crosses*, her focus is on the interracial relationship between Callum and Sephy (Channel 4 News, 2019, 5:09). Blackman explains that her aim is to raise awareness about seeing the issue of racism from a different perspective. As she presents her characters, Blackman says that she challenges people to reflect on the events in the series and form an opinion about them (Channel 4 News, 2019, 2:12).

The graphic novel *Noughts and Crosses* is illustrated in black and white drawings that are quite detailed. The story has no narrator; therefore, it does not contain any narrative text or thought bubbles. The black and white visual illustrations provide the reader with facial expressions and body language, however, there is no insight into the personal thoughts and feelings of the characters, apart from what they express through words, facial expressions, and action. As a result, inner lives of the characters remain a mystery to the reader.

3.2 Synopsis

Noughts and Crosses is a fictional novel describing an alternative history where Crosses, dark skinned people, colonized and enslaved the noughts, light skinned people. The graphic novel is set in an "alternative twenty first century Britain" (Channel 4 News, 2019, 2:31). In this fictional society, the Crosses run society by controlling the government, employment, money, and education. Noughts are often poorer second-class citizens, working mostly in service to the Crosses. In addition, noughts have quite limited access to basic human rights, and they lack protection from discrimination in society. Even though slavery has been abolished segregation between the two races is enforced and encouraged, which continues to keep Crosses in control. Although, the main theme of the graphic novel is forbidden love, other important themes are racism, prejudice, and terrorism.

Callum's mother, Meggie McGregor, is a nought that works as a housekeeper for Sephy's mother, Jasmine Hadley. This results in the friendship between Sephy (Persephony), a Cross and Callum, a nought. They grow up together as best friends until Maggie is fired because she fails to provide an alibi for Jasmine's infidelity to Kamal Hadley, Sephy's dad and Home Secretary. This makes it difficult for Callum and Sephy to see each other. However, Callum passes the entrance exams to get a place at Heathcroft, Sephy's school. They both imagine that they will see each other at school. Nonetheless, Callum's time at school is difficult, protests start and the racial conflict in school makes it hard for them to be together. The protest's lead to arguments between them, and Sephy is attacked by Cross girls because she sat at the nought table at lunch, so Callum renounces their friendship in hope of keeping Sephy safe. Due to life circumstances, Sephy and Callum see each other less, but they still meet on the beach from time to time. During this time, Sephy wants to go to boarding school and asks Callum to come with her so that they can start a new life together. Undoubtedly, Callum wants to go with her but does not manage to reach her on time, and as a result he joins the Liberation Militia. Sephy's departure to boarding school separates them for two years, so when Sephy finally returns, Callum leaves her a note asking her to meet him on the beach where they used to meet. Sephy goes to meet him and is kidnapped by Callum assisted by the Liberation Militia and taken to a hideaway. In the hideaway, Callum is left in charge for Sephy, and they end up having sex, which results in Sephy becoming pregnant. Despite of pressure from her father, Sephy refuses to have an abortion. When Callum hears of the pregnancy, he comes to see Sephy. As a result, he is arrested, and charged with raping her. Refusing to give in to pressure from Sephy's father, Callum is executed. Sephy gives birth to their child Callie Rose McGregor.

3.3 Self-efficacy

In this section I present the parts of *Noughts and Crosses* that deal with the main characters' perceived self-efficacy. I will discuss how experiences of mastery affect Callum, and how social models affects both Callum and Sephy.

3.3.1 Callum

One section in the graphic novel that deals with Callum's perceived self-efficacy in *Noughts and Crosses* occurs when Callum is in history class, on pages 40 to 44. This section begins with a panel with a drawing of Heathcroft high school, including two text boxes. The first text box explains that this situation takes place the day after Callum and Lynny talk about the future. The second text box narrates the teacher, Mr Jason's statement:

The purpose of today's history lesson is to show that all famous scientists, inventors, artists, and other people of note are all people, just like you and me. When we think of them, it's very easy to imagine them as being "out there" somewhere above and beyond us. What I want you to realize is that they are just like you and me, that we too can aspire to greatness. Anyone in this room can be a scientist or an astronaut or anything you want to be if you work hard and are determined. Right then, who knows who invented automatic traffic signals which led to the traffic lights used today? He also invented a type of gas mask used during World War One? Anyone? (Blackman, 2015, p. 40).

The next panel shows Callum answering the question: "Garett Morgan, Sir" (Blackman, 2015, p. 41).

This continues as Callum answers who pioneered the first blood bank, who was the first person to perform open heart surgery, the first man to reach the north pole and who the saying "The Real McCoy" is named after. Callum answering all these questions makes the teacher suggest that Callum should teach the lesson. Then the teacher asks what all these people have in common, Callum points out that they were all Crosses. This answer makes Mr. Jason exclaim:

Correct! Well done! Throughout history from the time our ancestors in Cafrique sailed to other lands and acquired knowledge of gunpowder, writing, weapon making, the arts and so on, we have been the dominant race on earth. We have been the ones to move entire backwards civilizations forwards (Blackman, 2015, p. 43).

Callum raises his hand again and attempts to point out that there were noughts that also made significant contributions. When the teacher asks why he has never heard of them, Callum exclaims: "Because Crosses write all the history books and you only write about your own. Noughts have done Lots of important things that I bet no one here knows" (Blackman, 2015, p. 43). This makes the teacher accuse Callum of spreading pathetic lies and asks who has been

filling his head with nonsense. Sephy observes this situation but does not speak up, and there are no reactions from the rest of the class. Callum attempts to defend himself by explaining that his father told him, but Mr. Jason continues to mock and ridicule him, and finally Callum is sent to sit by the headmaster's office. History is written by the people that dominate society, in this case by Crosses.

This section shows how Callum should be experiencing a mastery experience because he has the answers to all questions the teacher asks. Not only that, he is also able to provide additional information about historical events. Yet, because he is a nought and therefore discriminated against, his knowledge is dismissed by Mr. Jason as lies and nonsense. This is a clear example of microinvalidation and as such an experience of nonrecognition. Instead of experiencing a sense of mastery, he is sent off to sit by the headmaster's office as if he had done something wrong. On page 46 in the novel, Callum is told by another teacher that Mr. Jason was hard on him not because he wanted to see him fail, on the contrary, he wants him to succeed and therefore is hard on him. Still, the result of this microinvalidation Callum feels like his reality is not real or true, and he cannot say or do anything right. He ends up feeling like he failed, even though he did not, and this is due to the fact that he is a nought.

Furthermore, Callum is subject to social modelling in his family. On pages 72-74 Callum finds out that his father and brother, Jude, have joined the Liberation Militia. He wants to join the LM as well, but he is told that he is not old enough. His father does not want to involve him because he is the only one in the family that is in school. His father is extremely proud that Callum attends a Cross school. When Callum expresses that he wants to leave school, his father reacts to this by angrily insisting that he would only leave school over his dead body. The third panel on the page shows Callum, with his father's menacing, black shadow over him and on the background behind him. The last panel on that page shows Callum sinking to the floor after his father and brother leave (Blackman, 2015, pp. 72-74). The father's shadow over Callum can be interpreted that his father has a certain influence, authority, and power over Callum. While Callum's father is still alive, Callum attempts to stay in school. His father's influence prevents him from quitting school and joining the Liberation Militia. Nonetheless, after he is suspended from school and his father dies, his life takes a different direction.

Another example of Callum being influenced by social modelling occurs on pages 145 to 147. Several weeks after his father's death Callum finds himself sitting in a diner eating chips, when his brother, Jude, suddenly turns up. He asked if Jude had heard about the death of their father.

As they sit Jude says: “Yeah, and now it’s payback time. I heard that you were booted out of Heathcroft” (Blackman, 2015, p. 146). Callum answers that he was not booted, he left himself. When he was asked what he does now, he answers that he eats chips. Jude then asks him if he would like to do something more worthwhile. Callum is interested and asks what they should tell their mother. Jude says: “Nothing! Where we’re going, she can’t follow” (Blackman, 2015, p. 146). When Jude is asked where they were going, he says: “We both know where. Only question is are you in or out?” (Blackman, 2015, p. 146). The next two panels show Callum’s face, as he is hesitant at first, but when pressed he says he is in. He is told by Jude to go home, pack and say farewell to his mother. He is told that he will not see her or anyone else and welcomes him to the Lifeboat Party (Blackman, 2015, p. 147).

Consequently, Callum, having left school, has no choice but to join the Liberation Militia. As a nought, he has no prospects in a society that does not recognise his rights as a free and capable individual. This rejection and nonrecognition from society take away his potential. He has nowhere to turn and joining the Liberation Militia was already modelled to him by both his father and his older brother. Undoubtedly, Callum perceives himself as similar to his brother Jude in many ways, so it is only natural that he finally joins The Liberation Militia, even if he does have doubts. His attempt to run away with Sephy is indeed an attempt to lead a normal life. However, when he misses the opportunity, Callum probably feels abandoned by his only friend, Sephy, and has no other choice but to join the terrorist group. Callum may see it as his only opportunity to make a change in a situation that is unbearable. He has lost his sister, as well as his father due to the structures of current society. As a nought, he has no other possibilities of making a difference. Importantly, he understands that changes must be made if he wishes to live a normal life as a nought. This is a clear example of how societies that reject certain groups of people because of their race, religion or beliefs create their own enemies. By excluding individuals from the possibilities of participation in society, they create a group that has experienced nonrecognition from society, possibly during decades. These people rebel and struggle for recognition, sometimes including use of violence in their tactics, as their anger due to nonrecognition and desire for revenge may be leading their rebellion.

3.3.2 Sephy

The next self-efficacy example in the graphic novel is how Sephy is socially influenced by her mother's drinking. After a bombing incident at the mall, where Callum's father and brother were involved, Callum manages to get Sephy to safety at the last minute. Sephy is clearly affected and shaken by the incident. As a result, she stays up after her mother goes to bed, she pulls out her mother's wine bottle from the fridge and pores herself a drink (Blackman, 2015, p. 86). This is the first time she drinks, but this develops into a habit. A few days later she meets Callum on the beach, and she is clearly drunk. When she sees Callum, she walks towards him saying: "Hey, you came! Hi Callum, old friend! Old buddy! Old pal! How are you on this glorious day?" (Blackman, 2015, p. 91). In the next panel she has her arms around him, as she says: "Isn't it a beautiful Sunday? The birds are singing. Not here but somewhere, don't you think?" (Blackman, 2015, p. 91). Callum answers: "You're drunk!" (Blackman, 2015, p. 91). She answers: "No, I'm not! I've just had one class of cider. Or maybe four? But not wine, no. I don't want mother to get suspicious" (Blackman, 2015, p. 91). Callum is enraged by this, he grabs Sephy by the shoulders and exclaims: "How could you be so stupid? At least your mother had a reason to start drinking, what's your excuse? Daddy's allowance not big enough? Mummy doesn't love you enough? Don't like this! Don't want that!" (Blackman, 2015, p. 91). Sephy is angered by Callum's words. She answers: "Don't you judge me! How dare you!" (Blackman, 2015, p. 92). Callum tells her: "If you act like a moron. Don't bleat when people treat you that way." (Blackman, 2015). Sephy protests: "I'm not a moron!" (Blackman, 2015, p. 92). Callum does not stop there. He continues to tear her down by saying: "No, you are worse. You're a drunk. A lush. An alcy" (Blackman, 2015, p. 92). Sephy is upset by this, turning away from him, and saying: "Don't say that. You don't know anything!" (Blackman, 2015, p. 92). Callum then asks her: "So tell me. What are your reasons for falling into a bottle?" (Blackman, 2015, p. 92). Sephy then breaks down and tells him: "I'm tired, ok! I'm tired of my mother and father, my sister and yes, you too! I'm tired of the way you all make me feel!" (Blackman, 2015, p. 92). The third panel on the page shows Sephy's face, angry and tired, as she explains: "Be a good girl, study at school, study at university, get a good job, marry a good man, live a good life and they all lived happily ever after! The whole thing makes me puke! Is that all there is? I want something more in my life" (Blackman, 2015, p. 92). In the last panel on the page Callum asks her: "And you'll find it in a wine bottle?" (Blackman, 2015, p. 92). Sephy then says: "I don't know where else to look" (Blackman, 2015, p. 92).

Obviously, Sephy has received social modelling from her mother and this leads her to use the same strategies when dealing with her own painful reality. Her mother drinks to handle her problems therefore Sephy develops the same strategy over time and begins to drink as well. Bandura claims that the perceived similarity of social models is crucial in social modelling. The greater the perceived similarity, the greater the persuasion of the model. This also shows that Sephy identifies more with her mother than she may be aware of. Like her mother, she wants to get away from her reality because it is too tough to deal with. Callum of course, does not see that she is struggling because from his point of view, she has all odds in her favour. She is accepted and valued by society, she has all the money and material things she needs, she has all the possibilities in the world. Callum has no way of understanding why she feels so unhappy and desperate, because his situation is not only different, but the complete opposite. He is not accepted by society, has no material wealth, no opportunities, or possibilities. Even though he may be able to understand and empathise with Sephy, he might still feel that if he had the privilege that she experiences, he would have no problems because his challenges are very different from Sephy's. This is a common assumption, yet it is seldom correct.

3.4 Recognition, Nonrecognition and Identity

In this section I will address the aspects of the graphic novel that deal with how the main characters Callum and Sephy both experience nonrecognition and recognition from people around them. They both experience nonrecognition at school and from society in general, and they both experience recognition from each other.

3.4.1 Callum

The first example of nonrecognition for Cullum occurs during the first day of school, on pages 16-18. Cullum and the other nought students are met by a crowd outside of the school. The crowd shouts protests like "Blanskers out" (Blackman, 2015, p. 16) and "No Blanskers in our school" (Blackman, 2015, p. 18), as the nought students are on their way into the school. The crowd is held in check by armed men, but their protest is quite ferocious. One of the nought

girls is hit on head with a rock thrown by the crowd and Callum tries to help her. Sephy tries to stop the protests by turning to the headmaster for help, but her plea goes unheard. In an attempt to stop the violence, she screams: “Stop it! Stop it! You’re behaving like animals! Worse than animals-like blankers!” (Blackman, 2015, p. 18). The last panel on the page is a drawing of Callum’s face, as he looks shocked by Sephy’s outburst (Blackman, 2015, p. 18).

It is worth mentioning that this part in the graphic novel bears great resemblance to the Little Rock Nine events in 1957. The Little Rock Nine were a group of nine black students who enrolled at a formerly all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in September 1957. The national guard were called upon to prevent the nine students from entering the school. In addition, the school area was filled with white protesters that verbally harassed one of the nine students, as she was separated from the rest of the group. Eventually, the president sent a division from The United States Army to escort the students to school every day. Ernest Green, one of the nine students, notes that this incident was a “rejection he had never experienced before” (Associated Press, 2017, 0:53). Similar to the feeling of rejection and nonrecognition for Ernst Green, for Callum, the protest outside of school was clear racial assault and must have felt like the ultimate rejection and nonrecognition. It is made abundantly clear by all accepted and respectable members of society, the Crosses, that he and his “kind” are not welcome at the school. They are not accepted, not wanted, and not recognised as equal members of society. Not only is their sense of identity rejected, one of the students is even subjected to physical violence. Despite the nonrecognition Callum experiences from strangers, Sephy’s outburst seems to be the worst in terms of nonrecognition for Callum.

Callum and Sephy meet later, on the beach. The beach is a place where they are always alone, and they can be themselves and reassure each other. Here, Sephy attempts to explain herself: “It’s...it’s just a word, Callum. Sticks and stones...that’s all” (Blackman, 2015, p. 19). Callum tells her: “Sephy, if you’d slapped me or punched me, sooner or later it’d stop hurting-but I’ll never forget what you called me” (Blackman, 2015, p. 19). This is a prominent example of how racial assault, no matter how they are intended clearly damage the individual. Although Callum knows that Sephy might not have meant to hurt him by using the word “blankers”, he is extremely hurt by her comment. For him, this racial microinsult might be worse than the actual racial assaults he experienced during the protest because Sephy is someone he loves. This part shows that what we choose to say to others, the words we use in doing so matter, even if they are only words. Use of racial comments or name-calling, even if they are not used with the intention to hurt or disrespect, have an impact on people. Blackman and her

interviewer talk about how people make racial jokes and assume that because it is meant as a joke, it is assumed that it is not hurtful to the people on the receiving end. This is, of course, not the case (Channel 4 News, 2019, 36:10). In fact, this is racial microaggression. This section serves as a perfect example that could be used to discuss language and rhetoric employed in conversation. Callum tries to protect Sephy by telling her that they should not see each other at school. Sephy, however, does not take his advice.

The final example of recognition for Callum in the graphic novel accrues at the end of the novel, on pages 197 to 200. During his imprisonment, Callum befriends a Cross guard named Jack. This guard treats him with respect, and he engages in discussions with Callum. The two relate to one another as two human being, regardless of their race. During their discussion about society, Jack says that people are people, and being imperfect, people will always find a way to mess things up. It is easy to imagine that if society was ruled by other people that things would be better, but this is merely an illusion as there are no perfect people and therefore no perfect society. Callum appreciates their relationship and communicates to Jack that he has treated Callum better than any nought could. Jack, in turn, asks Callum to forgive him as he places the noose around his neck. Callum says that there is nothing to forgive as he has done nothing wrong. The guard replies that Callum has done nothing wrong either (Blackman, 2015, pp. 197-200).

Jack is able to see Callum's humanity and understand his circumstances, despite their racial differences. He understands and accepts Callum as a human being, and he able to see that he is a victim of a racist society. By accepting Callum as he is and his perceiving circumstances, he offers Callum recognition. Callum offers Jack mutual recognition and acceptance as well. Callum is clearly aware of how Jack is also a victim of society. Due to the racial issues in society, Jack is made to carry the burden of assisting in the excision of another human being, the excision of someone he respects and regards as a friend. They are both in a helpless situation and they are both put in that situation because of the racial issues in society.

3.4.2 Sephy

Even though Sephy is a Cross, she still experiences nonrecognition from others, because of her open mindedness towards noughts. This begins on page 25, where Sephy sits down with Callum and other noughts. She sits down by Callum and the other nought students and strikes

up a conversation with the girl that was hit on the head during the protest, asking her about her wound. One of the teachers asks her harshly: “Persehone Hadley! What do you think you are doing?” (Blackman, 2015, p. 26). Sephy answers that she is having lunch. The teacher continues: “Don’t be facetious! Get back to your own table now!” (Blackman, 2015, p. 26). Sephy tries to protest, but the teacher drags her away physically and escorts her to another table, leaving her speechless and shocked (Blackman, 2015, p. 26). Later, on pages 27 to 29, Sephy is confronted by three Cross girls in the bathroom. They threaten her and reveal their prejudice towards noughts. When Sephy disagrees with them, they call her blanker lover and beat her up (Blackman, 2015, pp. 27-29).

Naturally, Sephy is forbidden to interact with nought students, due to the racial discrimination at school. Since she chooses to ignore the fact that the noughts are discriminated and chooses not to participate in this practice, she experiences harassment and violence. It is worth mentioning that the white students who befriended the black students in Little Rock Central Highschool in 1954 suffered harassment and humiliation as well. One of the white students that choose to share her book with a black student, was followed home by a mob of students that she claims “threw things at me, spat on me and called me names. And I got a lot of hate calls and hate mail” (OWN, 2020,7:36). The experiences Sephy undergoes are not only experiences of nonrecognition or humiliation, in fact, these are experiences of physical abuse. She is beaten up so severely that she is forced to stay home from school for a week to tend to her wounds. The form of abuse Blackman chooses to employ here is extreme and severe. In fact, this is a conscious choice, since hate crimes often involve similar forms of abuse. Nonetheless, these experiences do not affect Sephy or her point of view. One interesting aspect in this part of the novel is the role of the media. The girls that attacked Sephy mention that the media claims that all noughts are members of the Liberation Army, thus their prejudice against noughts is created by the media, and the girls claim that the media does not lie. The media occupies an important role in the graphic novel as well as many societies in the world today.

Sephy experiences nonrecognition and rejection again on pages 191 to 193, but this time from her own father. After the kidnaping, her parents want her to abort the pregnancy because they believe that Callum raped her. When Sephy admits that she had consensual intercourse with Callum, her father slaps her and screams: “You are no longer my daughter. You are a blanker’s slut. You will go to the clinic and you will have an abortion. I will not allow you to embarrass me any further. D’you hear me?” (Blackman, 2015, p. 192). Regardless of the insults, threats, and blackmail attempts from her father, Sephy does not change her mind. This incident makes

it clear that Sephy's parents do not give Sephy any recognition for her decisions or her wishes. On the contrary, her father does everything he can to prevent her from keeping the baby. The nonrecognition, threats and the blackmail attempt only serve to make her even more resolved in keeping the child. This is consistent with Honneth's theory, where he states that people that experience nonrecognition, they rebel against it. In fact, greater the nonrecognition, the greater the resolve for rebellion against the nonrecognition she experiences. She remains strong and does what she believes is right.

The first example of recognition for Sephy in the graphic novel occurs after Lynette's funeral, on pages 68 and 69. Sephy shows up at the funeral to pay her respects, but she was told to leave because she is a Cross. Later Callum and Sephy meet on the beach, and Sephy tells Callum that she did not mean any harm by showing up at the funeral, even though it was not the best idea she ever had. Sephy then asks him to hold her and he does. The two last panels on the page show how Callum comforts Sephy after this experience of nonrecognition. The last panel on that part shows the couple standing by the edge of the water, surrounded by rock (Blackman, 2015, pp. 63-69). Sephy and Callum meet on the beach most of the time to talk and comfort each other. The beach is a place where they can be alone, without the judgement and scrutiny of others. It is the only place where they can really be themselves and show each other that they care about each other in a society where their friendship and love toward each other is unacceptable. The last panel on page 69 is a splash page with Callum and Sephy hugging on the beach, surrounded by rocks and the vast sky is filled with clouds above them. The beach itself is a tranquil place where two very different elements, water, and land, come together. This is an image of the couple, Callum and Sephy. They come from different backgrounds and families, they are not equal in society and their perceived potential is differs as well. Sephy is a highly valued member of society, while Callum is not because of his race, thus his potential as a person is not valued in society.

3.5 Mindsets

In this section I discuss how Callum changes his mindset from wanting to become someone who earns money and is respected in a society that does not recognise him as valuable, to becoming someone who wants to make changes in society at any cost.

3.5.1 Callum

At the beginning of the novel, on pages 38 to 40, when asked by his sister, Lynny, how he can keep going, Callum answers that he has a goal in life. His goal is to become someone and make a difference. Lynny then asks him: “What if you could only have one choice, which one means more to you?” (Blackman, 2015, p. 39). He then answers: “I suppose...being someone. Having a large house, money in the bank and being respected” (Blackman, 2015, p. 39). His sister says that she would have put money on him choosing to make a difference instead. But he says that there is no point in making a difference if one has nothing to show for it (Blackman, 2015, p. 39).

This is when Callum is still attending school at the time and he believes that he has a future that is different from the future that unfolds later in his life. His priority is to become someone, make money and earn respect in society. After his sister’s death, his mindset changes. Lynette commits suicide because she cannot bear to live in a society where she will never be good enough, just because she is a nought. Callum knows that this is unfortunately the reality for all noughts, and Lynette’s death makes him realize that he will never be able to lead a satisfying life if there are no equal rights for both races. Material possessions cannot compensate for value, equal rights, and recognition. He must believe that things must and can change for the better. When Callum finds out that his father and Jude are part of the Liberation Militia, he wants to join them to make a difference. When his father is arrested and put on trial, he tries to attend school. However, he is suspended because of his father’s trial, and as a result he quits school.

The confusion and instability Callum experiences do not lead him to give up on his goal. This could be considered an extremely trying time, a time when he desperately needs the stability that attendance at school is able to provide. his father’s death, he joins the Liberation Militia in hope of making a difference. If he could have stayed in school, he might have avoided joining the Liberation Militia and his future could have taken a different direction. Yet, he is deprived of that stability and consistency because of his father’s trial and partly because of his race. This, naturally, feels unfair and Callum becomes angrier and even more determined to change the situation. After this experience, his mindset changes from trying to be somebody that earns money and is respected to becoming someone who wants to change society at all

cost. He has lost two family members because of structures in society, and he is determined to make a change and his anger and determination lead him to the Liberation Militia and acts of terrorism. This decision eventually costs him his life.

3.6 Resilience

In this section I present how resilience is shown in *Noughts and Crosses*. I compare the experiences of Callum and Sephy to show how resilience or lack thereof is described in the graphic novel.

3.6.1 Sephy and Callum

The only example of resilience that I found in the graphic novel is in connection with Sephy. Sephy, being a Cross, is accepted in society. Not only that, but she is the daughter of a well-known and powerful politician. She has the possibility to do what she wants. She wants to get away from her childhood home and most of all, get away from her mother because she models inappropriate coping strategies. She expresses the desire to go away to boarding school, and after some convincing, she manages to persuade her mother and father to let her go to a boarding school in Chivers. She writes a letter to Callum, asking him to run away with her, yet her mind is made up. When Callum fails to show up, Sephy leaves without him. When she returns two years later, she is transformed. Firstly, she has stopped drinking to deal with the discomfort and pain she experiences. She has also joined a Pro-Nought dissident group in Chivers, and her goal is to change society. She says that the old guard, meaning her father and all people that still believed that noughts are inferior and should remain in service to Crosses, must go. The new generation, like herself and her sister, should be better than that. She has a clear goals for her life, to become a lawyer in order to make these changes that she perceives as necessary (Blackman, 2015, pp. 155-156).

Giving up drinking shows that Sephy manages to progress from the negative end of the resilience scale over to the positive end. In comparison to Callum, Sephy has the possibility of education in a boarding school as well as the option to make changes in society in a non-violent manner. This is a healthier and more resilient approach because violent resistance

movements are considered as criminal activity, while non-violent resistance is acceptable in most societies. Since Sephy has the privilege of being accepted in society, it is easier for her to overcome her dependence on alcohol, as well as fight for change in a peaceful manner. In contrast, Callum was deprived of his opportunity for education, he experiences lack of support and acceptance from society, as well as lack of choice and possibility. This makes it more challenging for Callum to demonstrate the same ability for resilience. As Callum was angered and determined to make a change, he forfeited the option to accept the suspension issued by the school and attempt to resume his studies later. If this proved impossible, he could have attempted to acquire work and simply try to make the best of a bad situation. In this case it might not have been possible for him, as a nought, to make a difference in society in a healthy and resilient manner, but he could have accepted this and attempted to do the best he could in his situation. Obviously, the resilient options that are available to Callum are less dramatic and therefore maybe less suited for an interesting graphic novel. Although Callum's own reaction to his circumstances and involvement in the Liberation Militia is understandable, avoiding crime and terrorism would have been a healthier and more resilient approach.

3.7 Didactic potential

How can *Noughts and Crosses* be used as a source of insight into life skills? In terms of language and comprehension, it is possible to conclude that the graphic novel is suited for both competent and reluctant readers. The combination of visual and verbal modalities allows the students to see the whole situation, including facial expressions and body language. Although the graphic is in black and white, it is expressive and clear. The action of the characters drives the story forward. The absence of narrative text and thought bubbles bases the graphic novel on the action of the characters, and there is no focus on their inner reality.

Before initiation work with any graphic novel in the classroom, it is necessary to familiarize the students with the vocabulary they need to be able to discuss and describe the visual elements in the graphic novel. Using the resources available on Read Write Think called *Pictures Tell the Story: Improving Comprehension with Persepolis* by Janet M. Ankiel. I would use the *Graphic Novel/Comic Terms and Concepts* sheet to teach and discuss the terms used when working with graphic novels. Going through all these terms and showing examples

of what the terms mean would be sufficient to familiarise the students with the vocabulary they need to be able to talk about and work with any graphic novel.

Nought and Crosses contains several examples of self-efficacy and nonrecognition. The novel could be employed in the discussion of how our immediate family, in addition to other factors, and their actions can affect our behaviour as well as important decisions we make. In both Sephy's and Cullum's case, it is possible to discuss how social persuasion from their immediate family affects the choices they make and thus, it affects their future. In addition, it is a graphic novel that can provide insight into how racism, exclusion from society, and the absence of equal rights can affect individuals. As a result, groups that are willing to employ violence in their struggle for recognition are created. The novel could also be used in the discussion of how outer experiences can alter our mindsets, and how our beliefs, in turn, affect our actions. Consequently, the novel can also show how being a valued member of society creates possibilities and how exclusion from it creates limitations, also in terms of resilience. Students can be asked to think of people or situations that may have affected their behaviour or school performance in a positive or negative direction. They might be asked to describe these situations, write how they felt and why they acted the way they did. This activity would aid the students with increasing awareness around "the ability to understand and influence factors that are important for mastering one's own life" (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020)

Another aspect that makes this graphic novel interesting and highly relevant in the English classroom, is the fact that it could be employed as an access point into various historical events. The students could be asked to investigate the Stephen Lawrence case, since this specific case was the inspiration for the novel. Parallels could be drawn to the Civil Rights Movements and the Black Lives Matter movement in English speaking countries. Students could investigate and present the events that took place in Little Rock in 1954, the case of Ruby Bridges, Josephine Baker or Rosa Parks. Students could also investigate and present events that led up to the Black Lives Matter Movement, like the cases of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, and George Floyd. Students could be asked to use relevant and dependable sources as they research these significant events. This task would address the core elements that state "pupils shall employ suitable strategies to communicate, both orally and in writing, in different situations and by using different types of media and sources", as well as the core elements that state that "by reflecting on, interpreting and critically assessing different types of texts in

English, the pupils shall acquire language and knowledge of culture and society” (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020)

In addition, the novel is ideal in the discussion of what constitutes treason and in learning about capital punishment. Through documentaries, students could learn about the death penalty and how it is practiced in certain states in the US and campaigns to abolish it. The students could be engaged in writing an appeal to abolish the death penalty in US. I would focus on the US because it is an English speaking and democratic country where both racism and capital punishment are still relevant issues. This task addresses the core elements that are related to the interdisciplinary topic of democracy and citizenship, where the curriculum states that:

Democracy and citizenship as an interdisciplinary topic in school shall give the pupils knowledge about the basic tenets of democracy and its values and rules and prepare them for participating in democratic processes. The teaching and training shall give the pupils an understanding of the relationship between democracy and key human rights, such as freedom of speech, the right to vote and freedom of association (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

Through work on this task, the students can become aware of the rights everyone possesses and the importance of participation in society.

The example of Callum speaking up in history class could serve as an opportunity to discuss who writes history in our society. Do all people get to influence the writing of history? What version of history are we subjected to? What is excluded from the history that we have access to? Malorie Blackman explains in her interview that she was told that there were no black scientists that contributed to society. Of course, she knew that this statement could not be correct (Channel 4 News, 2019, 2:57). The film *Hidden Figures* can be employed to shed light on some of the great black scientist that are not well known for their contributions to science. The film presents the story of three black NASA employees that made significant contributions to space research (Melfi, 2016). Their stories are quite interesting and explore black women who made contributions to science at a time where segregation in the US was common. Their biographies are also available for further exploration on the webpage from 2019 called *NASA From Hidden to Modern Figures*.

The graphic novel can be used to discuss the role of media and how it affects people's perceptions of certain events. This is an interesting aspect that could be discussed, because teenagers are frequent users of social media. What kind of news are they subjected to on social media? Is it reliable? It could be used to engage a discussion about what sources are objective and what sources could be considered as unreliable. Students can be asked to compare news sources and to learn what media outlets are reliable, and how to determine their reliability. The core elements in the curriculum state that "students should employ different communication strategies by using different sources and media" (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

The graphic novel could be employed to address what kind of rhetoric is used in conversation. It is especially important to understand that negative comments regarding race, gender, ethnicity, culture, or religion have an impact on the receiver, regardless of the intentions of the sender. Students can reflect on whether they have experienced situations where they have heard, or maybe used certain words or even insults without the awareness of the receiver and how they might feel. Students may have experienced being subjected to certain language that may have hurt their feelings and writing about these situations and their feelings about them might aid them in dealing with the experiences in a healthy manner. The aim is to make students aware of the fact that rhetoric they choose to employ or the rhetoric they experience is important and should be tackled. During this task, the core curriculum element addressed is "the ability to draw boundaries, respect other people's boundaries and the ability to deal with thoughts, feelings and relationships" (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

4 *Persepolis*

In this section I will present and analyse the graphic novel *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi. Firstly, I include a brief introduction of the author and the graphic novel, then a short description of the plot. Finally, I analyse and discuss the parts of the graphic novel that I consider relevant in association with life skills. I discuss how self-efficacy, recognition, nonrecognition, and identity affect the main character and influence important decisions in her life. In this section, I refer to the author as Satrapi and the character as Marji.

4.1 About the Author and the Graphic Novel

Satrapi was born in 1969 in Rasht, Iran, as the only child of Westernized parents. She grew up in Teheran and attended the Lycée Français. Her parents decided to send her to Austria to attend school, as their Western way of life drew the attention of the authorities in Iran. She returned to Iran at the age of 19, where she studied art and got married. The marriage ended and she moved to France. Satrapi currently lives in Paris and writes in French.

The graphic novels *Persepolis 1* and *2* were published in 2000 and 2001 in France. When translated to English they were combined as *Persepolis, The Story of a Childhood*. *Persepolis 3* and *Persepolis 4* were published in France in 2002 and 2003, and later were translated together into English as *Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return* in 2004. *Persepolis* is an account of Marjane Satrapi's own childhood in Iran, in which she endured the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War (Movieweb, 2010). The graphic novel was then adapted as a film simply called *Persepolis* in 2007. The film was nominated for an Academy Award for best animated feature (Luebering, 2021). Hilary Chute states that the graphic novel has been translated into many languages; it has not been translated into Farsi because of the political situation in Iran. *Persepolis* came to life, as the author herself explains, partly because of her discovery of Spiegelman's *Maus* and the support of Davis B, of the autobiographical *Epileptic* (Chute, 2008).

Amy Malek (2006) writes that Satrapi's *Persepolis The Story of a Childhood, and Persepolis 2 The Story of a Return* "can be regarded as unique forms of exile cultural production, in that they blend the genres of memoir and graphic novel (alternately referred to as graphic memoir,

graphic biography, graphic book, comic book, picture novella, etc.)” (Malek, 2006, p. 353). The graphic novel is based on Satrapi’s childhood experiences, and it is considered a graphic memoir. Satrapi herself says that it is not a biography, as elements of fiction are always included when a story is told. She states that even documentaries are partly fictional because “as soon as you make a story, you must have to have some fiction. Otherwise it doesn’t work” (Movieweb, 2010, 0:10). Malek also states that the graphic novel:

presents the story of a young girl growing up in a tumultuous and often misunderstood period of Iranian history. Satrapi’s illustrations perform a complementary function to her narrative: her words provide the captivating story, while her drawings provide resonance for Iranian and non-Iranian readers alike, the combination of which accomplishes Satrapi’s stated (and unstated) goals (Malek, 2006, p. 354).

Chute also writes that the style Satrapi uses in the novel is simple black and white. Satrapi’s technique also makes a specific reference to ancient Persian miniatures, friezes, and murals. By avoiding colour, Satrapi emphasises the attention to the violence and horror of history. Satrapi notes that today, “violence today has become something normal, so banal- that is to say that everybody thinks it’s normal. But it’s not normal. To draw it and put it in colour – the colour of flesh and the red of the blood, and so forth-reduces it by making it realistic” (Chute, 2008, p. 99).

In addition, Nima Naghibi and Andrew O’Malley (2005) claim that the illustrations in the graphic novel are drawn in style called “cartooning” by Scott McCloud. They also claim that there are two effects that arise from this style. The first effect enables a focus on specific details, and the second is “the universality of cartoon imagery. The more cartoony a face is, for instance, the more people it could be said to describe” (Naghibi & O’Malley, 2005, p. 228). Cartooning is the simplification of images and characters. This makes it possible to see yourself in the images in the drawings. Although she has been critiqued for lack of detail as a graphic artist, Satrapi’s style is deliberate and aims to make the other as familiar as possible. Her aim is that the reader sees herself in Marji , “to see the self in the other, to erase all differences in gesture of “cultural understanding” (Naghibi & O’Malley, 2005, p. 228) It is clear that Satrapi’s intentions is that the readers sees themselves in the main character of the story and identify with Marji and her experiences. This is a contrast to *Noughts and Crosses*, where the drawings are very detailed and sophisticated in comparison.

4.2 Synopsis

The graphic novel is a four-volume text that recounts approximately sixteen years of Satrapi's life between the ages of ten and twenty-six. The reader follows Marji's experiences growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution of 1978 and the Iran – Iraq War. In *Persepolis The Story of a Return* the main character, Marji, is sent to Austria in 1984 by her parents, as they fear for her safety in the country because of increasing attention from the Islamic authorities. She attends secondary schooling in Vienna, Austria where she stays for four years. Here she experiences life in the West and tries to assimilate into a new culture. Later, she returns to Iran. At first, she experiences a great separation between herself and others, which leads her to feel as if she has lost her identity and she enters a severe depression. After a failed suicide attempt, she eventually begins her studies in graphic arts, gets married and lives in Iran for a while, before divorcing her husband and leaving the country in 1994 to go live in France.

Persepolis, The Story of a Childhood is a story about a girl growing up in political turmoil and surrounded by violence and war. This part of the novel can be used to provide background information and knowledge of history of Iran, while also providing additional information about the environment where the main character grows up. This might aid the reader in understanding why the main character acts and reacts a certain way in the graphic novel. This background information is necessary for the reader, as it is a part of history that is not especially familiar to most of them. *Persepolis, The Story of a Return* deals with the struggles of a teenage girl living far away from her parents, dealing with the challenges of living alone in a strange country and culture. I have chosen to focus on this part of the graphic novel, as it deals with several of the topics that I want to address. In addition, Marji, the main character, is a young adult in this part of the novel. This might make it easier and better suited for students in VG 1, as they might be able to identify with the main character more easily than with Marji as a child.

4.3 Self-efficacy

In this section I will focus on the sections of the graphic novel that express something about the main characters perceived self-efficacy. I will discuss how Marji's perceived self-efficacy

in academia and arts leads to the development of personal relationships, as well as how her parents and close friends have impacted her perceived self-efficacy.

In *Persepolis, The Story of a Return* on pages 161 to 163 the reader understands that Marji is starting a new life living by herself in a boarding house run by nuns. This is a complete change from her previous life with her parents and she is now expected to take care of herself completely. In two of the last panels on page 161, the readers can see Marji sitting on her bed. The text box states: “Now I had a real independent adult life. I was going to feed myself, do my own laundry” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 161). The next panel shows Marji heading out to the grocery store, with a smile on her face. The narration in the text box states: “I headed out to the supermarket to buy groceries like a woman” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 161). This makes it clear to the reader that Marji is entering a new phase of life where she is expected to act and be an adult. The graphic representations and the narration invite the interpretation that she is excited about this prospect, and she clearly believes that she can handle the challenge. It is possible to conclude that her perceived self-efficacy in this area is quite high. She believes and expects herself to manage the situation. She does acquire mastery experiences in this area of her life right away. It seems to be more of a challenge to make connections with other people. I will address this issue in the next section, since friendships and personal relationships are important in the context of recognition, nonrecognition and identity.

Marji does acquire a group of friends with time. The first panel shows on page 175 her friends are talking about going on holidays. Holidays are a very lonely time for Marjane. In the third panel on the page in the text box: “For me, not going to school was synonymous with solitude, especially now that Lucia was spending all of her time with her boyfriend, Klaus” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 175). Momo, her gay, punk friend, convinces her that she should take advantage of that time to cultivate herself and read Bakunin. Marjane is persuaded by his advice because she feels like an outsider and has a strong need to assimilate. In the eighth panel on page 175 the text box states: “This cretin Momo wasn’t all together wrong. I needed to fit in and for that I needed to educate myself” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 175). Here, it could be stated that the influence of her friends persuades her to try to fit in by reading the literature that her friends are interested in. The first panel on page 176 shows a drawing of Bakunin, a serious man with long, dark, curly hair and a full beard. The first text box on the top of the panel explains: “So they went off skiing and I set myself to reading. I started with Bakunin. I learned that he was excluded from the first international conference of communist co-operators and that he rejected all authority, especially that of the state” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 176). The second text boxes on the

bottom of the panel states: “ Aside from that, I don’t understand much of his philosophy, as surely Momo didn’t either” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 176). As mentioned in chapter 2, Bandura claims that it is easier to undermine efficacy beliefs than to install them, especially if the boosts of efficacy are unrealistic. Although Momo convinced her to read Bakunin, it seems that reading Bakunin proved to be a bit too challenging for Marjane.

On pages 163 to 169, the reader can clearly recognize that Marjane struggles making friends at first, but the fact that she possesses mathematical and artistic skills help her to establish a few friendships. The fact that she receives a 19,5 out of 20 on a math test and her drawing of caricatures draws some of the students in her class, and thus leads her to acquire a group of friends (Satrapi, 2008, p. 167). Her perceived self-efficacy in math and arts help her attract a group of friends. According to Bandura, the most effective source of creating a strong feeling of self-efficacy is through mastery experiences. Marji is efficacious in mathematics and arts, and this helps her making connections with other people and developing friendships. I will come back to the subject of friendship in the next section.

Again, on pages 327-328 it is possible to observe another situation where Marji is persuaded by her father to make changes in her life for the better. She is back in Iran, studying graphic arts and married at the time, yet she spends most of her time in front of the television. When her father confronts her with this, she replies by taking offence and saying that she is an adult. Her father says: “Anyone can be twenty-two and be married. That does not require an exceptional intellectual effort!! You would be better off thinking about getting your diploma. It’s in less than a year” (Satrapi, 2008, pp. 327-328). He is clearly trying to motivate her through persuasion to do something more important than sit in front of the television all day. He knows that she is wasting her potential and her time. She reacts with hostility at first, but after reflecting upon the matter decides that her father is right. The fifth panel on page 329 reflects that changing her life is not something that she did all by herself. The panel shows a drawing of Marji standing up straight, with a serious expression on her face. She looks quite sophisticated dressed in black. The contrast of the black outfit can be interpreted as her regaining her identity. In the text box she says: “Persuaded by my parents, encouraged by Dr. M and his friends, and also a little thanks to myself, I changed my life” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 329). The next panel shows a drawing of her sitting with her legs crossed holding a cigarette and reading the newspaper. In the text box she states: “Once again, I arrived to my usual conclusion: one must educate oneself” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 329). In both these panels, Marji is dressed in black and that provides quite a contrast against the white background. From these

statements it is possible to conclude that almost any changes made in Marji's life is a result of the people around her that push her and encourage her towards improvement. This is consistent with Banduras theory, that it is highly likely that all people are affected by the achievements of the models that surround them.

4.4 Recognition, nonrecognition and identity

In this section I will focus on the aspects of recognition, nonrecognition and identity. I will discuss how experiences of recognition and nonrecognition at both the individual and societal level affect Maji's behaviour.

An example of an experience where Marji feels that she receives recognition, love and support is on pages 202 to 208. Marji's mother comes to visit her in Vienna. She stays for 27 days. Mother and daughter talk and spend quality time together. During this time her mother tells her that she must try to be the best, no matter what she does, no matter what she decides to become, she must do her best. Marji feels like she can finally be herself and can talk to someone without explaining her culture. In the last caption on page 208 there is a drawing of Marji with a big backpack on her back. The in the text boxes she explains: "My mother left. I'm sure that she understood the misery of my isolation even if she kept a straight face and gave nothing away. She left me with a bag of affection that sustained me for months" (Satrapi, 2008, p. 208). The backpack on Marji's back is clearly a symbol for the recognition, love, and affection that she received from her mother. Since she has not been shown much recognition from others, this was much needed and longed for. This gives her some strength to go on. This is an example of Marji's mother is the nurturing primary caregiver that Honneth emphasizes in his theory.

There are two clear examples of Marji struggling to make connections with others. The first example of this is on pages 163 to 165. Marji is acquainted with her roommate and communication is challenging because Marji does not speak German and Lucia, her roommate, does not speak French. The sixth panel on page 163 is a drawing of both girls standing beside one another, as there are two exclamation marks drawn over both their heads. These exclamation marks are nether motion lines or sound effects, yet they express something about how the girls feel in the situation. When reading the gutter, it is clear the girls do not

understand each other, and they feel a certain awkwardness being together because of the lack of communication. The last panel on page 163 shows both girls just sitting on their beds, smiling to each other. The beds are placed far apart and there are two crosses on the walls above their beds (Satrapi, 2008, p. 163). The panel's dimension makes it look as if the two girls are physically far apart from each other, as if they are sitting on two different islands in the middle of the ocean. The graphic representations invite the interpretation that the girls are not able to connect because of lack of communication.

On page 164 some communication between the two girls does take place and Lucia invites Marji to watch television in the tv-room. On page 165 the first panel, as the girls entering the tv-room, Marji has a big smile on her face and she says "Hallo!" to everyone but receives no answer. The next panel show a drawing of television with sound effects drawn above it. The drawing also shows the back of the heads of the people in the tv-room, with Marji's head turned to the side at the very front of the panel, her expression can be interpreted as bewildered. The narration in the text box states: "Everyone was watching a movie. They seemed to be enjoying themselves. Except me! I was hearing "achs" and "ochs" and "michs" but nothing that I could understand" (Satrapi, 2008, p. 165).

It is suggested that Marji is the only one that does not understand what is said on the television and that makes her feel like an outsider. The next panel shows all the people in the tv-room laughing, expressed by big, smiling, open mouths as well as sound effects. Marji is at the back of the panel, not smiling, with three exclamation marks over her head. Again, the exclamation marks and reading the gutter suggests that Marji does not understand German and this results in her feeling confused, awkward, and out of place. The next panel Marji is turned toward Lucia with a question mark and an exclamation mark over her head. When reading the gutter, it is implied that Marji is looking to Lucia, trying to communicate to her, through facial expressions and body language, that she does not understand the movie and that she feels out of place. She clearly wants Lucia to understand her, but Lucia does not react at all, so in the next panel the reader can see Marji sneaking out of the room as the text box states: "I decided to leave discreetly" (Satrapi, 2008, p. 165). The last panel on the page shows Lucia watching tv and Marji saying: "Bye bye Lucia" (Satrapi, 2008, p. 165) in a speech bubble, while sneaking out of the room. The narrative voice says: "She didn't even answer me" (Satrapi, 2008, p. 165).

Communicating through body language is most likely part of Marji's culture and identity as Iranian and she clearly tries to employ this form of communication with the people she meets. It is quite common to communicate through body language in the Eastern countries, I would even claim that it is much more common than in European countries, where people are quite subtle with their body language. So, in this section of the novel, Marji is dealing with some cultural defences that are unfamiliar to her. Marji's willingness to communicate with others is clear. She says hello to everyone in the tv-room, and she tries to communicate with Lucia through other means than language, yet she is either not understood or ignored. According to Honneth, disregard and nonrecognition lead to motivation struggle to overcome the nonrecognition. Marji does struggle making connections at first, but she is motivated, and she struggles to achieve her goal of making friends.

As mentioned in the previous section, Marji's self-efficacy in math and arts helps her achieve some attention from others, including Julia, who introduces her to her friends. Page 169 is a splash page with a drawing of her friends. The drawing in the panel shows five people. Marji is in the front with her friend Julia and behind them there are three boys, one of the boys is a punk with a mohawk, Momo. One of the other boys is tall and blond with short hair, and the other one is shorter with longer dark hair. The text box in on top of the panel states: "An eccentric, a punk, two orphans and a third-worlder, we made quite a group of friends. They were really interested in my story. Especially Momo! He was fascinated by death" (Satrapi, 2008, p. 169) These friends seem also to be attracted to her because of her past experiences of war. Her friend Momo is very interested in the subject of war and death, and since Marji has some experience in the matter, she is perceived as different from the rest of the students in her class. This leads to her developing friendships with people that are older than herself (Satrapi, 2008, pp. 167-169). As explained in chapter two, personal relationships such as friendships, romantic relationships are important for the development of self-esteem, which again is important for the development of a positive identity. In Marji's case, some friendships and romantic relationships lead to a negative attitude towards her own identity, as well as low self-esteem because she experiences of nonrecognition from friends, romantic interests, and people around her in general.

It is possible to say that Marji's loneliness and need for connections makes her compromise her identity and her values as an Iranian. One example of this is on page 194, when Marjane's friends want to smoke joints. For Marjane drugs are a serious matter and she remembers her parents and their attitude to drug use, as they had expressed that her cousin had become a

“vegetable” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 194) because of drugs. For Marji, becoming a so-called “vegetable” was out of the question because she wants her parents to be proud of her. Still, she pretends to smoke joints with her friends, without inhaling the smoke. She pretends because she is lonely and in need of the few connections she has managed to make, even if it is at the cost of her abandoning her own beliefs and her identity. We see an illustration of this on page 195. The first panel shows the shadow of her parents standing to the far left in the panel, as a gigantic Marjane takes a big step, or even a jump, away from her parents. This is a clear depiction of how her identity is slipping further and further away from her original identity as Iranian. In the text boxes on page 195 she says:

The harder I tried to assimilate the more I had the feeling that I was distancing myself from my culture, betraying my parents and my origins, that I was playing a game by somebody else’s rules. Each telephone call from my parents reminded me of my cowardice and my betrayal. I was at once happy to hear their voice and ashamed to talk to them. If only they knew...if they knew that their daughter was made up like a punk, that she smoked joints to make a good impression, that she had seen men in their underwear while they were being bombed every day (Satrapi, 2008, p. 195).

The difference in size and the jump away from her parents illustrated in this panel, could be interpreted as both a cultural distance as well as the actual physical distance Marji experiences. Living in the West has had its effects on Marji, and she feels a certain amount of pressure to assimilate into society. On page 196 and 197 it becomes clear that this pressure of assimilation grows as time passes. She begins to avoid news about her country, she tries to forget anything that has to do with Iran, even if this entails forgetting her own childhood and her past. She even goes as far as trying to pretend she is French, thus trying to forget or even deny her identity completely (Satrapi, 2008, p. 197).

Despite her efforts to assimilate into society, Marji still experiences a great deal of nonrecognition from society and people around her. The first example of this is on page 179. The mother superior of the boarding house that Marjane lives in insults her and her identity as an Iranian, stating that: “It is true what they say about Iranians. They have no education” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 179). This is a clear example of a cultural microaggression, however, Marji replies to this micro assault by assaulting the mother superior in return, thus rebelling against the nonrecognition she experiences. This leads her to being thrown out of the boarding house.

Another example of the rejection and misrecognition Marji experiences is on pages 198 and 199. Marji overhears a few people criticizing her and saying quite offensive things about her appearance and personality, yet, it is the comment about her parents not caring about her that sends her into a rage. The first panel on page 199 shows a drawing of the girls that insulted her sitting in a booth at the far left of the panel. They are pressed into the corner, they look terrified, as if they are trying to get away from something or someone dangerous. On the right side of the panel there is a drawing of the profile of Marji's face. Her face is bigger than the girls on the opposite side, which indicates that her outburst was quite powerful. She clearly looks furious, and her mouth is open in a scream. The text that she screams is written in big letters in the middle of the panel: "You are going to shut up or I'll make you! I'm Iranian and proud of it!" (Satrapi, 2008, p. 199). She storms out crying but feels much better later because she feels that she has redeemed herself and her identity. She remembers the words of her grandmother. In the last caption on page 199 she is depicted smiling softly. She looks very calm and confident. The text boxes state: "For the first time in a year I felt proud. I finally understood what my grandmother meant. If I wasn't comfortable with myself, I would never be comfortable" (Satrapi, 2008, p. 199). The feeling of pride and redemption that she that she experiences might be because she is able to stand up for herself and rebel against the misrecognition that she experiences from the people around her. This is consistent with Honneth's theory of recognition, nonrecognition and identity. Emotional experiences of nonrecognition lead to rebellion in interpersonal relationships as well as in society in general. Here Marji understands that if she keeps denying her identity, she will not be able to be comfortable or at peace anywhere.

Even though Marji stands up for herself in this specific situation, she still experiences nonrecognition and loneliness most of the time. Taking into consideration the social exclusion and nonrecognition she experiences in Vienna, Marji ends up with a negative self-image and quite low self-esteem, as well as a weakened sense of identity. This is enhanced further by a relationship with a boy called Enrique. Marji thinks he is her boyfriend, but he confesses to her that he is gay. The first panel on page 218 explains her feelings about herself. It shows a drawing of half of Marji's face. She looks quite exasperated, with black rings under her eyes making her look bitter. In the text box she states:

After my romantic disappointment with Enrique I understood Julie better when she talked about the negative effects of a platonic affair on her mother. I had grasped the

necessity of a carnal relationship. But after this incident, what was I to do? I felt even more unlovable and had even less self-confidence (Satrapi, 2008, p. 218).

The rejection has a negative effect on her self-esteem, and as a result Marji struggles with her identity. She meets a boy named Jean Paul. She likes him and wants to engage in a relationship with him, but it turns out that he is only interested in her because she can help him with mathematics. After helping him, he gives her a kiss on the cheek and leaves. In the last panel on page 219 she is left feeling alone at the table in a restaurant. She sits there with a gloomy and sad expression, with her hands on her face and in the thought balloon above her she thinks: “What did you think, you stupid girl? You think that a guy like him would be interested in a girl like you??” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 219). In the text box below, she states: “What an imbecile! How could I have been so delusional?” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 219). Again, consistent with Honneth’s theory, her self-esteem is shattered, and her negative self-image is reinforced, because of experiences of rejection or nonrecognition from boys that she is romantically interested in.

Back in Iran, Marji must face the Islamic regime in the country. The Islamic regime in Iran that is portrayed in the graphic novel is based on controlling every aspect of people’s lives. As previously mentioned in the theory section of the thesis, the development of an individual’s identity and self-respect is dependent on the individual’s rights being acknowledged by society. Satrapi shows examples of this lack of acknowledgement of basic rights on page 304. The government had executed and imprisoned so many students that no one dared to demonstrate or talk politics any longer. In the third panel there is a drawing of actions that could get one arrested. In the narration in the text box Marji says: “It hinged on the little details. To our leaders the smallest thing could be a subject of subversion. Showing your wrist. A loud laugh. Having a Walkman. In short.... everything was a pretext to arrest us” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 304). She explains that the regime had understood that keeping people focused on dressing correctly and fearing the consequences of not doing so, made people ignore important issues about their freedom and rights. In the thought balloon in the last caption Marji states:

It is only natural! When we are afraid, we lose all sense of analysis and reflection. Our fear paralyzes us. Besides, fear has always been the driving force behind all dictators’ repression. Showing your hair or putting on makeup logically became acts of rebellion (Satrapi, 2008, p. 304).

Satrapi shows how people rebel against the regime by leading two different lives, a public life, and a private life. This is illustrated on page 307, where the first panel shows a group of women in veils, and the second panel shows the same women in modern, maybe even a bit provocative, outfits. The provocative outfits, I believe, are also a means of rebellion against the regime. The text boxes on the page state: “Our behaviour in public and our behaviour in private where total opposites. This disparity made us schizophrenic” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 307).

These two sets of behaviours, one in the public sphere and another in the private sphere, are forced upon the people by the controlling regime. The fact that Satrapi uses the word “schizophrenic”, invites the idea that it the results of the controlling regime is a split sense of identity, or at least the need to keep one’s true identity concealed. This must affect the well-being of the individuals in society. According to Honneth, individuals that have their rights denied and violated by society, will naturally be motivated to struggle, and do anything to restore their sense of identity and self-respect. The distinction between the two behaviours could be both a coping mechanism as well as a silent, and to some extent, private, invisible rebellion against the regime. This is also consistent with Honneth’s theory. Individuals that are excluded from or denied their basic right in society experience negative emotional experiences of disrespect and therefore rebel by any means possible. As demonstrations could cost one’s life, it was easier to rebel in minor details, like using lipstick or showing one’s wrist.

Finally, the last example of nonrecognition is related to women and their position in the Iranian Islamic regime. After visiting a friend, Marji explains in a conversation with a friend that all the laws are on men’s side in Iran. Women do not even have the right to testify in a murder case, if it is against a man. Men had the right to divorce and even if they granted that right to the woman, they still had custody of the children without question or debate. This law was justified by religion, claiming the man is the grain and the woman is the earth in which the grain grew. That justification, apparently, made it obvious that the child belongs to the father (Satrapi, 2008, p. 339). Even today, the discrimination against women in Iran is enforced through the legal and judicial sphere. According to Honneth, self-respect is obtained when a person is recognized as a legally mature person and respect is shown to the individual by treating her according to her rights. However, Honneth notes that there can be self-respect without rights. If women have no rights, it is difficult to feel that one has the possibility to participate as an equal and valid member of society. This is the main reason why Marji leaves the country and goes to live in France.

4.5 Resilience

In this section I will discuss the parts of the graphic novel that deal with resilience or lack of resilience. In this section I will address the coping strategies Marji uses to deal with challenges and negative emotions, how alienating herself from others by refusing to speak about her experiences leads to depression, and how she finally shows resilience by changing her life completely.

The disappointing romantic experience with Jean Paul makes her seek out an old friend, a girl named Ingrid. They spend their time meditating or tripping. The last panel on page 220 is a drawing of their faces while tripping. Their eyes are drawn as big spirals, their mouths are open. Marji's mouth is contorted and even the mole on her nose is drawn as a spiral. This drawing shows how tripping helps her escape her reality. The text box explains: "I didn't always like it, but I by far preferred boring myself with her to having to confront my solitude and my disappointments" (Satrapi, 2008, p. 220). The drawings of the spiralling eyes and contorted mouth show the state of drug use. The drawing depicts the actual escape from reality. The next panel, first panel on page 221 shows a drawing of Marji's face against a black background. She has black rings under her eyes, her face looks sad and distant. The text box on top of the panel states: "Little by little, I became the portrait of Dorian Gray. The more time passed, the more I was marked" (Satrapi, 2008, p. 221). The drawing shows how drug use affects both her physical appearance and her state of mind. This reference to the portrait of Dorian Gray might require an explanation. Dorian Gray is a man who sells his soul to ensure that his beauty lasts forever, and that his portrait ages instead of him. Marji apparently feels like the portrait of Dorian Gray. She is fading, aging, or changing for the worse due to drug use. She is somehow becoming less like herself as time passes. The drug use is avoidance or escape from her own life, loneliness, and disappointments. This unhealthy coping strategy leads her to a downward spiral.

She enters a new relationship with a boy named Marcus from a negative mindset about herself, and when this relationship ends, her whole life takes an extremely negative turn. She is kicked out by her landlady and she wanders the streets for a while before ending up in the hospital because of severe pneumonia. The doctor warns her about smoking and says that she would be putting herself in serious danger if she smokes one single cigarette. Before going back to

Iran, she stays at a hotel for 5 days. The sixth panel on page 246 shows a drawing of Marji at the drug store buying several cartons of cigarettes. The text box states: “Despite the doctor’s orders, I bought myself several cartons of cigarettes” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 246). The next panel on the page shows Marji sitting on her bed in the hotel room, smoking. There are several packs of cigarettes around her, as well as a plate on the bed full of cigarette butts. On the top left corner of the panel there is a drawing of the doctor pointing his finger at her, scolding her. In a speech bubble he says: “You are putting yourself in serious danger...” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 246). The last panel on the page shows a drawing of Marji’s face and hand holding a cigarette on the top left corner. Her face is serious and quite sombre. The rest of the panel contains text:

I think that I preferred to put myself in serious danger rather than confront my shame. My shame at not having become someone, the shame of not having made my parents proud after all the sacrifices they made for me. The shame of having become a mediocre nihilist (Satrapi, 2008, p. 246).

As resilience is the ability to cope, learn and thrive in the face of challenges, it is safe to assume that it is her mindset about herself, the repeated rejection and nonrecognition from others around her, low self-esteem, identity issues, as well as her longing for belonging that lead her to use drugs and cigarettes as a coping mechanism in order to deal with her negative emotions. This is clearly on the negative end of scale in terms of resilience. Marji’s parents sent her to Vienna to study and to become a responsible person, to “become somebody” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 205), like her mother told her during her visit. Marji obviously feels that she has failed her parents completely by not being able to remain in Vienna. The shame and self-loathing make her not even care about her wellbeing and her health. To disappoint her parents is a great burden, and she is ashamed.

When Marji returns to Iran, she is faced with the changes that took place in the country while she was in Vienna. The war and a fundamentalist regime endured by her family and friends make her feel alienated from everyone around her. Her father brings her up to date with what happened in Iran while she was in Vienna (Satrapi, 2008, pp. 255-259). In the last panel on page 259, the readers see a drawing of Marji laying on her bed in her room, clearly overwhelmed by her father’s report. The panel is all black, her bed is all black, with the exceptions of white stars decorating the bed. This use of the colour black makes the mood of the drawing sombre and discouraging. The text boxes in the panel narrate: “Next to my father’s distressing report, my Viennese misadventures seemed like anecdotes with no importance. So

I decided that I would never tell them anything about my Austrian life. They had suffered enough as it was” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 259). She is not able to reconnect with her friends and family, and that results in feelings of alienation. She creates, or at least enforces this alienation by deciding not to tell her parents about her experiences in Vienna. She believes that people around her are unable to understand her and her experiences. She does not share her experiences from her life Vienna with anyone, thereby creating the feeling of disconnection and alienation, which results in her falling into a deep depression.

The four first panels on page 270 include a visual representation of how it feels to fall into a depression. In the first panel she is looking forward, with a serious expression on her face. The background of the first panel is white, so Marji dressed in black is a contrast in the white panel. In the next panel her hands are on her face. Although the rest of the panel is still white, there is a black part at the top of the panel, right under the text box. It looks like a black shadow descending upon Marji. In the third panel she covers her face with her hands, as the black shadow grows larger. There is only a bit of white panel left just above Marji’s figure. Finally, in the last panel, she lays down on the white table in front of her, resigning completely, and the background of the panel is completely overtaken by the black shadow. The use of black and white colours in these panels shows the descent of depression. The blackness represents the depression that slowly descends upon Marji. When reading the gutter, it is suggested that her inner state becomes heavier and heavier as the shadow descends upon her. By not speaking of her experiences she isolates herself from others, and she denies herself the experience of receiving understanding, support and recognition from her family and friends (Satrapi, 2008, p. 270).

After seeing several doctors, she is prescribed medication because of her condition. The pills prescribed to her seem to be effective. The last panel on page 273, there is a drawing of Marji’s face with big round spiralling eyes. As mentioned in the previous section, the spiralling eyes are meant to illustrate the effect of drug use. In the text box she states: “I felt “well” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 273). The second panel on page 274, there is a drawing of Marji’s white silhouette against a black background. The silhouette is Marji herself. In the text box she says: “But as soon as the effects of the pills wore off, I once again became conscious. My calamity could be summarized in one sentence: I was nothing. I was a Westerner in Iran, an Iranian in the West. I had no identity. I didn’t even know anymore why I was living” (Satrapi, 2008, p. 274). The clear, simple, white silhouette is a visual representation of the emptiness and lack of identity she feels. Undoubtedly, Marji has reached the very end of the scale on the negative side in

terms of resilience. She expected to feel better once she was back in Iran, back with her family, yet she ended up only feeling alienated from others. At this point, Marji sees no other solution but to commit suicide. This could be interpreted as a lack of resilience because she gives up on herself and her life entirely and follows through with the suicide attempt.

However, Marji's suicide attempt fails. The doctor tells her that he cannot explain her survival, apart from divine intervention. The last panel on page 275 shows a text box where Marji is standing outside, with trees and the sky behind her. In the text box on the top of the panel she states: "I inferred from this that I was not made to die" (Satrapi, 2008, p. 274). In a thought balloon she thinks: "From now on I'm taking myself in hand" (Satrapi, 2008, p. 274). The background of the sky and the trees could be interpreted as a new beginning or a fresh start in her life, as this is a clear turning point in Marji's life. She makes the decision change her life by herself, without the persuasion or assistance of anyone. The motivation for the change comes from herself and could be interpreted as resilience. It could be said that hitting rock bottom, experiencing depression, and a failed suicide attempt led her to become even more resilient because she changes her life completely.

4.6 Didactic potential

How can *Persepolis, The Story of a Return* be used to promote the teaching of the interdisciplinary topic of life skills in VG1? In terms of language and comprehension, it is possible to conclude that the graphic novel is suited for both competent readers. It could be challenging to understand for reluctant readers, as the story is long and complex. It offers insight into a complicated part of history of Iran, the effects of politics, war, loss of family and friends, and living in a restrictive regime. It is necessary to offer additional information on political, historical, cultural, and social contexts to facilitate understanding of the society the character grows up in. However, I believe that reading *Persepolis, The Story of a Childhood* should provide enough background knowledge and insight into the main character, Marji as a person.

To provide the students with a certain amount of previous knowledge, I would use resources created by Susan Spangler available on the website Read Write Think called *Gaining Background for the Graphic Novel Persepolis: A WebQuest on Iran* as a prereading activity.

I would use the *WebQuest Introduction and Task Sheet* and *Persepolis WebQuest Link*, and *Creating a PowerPoint Slide* as resources. The task would be to work in 6 groups to research information about Iran during the Islamic revolution, to design a PowerPoint presentation and to effectively present their findings to the class. Each group would be assigned a topic to research. The topics are:

1. The Shah of Iran
2. Islam
3. Society in Iran (pre-Islamic Revolution)
4. Society in Iran (post-Islamic Revolution)
5. Culture in Iran (pre-Islamic Revolution)
6. Society in Iran (post-Islamic Revolution) (Spangler, n.d.).

After familiarising the students with the task, they can research information on the *WebQuest Link* and present their findings in class (Spangler, n.d.). This task should be sufficient in providing the students with previous knowledge about Iran. This task incorporates several core elements from the curriculum, as well as competence aims from the curriculum for English VG1. Relevant aims are using digital resources and other means in the process of language learning and in creation of texts (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020). The core elements addressed here are obtaining cultural knowledge and experience of different cultures and societies (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

This graphic novel is clearly suited to discuss the aspects of self-efficacy, recognition, nonrecognition and identity, as well as resilience in the English classroom. The graphic novel is ideal to employ in addressing the issue of immigration and how difficult it might be to find oneself in a country where language and culture are unfamiliar and strange. Here, the novel could be used to discuss cultural differences, as well as differences in use of body language as a means of communication. The students could be asked to create 4 to 6 panels illustrating and explaining what happens in the gutter, Marji's thoughts and feelings while she is in the television room with Lucia. What are her thoughts at that moment? What could she be feeling? It is possible to discuss how the experiences of nonrecognition affect the construct of self-esteem and identity. Since this is a universal aspect, anyone could experience this in various

ways in their lives. Students may be encouraged to create 4 or 6 panels illustrating and describing situations from their own lives that may have affected their identity and self-esteem. This task incorporates the competence aim to use grammatical and structural knowledge in the creation of written and oral texts and the aim of writing different types of texts, both formal and informal (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020). This task also addresses the core curriculum within the interdisciplinary topic of health and life skills that addresses the “ability to understand and influence factors that are important for mastering one's own life” (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

The graphic novel is also highly suited to discuss how restrictive governmental regimes might restrict identities and affect lives. The novel is ideal in the discussion of the fact that whatever restrictions and control people experience, they still might find their own ways to protest or rebel. It is important to point out that this protest behaviour is both a way of coping with restrictions, as well as a minor rebellion against the regime. The focus could be turned toward the nonrecognition of women and women’s rights in society. Students could be asked to reflect on and discuss these questions. The first question is from Read Write Think:

1. “What similarities and differences can you identify between the politics of the Middle East and those in our country?” (Ankiel, n.d.).
2. How did the role of religion in Iran affect Marji’s studies and career?
3. Why does she finally decide to leave?

This task addresses the interdisciplinary topic of democracy and citizenship through making the students aware of “the right to participate in political activities, societies dependence on citizens exercising their rights to participate in politics and influence developments in the civil society” (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020). This task also aids the students “learn why democracy cannot be taken for granted and understand that it must be developed and maintained” (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

The novel also contains one example of how personal experience of alienation can affect the characters state of mind and lead to depression. Obviously, keeping her experiences to herself alienates Marji from people around her. Students could be asked to reflect on what they think causes Marji’s depression, and whether they think this is a positive or a negative experience in her life as a whole. At the same time, it is also possible to see how the character can rise past their experiences and become resilient. These examples can be used in the classroom to

discuss how family, friends, and finally society affect the individual's sense of identity and wellbeing. The students could be asked to discuss the role of Marji's family and friends. Students could be asked to reflect on and discuss these. The first question is from Read Write Think:

1. "In what ways is the family in the book similar to yours? How is it different?" (Ankiel, n.d.)
2. How do her family and her friends affect her life?
3. How does the depression change her?

The final task addresses the interdisciplinary topic of health and life skills by exploring the "issues that come under this topic are value choices and the importance of meaning in life and relations with others" (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020). The task addresses also the competence aims to read, analyse and interpret English literary texts and the competence aim to discuss and reflect on the form, content and literary terms in different English cultural expressions (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

5 American Born Chinese

In this section, I analyse the graphic novel *American Born Chinese*, written by Gene Luen Yang. Firstly, I will present the author and how his personal experiences from childhood have influenced the graphic novel, then I include a brief synopsis of the graphic novel. Finally, I will analyse and discuss the graphic novel, again with the aims of bringing forward the parts of the novel that reflect self-efficacy, recognition, nonrecognition, identity, and finally resilience.

5.1 About the Author and the Graphic Novel

Gene Luen Yang was born the 9th August 1973. He is the son of two Asian immigrants; his mother is from mainland China and his father is from Taiwan. His family moved to California in United States, where the author grew up, and at the time, his family was one of the first Asian families in the area (NBC News, 2016, 0:14). His graphic novel, *American Born Chinese*, was published in 2006 and became the winner of Michal L. Printz Award, as well as the Eisner Award for Best Graphic Album in 2007. Lark Pien is the cartoonist that coloured the graphic novel, receiving the Harvey Award for Best Colourist the same year (*American Born Chinese*, 2021). The graphic novel is very colourful, and the author employs splash pages frequently to tell the story. There is a first and second addition of the graphic novel and in this analysis, I employ the first edition.

In Author Talk on PPLDTV, Yang explains that in the graphic novel, he has drawn inspiration from an ancient Chinese legendary figure, The Monkey King. Yang describes The Monkey King as a Chinese superhero, introduced to him through storytelling by his mother, as she used to read Chinese storybooks to him when he was a child. His favourite stories were always the stories about The Monkey King. In Asian culture, The Monkey King is a literary figure from a novel called *Journey to the West*. In *American Born Chinese*, Yang created his own Asian American version of the Monkey King to address the experiences of growing up as an Asian American in the United States. Yang wanted to combine both Eastern and Western philosophies in the graphic novel. Consequently, he transformed the deity character of Buddha from *Journey to the West*, Tze-Yo-Tzuh, to a Chinese version of the Judeo-Christian god like character. Yang also introduces four new characters that were not included in *Journey to the*

West. These characters are the human, the lion, the ox, and the eagle, adapted from the Book of Revelation. These three characters are not particularly important to the story, but they represent the Western part of the author that he wanted to include in the graphic novel (PPLDTV, 2016).

Moreover, Yang has drawn inspiration from his own life in the creation of the characters Jin, and the friendship between Jin and Wei-Chen. In his Author Talk, Yang relates that in junior high, he hung out with Asian American boys like himself. They were born in America; they spoke English without a Chinese accent, and they wore American clothes. Another group of boys Yang interacted with were boys that came to America as children. These boys spoke English with a Chinese accent, they spoke their native language amongst each other, and they wore clothes from Taiwan. The American Asian boys in Yang's group would interact with these immigrants, but they would also laugh behind their backs and call them Fresh of the Boat, F.O.B. The American Chinese boys made an emphasis on distinguishing themselves from the group of immigrant boys. Yang also draws inspiration from his own life in the making of the character Timmy. The racially offensive comments that Timmy makes in the graphic novel are inspired by comments that Yang heard in his own childhood (PPLDTV, 2016).

In addition, Yang notes that Chin-Kee's character embodies imagery from multiple historic and present-day stereotypes. Yang explains that "what Chin-Kee looks like and what he wears I pulled from old sources, then for what he says and what he does, I pulled from much newer sources" (PPLDTV, 2016, 31:59). In her article *Reading Images in American Born Chinese through Critical Visual Literacy*, Melissa Schieble (2014) writes that Yang "notes that Chin-Kee's hair and outfit are reminiscent of "more overtly racist imagery prevalent in the late 1800s and early 1900s accompanying US exploitation of Chinese immigrant labour during the gold rush and construction of the Transcontinental Railroad" (Schieble, 2014). Schieble also states that:

Yang fused these historic images and their racist undertones with examples of modern racist visual cues, which are notably more difficult to pinpoint. For example, Cousin Chin- Kee's desire for voluptuous American girls is a nod to *Sixteen Candles*' Long Duc Dong character, whom Yang describes as offering "Oriental comic relief" in the film." The graphic novel also includes a splash page of Cousin Chin- Kee singing Ricky Martin's pop song "She Bang" to the shock and horror of Danny's classmates and teachers. Yang's song choice in this frame references William Hung, who in 2004

performed similar “Oriental comic relief” through his off- key rendition of the same song for the hit show American Idol judges and audience. (Schieble, 2014).

As this quotation illustrates, Yang draws inspiration from both old and new sources, both of which present a stereotypical and racist attitude towards Asian people and culture. These choices make it clear that Chin-Kee represents everything that could be interpreted as embarrassing, funny or negative about the Asian culture. In her journal article “*How Good It Is to Be a Monkey*”: *Comics, Racial Formation, and American Born Chinese*, Min Hyoung Song (2010) notes that Chin-Kee rhymes with “chinky”, which, according to the urban dictionary, is a racist term used to describe a person from East Asian descent (Urban Dictionary, 2004). Furthermore, Song point out that Chin-Kee wears old-fashioned Chinese clothes, speaks English with a prominent Chinese accent and there is one panel of him eating something that looks like a cat’s head. He also embodies the Asian stereotype of the extreme overachiever. In the graphic novel, Chin-Kee could be perceived as both extremely annoying and as a character that provides comical relief (Song, 2010). However, the character was so controversial that Yang had to write an essay explaining the character to Asian American bookstores that refused to read or sell his book because of the controversial nature of Chin-Kee (PPLDTV, 2016, 29:12). In this essay, Yang explains that the character was deliberately exaggerated to make a point about racial and cultural stereotypes. He claims that “Cousin Chin-Kee isn’t meant to be funny. He’s meant to come off the page and slap you in the face. If you’re laughing at him, I want you to do so with a knot in your stomach and a dry throat” (Yang, Gene Yang on Steriotypes, 2007).

5.2 Synopsis

The graphic novel is divided into three separate storylines with three separate main characters. The first storyline builds on the Chinese fable of The Monkey King. This storyline takes place in ancient China, more of a mythological setting, at a time when gods and spirits were part of people’s everyday life. The main character, The Monkey King, is insulted by other gods and decides to prove that he is just as powerful as they are, so he practices his abilities, and then displays these to several gods and kings. He feels so powerful that he gives himself the name Great Sage Equal of Heaven, but when he encounters Tze-Yo-Tzuh, the creator of the universe and all gods, the creator tells him that he made him to be a monkey and he should be content

being a monkey. Monkey King does not want to comply, and as punishment he is buried under a mountain of rocks for five hundred years. After five hundred years, he is freed by the monk Wong Lai-Tsao, who reminds him that he does not have to stay trapped under the rocks if he transforms himself back to his original form. Wong Lai-Tsao takes The Monkey King as his disciple. Then the Monkey King's eldest son, Wei-Chen, decides to become an emissary, and as his test of virtue, he is sent to live as a mortal for forty years. The goal is to remain free human vice. When Wei-Chen loses faith in mankind and decides to abandon his mission, Monkey King disguises himself as Cousin Chin-Kee and visits Jin, his son's friend. At the end of the novel the Monkey King reveals his identity to Jin. Because the graphic novel employs different narrators in two of the three storylines, it is important to point out that in this storyline of the graphic novel, the text boxes contain narration from an omniscient narrator, not Monkey King himself.

The second storyline is set in the 1980's. The main character is a Chinese American middle school boy named Jin Wang. Jin is the narrator of his own storyline, so this storyline is written in first-person point of view. Additionally, parts of the narration and speech are initiated by angle brackets. This is meant to indicate that the characters are speaking Chinese, and that the speech is translated into English. Jin's family moves from San Francisco's Chinatown to a predominantly white suburb, which results in Jin not being able to fit in at school. Because of his cultural heritage, he is bullied and harassed by his classmates, until he befriends Wei-Chen, an immigrant from Taiwan. Jin falls in love with Amelia and he confides in his friend, Wei Chen. At first, Wei-Chen finds this amusing because his culture forbids falling in love before the age of eighteen, but when Jin points out that they both live in America, Wei-Chen starts dating Suzi Nacamura. Jin does ask Amelia out eventually, but her friend Greg asks Jin to not pursue their relationship further because he thinks she deserves someone better. This makes Jin wish he was white, he tries to kiss Wei-Chen's girlfriend, and the boys have a falling out. Thus, Jin is transformed into a white boy named Danny, which brings us to the final storyline.

Danny is a white high school boy who changes schools every year due to the yearly visits from his cousin Chin-Kee, the main character in this storyline. Chin-Kee embarrasses Danny because he is the embodiment of all negative stereotypes associated with Chinese people. He dresses in old-fashioned Chinese clothes, mixes the "l" and "r" sounds, he eats cats and dogs, and he is an academical overachiever. At the end of the graphic novel Danny becomes so enraged with Chin-Kee that he punches him in the face and reveals Chin-Kee's identity, the

Monkey King. As a result, The Monkey King reveals Danny's identity, Jin Wang. The Monkey King tells Jin that his son, Wei-Chen, failed his mission and decided to spend the rest of his time in the mortal world enjoying worldly pleasures. Jin waits for Wei-Chen in a Chinese restaurant until Wei-Chen returns, and the boys talk and become friends again. In this storyline, there are no text boxes, thus, there is no narrator, only action and speech between the characters. In fact, this storyline includes elements from American sitcoms. There are sound effects of people clapping and laughing presented as part of the artwork at the bottom of the panels that introduce and conclude this story line, as well as laughter at the bottom of several panels that include Chin-Kee, and sometimes Danny.

5.3 Self-efficacy

In this section, I will focus on the aspects of the graphic novel that express something about the main characters perceived self-efficacy. I will discuss how both vicarious experiences provided by social models influence the characters Jin and Wei-Chen, and how these two characters affect each other.

5.3.1 Jin

The first example of vicarious experiences provided by social models is on pages 23 and 24 of the graphic novel. The first panel on page 23 shows a drawing of Jin Wang sitting in the backseat of the family car holding his transformer toy. His head is bent, and he is clearly sad, as a tear runs down his cheek. His family is moving, and this is apparently the reason why Jin is upset and crying. The text box narrates: "My mother once told me an old Chinese parable" (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 23). The next panel shows Jin in the middle of the panel, with boxes next to him, and his parents in the front seat. The reader does not get to see the faces of the parents, as only parts of their bodies are drawn, the father on the right side of the panel and the mother on the left. This choice to not show the parents' faces is interesting, and I will come back to this in the section that deals with recognition. Above Jin's head there is a speech bubble, indication that it is the mother speaking Chinese: "<Long ago, a mother and her young son lived near a marketplace. Every day when the son played, he pretended to

buy and sell sticks he found on the street, haggling over prices with his friends. The mother decided to move. They settled into a house next to a cemetery. Now when the son played, he burned incense sticks and sang songs to dead ancestors. The mother decided to move again. She found a home across the road from a university. The sun now spent all his free time reading books about mathematics, science and history>” (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 24). Jin’s mother finishes her story as they pull pup to their new house: “<The mother and her son stayed there for a long time>” (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 24). This story serves as a perfect example to illustrate how social surroundings provide vicarious experiences and social models for people to imitate or follow. This is consistent with Banduras social cognitive theory, where he claims that having models that serve as examples makes the individual believe that they can achieve success in the same endeavours. It is also possible to interpret that Jin’s family is moving so that he, the son, can imitate and become like the people that surround him in his new environment. Therefore, this story serves as a foreshadowing of Jin’s own story because he ends up struggling with his Chinese identity to fit in with the rest of the kids around him.

The second example of self-efficacy in *American Born Chinese* is apparent in the way Jin and Wei-Chen influence each other. The first example of this is on page 89. Jin is in love with Amelia, and he confides in his best friend. Wei-Chen makes fun of him at first, explaining that in Taiwan boys that fall in love before the age of eighteen are made fun of. The second panel on page 89 shows the boys sitting on the school bench having lunch. Jin is holding a sandwich, while Wei-Chan has a bowl with chopstick on the bench beside him. In the third panel Jin says: “This isn’t Taiwan, you doof! Stop acting like such a F.O.B!” (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 89). Food serves as a cultural expression in this example. Earlier in the graphic novel, Jin is made fun of by Timmy when he brings dumplings for lunch, thus the sandwich in Jin’s hand is a clear indication that he is trying to fit in and become as American as possible. Here, the sandwich is a symbol of the American culture. Wei-Chen, on the other hand, is comfortable bringing Chinese food for lunch. The last panel on the page shows a drawing of Wei-Chen and Suzy Nakamura holding hands walking down the hallway at school, as the text box explains that Wei-Chen started dating Susi Nakamura two weeks later (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 89). This shows that Jin’s cultural understanding of being in love and dating has influenced Wei-Chen. Through social and cultural persuasion, Jin persuaded Wei-Chen to think differently because he is in America. It could be argued that Wei-Chen’s mindset has changed, maybe even the mindset about his own culture. This is

consistent with Banduras third way of strengthening people's self-efficacy believes through social persuasion.

The third example of social persuasion is on page 97. In the third panel there is a drawing of Jins face, with a big smile, and whiskers on his cheeks. I will come back to the meaning of these whiskers in the next section. In a thought bubble, Jin sees Amelia, and in the next panel he sees Amelia and Greg talking to each other. The next panel shows Jin only thinking of Greg, and the last panel shows a drawing of Jin walking into his house, thinking of only Greg's curly hair (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 97). When reading the gutter in this section, it clearly illustrates that Jin wants to catch Amelia's interest by becoming more like Greg. It is possible to interpret that Jin believes that Amelia must like Greg since they talk and hang out a lot, so by becoming more like Greg, Jin might attract Amelia's attention.

Even if the hair seems to be of greater cultural significance to women than men, it is apparent that hair does possess cultural significance in this example. People have unique hair structure and different people choose different hairstyles. In general, it is common that Asian hair can be straight, in other words, that it may lack natural curls. In this section of the graphic novel, it is indicated that Jin thinks that he would have a better chance with Amelia if his hair was more like Greg's hair, which is curly. Actually, Jin thinks that he might be perceived as more attractive if he had curly hair. In this case, curly hair may even be associated with being white, or more American. Therefore, Jin changes his hair to become more American, believing that this might make him more attractive to Amelia.

The fourth and final example social persuasion is when Wei-Chen tries to persuade Jin to take action to achieve what he wants, on pages 104 and 105. While Wei-Chen and Amelia are looking after the animals after class, they get themselves locked into the supply closet in the classroom. They spend an hour in there before Jin finds them and unlocks the door. On the second panel on page 104 there is a drawing of Jin opening the door into the closet, and the next panel shows a drawing of Jin looking in. His hair is curly, just like Greg's hair, yet seeing Amelia makes Jin nervous and insecure. In the fifth panel there is a drawing of Wei-Chen whispering into Jin's ear: "Again is a chance for your lifetime!" (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 104). On the first panel on page 105 the text box narrates: "I remember a jolt of confidence" (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006). The panel contains a drawing of a Jin's face up close, with five lightning bolts jolting. These lightning bolts indicate Jin's growing confidence as he finally asks Amelia out and she accepts. Here again, Wei-Chen

encourages Jin, through social persuasion, to act so that he can achieve his goals with Amelia, and he succeeds. Jin may not have been able to muster the confidence to ask Amelia out if his best friend was not there by his side offering support as well as a familiar and friendly face. The jolt of confidence that Jin felt came right after Wei-Chen whispered in his ear. This is clearly one example of self-efficacy through persuasion, consistent with Bandura's theory. It is normal to feel more confident and be able to accomplish a certain goal or task if an individual receives friendly support and encouragement from a friend or loved one.

5.4 Mindsets

In this section I present the change in mindset that Wei-Chen goes through. His experiences as a human and Jin's friend lead him to change his mind set and direction in life on earth.

5.4.1 Wei-Chen

On pages 217 to 220, after The Monkey King reveals his true identity to Danny, and restores Jin's true identity, he tells him that Wei-Chen is in fact his eldest son, who aspired to follow in his father's footsteps and become an emissary. For his test of virtue, he was sent to live in the mortal world for forty years, all the while remaining free of human vice (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 220). Here it is logical to assume that his friendship with Jin has influenced Wei-Chen's opinion of humans, and consequently his actions were influenced as well. Not only was he persuaded to lie for his best friend, he was also later betrayed by his best friend. Jin kisses Wei-Chen's girlfriend, and when Wei-Chen confronts him to get some answers, he is told that Jin believes him not to be good enough for Suzy. Jin rejects Wei-Chen as a friend, humiliates him and calls him a F.O.B. Even if Wei-Chen's choice to abandon his quest is his own, however, it is logical to assume that that decision was somehow affected by his experiences with his best friend, Jin. Jin has after all served as a model for human behaviour for Wei-Chen, therefore humans appear to be soulless and petty creatures to Wei-Chen. Considering this new information, Wei-Chen makes the decision to no longer serve as an emissary. Wei-Chen experiences a complete change in mindset and abandons all previous beliefs and behaviours. He loses his faith in Tze-Yo-Tzuh as well as his dearest creation,

humans. He has lost hope and is disillusioned. The fact that Wei-Chen is turned away from his father during the whole conversation on pages 218-220, indicates this change in mindset, the turning away from the old beliefs towards a new mindset.

Song says that throughout the graphic novel Wei Chen is presented as an innocent, nerdy and outgoing person, ready to help his best friend and be of service to humans. After his falling out with Jin, he transforms into an angry and dejected Asian American hipster. The anger he carries because of the rejection he experiences from Jin, leads him into a specific form of American cultural activity referred to as the Japanese import car scene. This is a culture that is defined by tricked out cars, street racing and the objectification of females. The creation of this import car scene came to existence due to rebellious youths in Southern California, where these youths felt they were not welcome at white car-racing events that involved Detroit muscle cars. As an act of general defiance, and opposition to the Mexican American car culture, the youths took to modifying and racing smaller, and cheaper Japanese cars, thus creating cars with hyper modern aesthetic. As Song notes, these youths “fashioned Japanese import into a synonym for an agile East Asian capitalist style capable of outperforming the more weighted down and brutish Detroit muscle car” (Song, 2010, p. 84). This makes it clear that Wei-Chen transforms from being a sweet, kind, innocent boy, who wanted to become an emissary to his creator, into the embodiment of the East Asian capitalist culture. This is a complete change in mindsets.

5.5 Recognition, Nonrecognition and Identity

In this section, I analyse the parts of the graphic novel that deal with nonrecognition, recognition and identity. I will focus especially on how nonrecognition from people around the main characters, mainly Jin and Monkey King, affects their actions and lead them into a struggle for recognition.

5.5.1 Monkey King

The Monkey King discovers that the gods arrange a dinner party in heaven, and he goes to the party, innocent, excited, and full of expectations. In the last panel on page 13, The Monkey

King tells the guard to announce the Monkey King of Flower-Fruit Mountain. The guard says: “Yes, yes, I apologize profusely Sir, but I cannot let you in...-you haven’t any shoes” (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 14) The Monkey King insists and in the second panel on page 15, the guard says: “Look. You may be a king- you may even be a deity- but you are still a monkey” (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006). The guests at the party are laughing and pointing at him, and on the last panel of the page shows a picture of The Monkey King’s face. His expression is hard and sombre, as the text box narrates: “The Monkey King was thoroughly embarrassed. He was so embarrassed, in fact, that he almost left without saying a word” (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 15). In her article, Song explains how East Asian people have been compared to monkeys upon several occasions. This comparison has served to picture different groups of people as subhuman or even non-human. The incident of exclusion from the dinner party shows the impact of racial microaggression, because the monkey has served as a racial diminutive. Song also points out that this comparison works only if one buys into the assumption that monkeys or animals are inferior to humans (Song, 2010). In this section The Monkey King, who has always been quite happy with being a monkey, experiences nonrecognition for being himself. In addition, it is pointed out to him that he lacks shoes, and in that sense, he is made aware that he is not human. The Monkey King is shamed and embarrassed in public for simply being what he is, a monkey. In Author Talk, Yang explains that he got the idea of using the shoes as a way to describe what he calls “the discomfort that all children of immigrants have to deal with when growing up in a culture that does not match the culture of their parents” (PPLDTV, 2016, 19:57). Hence, the shoes could represent qualities, racial and cultural, that the Monkey King does not possess. Yet, these qualities are apparently essential to the attendance of the dinner party. Because he does not wear shoes, the Monkey King is excluded from the dinner party. This obviously affects the Monkey King and he is infuriated.

The Monkey King’s rage and fury is expressed on page 16, a splash page with the narration: “But on second thought, he decided that perhaps saying one word would make him feel better” The splash page shows a drawing of The Monkey King swinging the guard by the ponytail on his helmet, to the surprise of the guests at the party, while he screams: “Die!” (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 16). In a very colourful sequence of splash pages, the Monkey King murders all the guests at the party (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, pp. 17-19). By murdering the guests, The Monkey King rebels viciously against the nonrecognition that he experiences from the rest of the deities. This is consistent with Honneth’s theory of

recognition, where he claims that rebellions against nonrecognition can occur on the personal as well as the social level. While this rebellion might feel very satisfying in the moment, the Monkey King's violence does not end there.

On page 20, the first panel shows the Monkey King descending on a cloud to back to Flower-Fruit Mountain, as the text box narrates: "The Monkey King could not stop shaking as he Descended on Flower-Fruit Mountain" (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 20). The next panel shows The Monkey King entering his cave, like a black shadow. The text boxes on the top right and bottom right narrate: "When he entered his royal chambers, the smell of monkey fur greeted him. He never noticed it before" (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 20). The last panel is completely black, with the image of The Monkey King sitting on a stone chair, in the dark, as the text box narrates: "He stayed awake for the rest of the night thinking of ways to get rid of it" (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 20). The use of the colour black in the background here is interesting and suggests that a shadow has descended upon the Monkey King. The fact that the Monkey King has never noticed the smell of monkey fur before, but clearly does so now, pondering how he can get rid of it, shows that the nonrecognition and exclusion has made an effect on him. It has changed his perception of himself as a monkey. Suddenly, the Monkey King is no longer content with simply being a monkey, and he experiences being a monkey as something to be vanquished. His very identity has turned into something he must improve, change completely, or transform. Consistent with Honneth's theory, the Monkey King does embark on a violent journey of struggle in several pages to come. He changes his identity completely and becomes The Sage Equal of Heaven. According to Honneth's theory, negative experiences, in this case experiences of nonrecognition and exclusion from different communities, provide motivation for struggle to receive recognition or overcome nonrecognition. The Monkey King could represent all people of Asian descent or other individuals that have experienced exclusion and nonrecognition.

The Monkey King's transformation, or struggle for recognition is described on pages 55 to 68. Page 55 is a splash page; the text boxes narrate: "The morning after the dinner party The Monkey King issued a decree throughout all the Flower-Fruit Mountain: "All monkey must wear shoes" (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 55). The splash page shows a drawing of five monkeys struggling to climb trees. One of them is falling off the tree, while the others are struggling to climb. The very idea of a monkey struggling to climb trees is ridiculous, because monkeys are normally extremely skilled climbers because of their feet, shaped like an extra pair of hands. The fact that the monkeys are made to wear shoes by the Monkey King,

confirms that the Monkey King also projects his feelings of discomfort and inadequacy on to the rest of the monkeys in his kingdom. This takes a toll on their climbing skills, and thus becomes a burden to them. The shoes restrict the monkeys' strengths and prevent them from thriving as monkeys. Hence, the shoes become inappropriate strategies for recognition. The shoes are a burden on Monkey king as well, though he does not realize it yet.

The first and only example of recognition in the novel is found in the story of The Monkey King, pages 133 to 160. In the mythological setting of ancient China, in all of antiquity, only four monks ever achieved legendary status. The fourth monk was a quite unremarkable monk, Wong Lai-Tsao. During his Journey to the West, he finds his first disciple, the monkey deity, under a mountain of rock. He encourages The Monkey King to return to his original form, by releasing the exercise of Kong-Fu. The Monkey King frees himself to save Wong Lai-Tsao from demons and becomes his companion on his Journey to the West. The monk tells the monkey that he has no need for shoes on their journey. Page 160 is a splash page of a drawing of Wong Lai-Tsao and The Monkey King as they walk away from the shoes, towards the star that guides their Journey to the West (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 160). In a sense, Wong Lai-Tsao offers The Monkey King the gift of absolute recognition and freedom. By only accepting The Monkey King in his original form, he grants him the recognition of the part of himself he has been fighting. The monk accepts the innocent, kind Monkey King without shoes. Here again, the shoes are a symbol of inappropriate strategies for recognition, as monkeys have no use for shoes. By taking them off, the monkey frees himself of the struggle for recognition and his false identity as The Great Sage Equal of Heaven. The shoes, as well as The Great Sage Equal of Heaven, are finally left behind. The fact that they are walking away from the shoes, could be interpreted as a distancing from the dominant culture and struggle for recognition, therefore a movement towards the culture of origin. It could also be interpreted as a movement away from a false self towards a true self. In this section, the Monkey King undergoes a transformation and transcends the message that has been presented to him, that he is not good enough as a monkey. This leads him to connect with himself and others, which leads him to compassion and finally becoming whole.

5.5.2 Jin

A first example of nonrecognition involving Jin is found on pages 30 to 35. Jin starts attending third grade at Mayflower elementary school in his new hometown. He is introduced by the teacher as Jin Jang, although his name is Jin Wang, and he is said to have come all the way from China, even though he moved from San Francisco. This is a clear example of microinvalidation, as it invalidates Jin's belief that he is American born in America. The only other Asian person in the class is Suzy Nakamura, and as soon as the rest of the class figured out that they were not related, a rumour started circulating about them being arranged to be married, which made them avoid each other as much as possible. Timmy in the class made some racially insensitive comments about Chinese people eating dogs, and he calls Jin Bucktooth and tells Jin to stay away from his dog in the playground. Timmy's comments and behaviour are clear microinsults on Jin's identity. Another classmate, Greg, defends Jin and stands up to Timmy. Greg has blond, curly hair. Jin's makes "a friend" named Peter Garbinsky, but is made quite clear on pages 34 and 35 that Peter just steals Jin's lunch and bullies him (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, pp. 30-35). These experiences of racial microaggression and nonrecognition affects him, just like the Monkey King was affected, and change the way he perceives himself. He is made very aware that he is different from the rest of his classmates, and that he is not accepted as one of them, but unlike the Monkey King, Jin does not rebel against this nonrecognition. On the contrary, he makes himself as small as possible around them, and he wants to resemble them as much as possible. This nonrecognition initiates Jin's own struggle for recognition, and he tries to become as American as possible. He starts bringing sandwiches for lunch to school instead of dumplings, he changes his hair so that he can resemble Greg and thus come closer to Amelia. Jin also persuades Wei-Chen to lie for him because his parents do not allow him to date.

Wei-Chen's arrival to class is described on pages 36-40. Just like in Jin's case, the teacher mispronounces his name, telling the class that his name is Chei-Chen Chun, while his name is Wei-Chen Sun. The teacher says that he has arrived all the way from China, while he is from Taiwan. The last panel on page 36 shows Jin sitting in the classroom amongst the rest of the class while Wei-Chen is introduced, and in a text box on the bottom he narrates: "Something made me want to beat him up" (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 36). Obviously, Wei-Chen and Jin have a lot in common; they are both Asian, the teachers cannot pronounce their names and have no idea where they come from. Yet, Jin wants to beat up Wei-Chen. One

interpretation could be that the aggression that Jin feels towards Wei-Chen emerges from the fact that Wei -Chen reminds him of himself. Because Jin does not accept Asian culture and is struggling so hard to change everything about himself, he has developed self-loathing. Wei-Chen, thus far, accepts his Asian culture completely, and this very fact may increase Jin's aggression towards him. Wei-Chen is very similar to himself, however, he accepts his Asian heritage and culture, while Jin loathes this part of himself. As a result, Jin projects his own self-loathing on to Wei-Chen.

Despite their differences, Jin and Wei-Chen become friends. On page 37, Wei Chen approaches Jin, who always sits alone in the playground. At first, Wei-Chen speaks Chinese to Jin but Jin tells him that he is in America and should speak English. Wei-Chen asks if they can be friends, but Jin says that he has enough friends. Still, Wei-Chen sits down on the bench on the opposite side of Jin and sighs, while taking a toy out of his pocket. The toy resembles Jin's transformer toy, so he asks what it is in Chinese. Jin asks: "<Can I see it?>", referring to the robot toy. Wei-Chen answers: "<Sure>" In the text box on the bottom right Jin says: "Over the next few months, Wei-Chen became my best friend" (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 40). In this example, the language the boys speak serves to indicate the degree of recognition given. By asking Wei-Chen to speak English at first, Jin rejects his own and Wei-Chen's Asian cultural heritage, and thus participates in rejection of his own as well as Wei-Chen's Asian cultural identity. Later he does address Wei-Chen in Chinese, showing some degree of recognition of their mutual culture, and thus indicates to Wei-Chen that he is open to the offer of Wei-Chen's friendship.

Another interesting example of nonrecognition in the form of racial microaggression experienced by Jin, Wei-Chen and Suzy Nakamura is on page 98. They are all three hanging out together by a bench, while Timmy and another boy walk by. The boy says: "Hey, I chink it's getting a little nippy out here" Timmy answers the boy: "You're right! I'm getting gook bumps!" (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 96). As the boys pass by, they laugh at the Asian kids. The next panel shows the Asian kids, with six lines on their cheeks, lines that resemble whiskers (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 96). I have already explained that "chink" is a racial term. Gook is also a racial term that was created during the Korean war. The word for American in Korean is "Miguk", which led to the American soldiers to believe that the Koreans were calling themselves "gook" (Urban Dictionary, 2005). This, apparently, developed into a term that is used for any person of Asian descent. This is another prominent example of racial microaggression, more precisely microassaults, because Timmy and the other

boy disguise their assaults intended in a simple conversation about the weather. Even though their assaults are apparent to the Asian kids, there is nothing they can do or say due to the disguise. The “whiskers” are drawn by the author to indicate humiliation or embarrassment.

Jin, on the other hand, experiences a series of significant episodes of nonrecognition before he begins his transformation. These episodes are illustrated on pages 179-184. Firstly, he is approached by Greg in the first panel on page 179. Greg asks for Jin to stop seeing Amelia. (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 179). The last panel on page 179 is a rectangular, long panel, with a small drawing of Jin’s face at the right side looking sad, confused, and alienated. The visual impact of this panel indicates how Jin must be feeling at that moment. The drawing of his face is small because he feels small, inferior, and insignificant. This is an important moment of nonrecognition for Jin because he experiences it in connection to Greg. Jin obviously looks up to Greg since he changes his hair to look more like Greg. Furthermore, Greg is the one that defending him when he experiences racial insults from Timmy. This moment of nonrecognition brings Jin close to rebellion.

The last panel on page 181 shows Jin sitting in the classroom, the colours of the background are faded, to indicate that Jin is in his own mind. The rest of the world does not exist for him at this moment. He imagines the conversation he just had with Greg, only now, in his imagination, he rebels and punches Greg in the face. As the school bell rings, the second panel shows Jin walking through the hallway at school, with lightning all over the following panels. He finds Amelia, and calls out her name, but as she turns around to face him, he sees Greg behind her. He loses his nerve at the sight of Greg and walks away (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, pp. 183-184). This is as close as Jin gets to rebelling against nonrecognition. In consistency with Honneth’s theory, Jin feels the urge to rebel against the nonrecognition he experiences from Greg. In his imagination, Jin rebels and punches Greg in the face. He wants to ignore what he said to Greg, and he wants to talk to Amelia, but he loses all confidence as soon as he sees Greg there with her. The clouds around Jins head in the first panel indicate that the lightning jolts of confidence and rage evaporated instantly when he sees Greg. Instead of rebelling against Greg, Jin becomes more like him and imitates his behaviour of nonrecognition. He perpetuates the same behaviour that he experiences in connection with Greg on to his friendship with Wei-Chen. Jin “becomes” Greg by imitating him and rejecting his best friend. Just like the Monkey King transformed into the Great Sage Equal to Heaven, Jin eventually transforms into Danny.

Jin's transformation begins when he kisses Suzy Nakamura, while she tries to confide in him about how she feels. When confronted by Wei-Chen, Jin answers by exercising the nonrecognition he experienced from Greg and projecting all his own self-loathing on to Wei-Chen. He tells him: "You have got to be kidding. You and I are nothing alike. And don't worry about your stupid girlfriend. She is not my type" (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 191). Wei-Chen asks: "Then why-?" (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 191). Jin continues: "Maybe I just don't think you're right for her, all right? Maybe I don't think you're worthy of her. Maybe I think she can do better than a F.O.B like you" (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 191). The last panel on page 191 is a drawing of Wei-Chen smacking Jin in the face with a closed fist. Clearly, Jin takes out all his anger of the nonrecognition that he experiences in connection with Greg on Wei-Chen, and it results in the nonrecognition of Wei-Chen. Jin goes out of his way to make Wei-Chen feel just as unworthy as he felt after he talked to Greg. Now, unlike Jin, Wei-Chen does not hesitate in his rebellion against this nonrecognition from his supposed best friend. Eventually, Jin transforms into Danny and his cousin Chin-Kee visits him every year, making his life difficult.

In his article *More than meets the "I": Chinese Transnationality in Gene Luen Yang's American Born Chinese*, Jonathan Doughty (2010) presents several clues in the text that may aid in understanding what goes on between Danny and Chin-Kee. He notes that the names of Danny and Chin-Kee have additional significance in the Mandarin Chinese language. Chin "qin" may mean "blood relation" or "relative". Chin-Kee is Danny's cousin, but through a linguistic interpretation, Chin-Kee transforms into a qin-key, a key that unlocks Jin's nonacceptance, hostility and shame towards his Asian heritage. Chin-Kee, on the other hand, addresses his cousin as Da-Nee. "Da ni", in Mandarin Chinese also has several meanings, like "Big You" or "Strike You". Of course, Chin-Kee does strike Danny, but in another sense, Chin-Kee remains the inferior or other in comparison with Danny's superior constructed identity as a "White American" (Doughty, 2010, p. 56).

Danny's rage and hostility towards his cousin Chin-Kee has been increasing slowly. Pages 205 to page 212 contain a sequence where Danny and Chin-Kee fight. All the panels containing speech or action from Chin-Kee, also include sound effects indicating laughter from an audience, while panels containing only Danny's speech or action lack this sound effect. The first panel is a drawing of Danny not being able to control his rage any longer. A violent fight erupts between the two. In a sequence of several pages, Chin-Kee beats up Danny by performing several Kung-Fu moves. All panels are accompanied by the sound effects of

laughter, indicating resemblance to a sitcom. These sound effects indicating laughter, that grows louder in the two last panels on page 21. This fight sequence is a metaphor of the fight that is going on in inside Jin. Jin wants to get rid of his Asian identity, and as a result he transforms into Danny, and Danny wants to get rid of cousin Chin-Kee, who has always haunted him. Chin-Kee serves as a key to unlock the emotions Jin has towards his Asian descent by enraging Danny to a breaking point.

Finally, Danny punches Chin-Kee so ferociously that Chin-Kee's head flies off and Chin-Kee's identity is revealed. He is the Monkey King. After the Monkey King's identity is revealed, he in turn, transforms Danny into Jin again. As a result, Chin-Kee, who is the embodiment of all negative Asian stereotypes, is literally "beheaded" and the Monkey King, a legendary Chinese literary superhero figure, takes his place. It is important to notice that at there is a change in the attitude towards the Asian identity at this point. The offensive Asian stereotypes are literally slaughtered by Jin's anger accumulated through experiences of racial microaggression. What emerges is heroic Asian identity, an identity Jin is proud of. Instead of internalising the ridiculous and comical stereotypes, Jin now internalises the positive qualities of the Asian culture and heritage. His identity is transformed into a positive experience.

In his attempt to find Wei-Chen, Jin goes inside to borrow the family car. He tells his parents that Chin-Kee went home. Here, in the last panel on page 225, the author chooses to show the faces of Jin's parents (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 225). It is interesting that the author chooses to show the faces of the parents after Jin accepts his identity. When he accepts himself and his culture, he also accepts his parents, accordingly the faces of the parents are made accessible to the reader. On page 226, Jin goes to the restaurant and waits for Wei-Chen. As the waitress asks what he wants, Jin points to a word on the menu. The waitress tells him that is not a dish, it says "cash only". In the last panel on page 226 Jin is clearly embarrassed, as he has the "whiskers" mentioned earlier on his cheeks. This time, he is embarrassed by the fact that he cannot read Chinese, that he is not familiar enough with his own heritage. He comes back every night for one month and waits for Wei-Chen (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 227).

Finally, Wei-Chen arrives in a blue car, loud music blasting, and the first image of him displays a different person from the innocent, kind boy that Jin befriended. He has earrings in both his ears, sunglasses, covering half his face, a metal neckless around his neck and a cigarette hanging from his mouth (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 229). He is a shell of the

person he used to be. As Song explains, he has taken on a consumerist protective armour to fend off the vulnerability of friendship. He displays emotional hardness and his exterior, especially the sunglasses, makes him an “object that looks but cannot be seen” (Song, 2010, p. 90). Then Jin mentions that he met his father and wants to talk, and the next panel shows a black and white drawing of Wei-Chen as a small monkey sitting in the car, innocent and vulnerable, not unlike his father, the Monkey King. His eyes are wide and expressive. The lack of colour in the panel is a contrast to the rest of the colourful page (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 229).

Song explains that when Wei-Chen’s father is mentioned, the “consumerist armour comes undone” (Song, 2010, p. 90). Underneath the armour, Wei-Chen is still a monkey, a racial representation that is still part of how Wei-Chen defines himself. Nevertheless, it is as a monkey that he is at his most vulnerable and lovable, not unlike his father. This, Song notes, “points directly to the need to confront a painful visual history of racial disparagement that has equated the animal with the subhuman” (Song, 2010, p. 90). As the boys talk, Jin apologizes to Wei-Chen, and Wei-Chen takes his sunglasses off. (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 232). This is a sign of Wei-Chen opening to Jin, lowering his armour, and allowing friendship again. Other interesting interpretation of this section is that the author attempts to extend an apology to the boys that the author used to call F.O.B growing up.

5.6 Resilience

In this section I will discuss the aspects of the novel that have to do with persistence and resilience and how self-acceptance is important in the development of resilience as well as self-improvement.

5.6.1 Monkey King

In the third panel on page 68 there is a drawing of Tze-Yo-Tzuh. As mentioned earlier, he looks like the Judeo-Christian image of god, with a long beard, an old-fashioned robe, and a cane. He is bigger than The Great Sage and is standing over him in the drawing (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 69). The Monkey King tries then to escape the hand of Tze-

Yo-Tzuh, but he finds out that this is not possible. They walk on a stone bridge as Tze-Yo-Tzuh explains:

“I am Tze-Yo-Tzuh, I was, I am, and I shall forever be. I have searched your soul, little monkey. I know your most hidden thoughts; I know your most hidden thoughts. I know when you sit and when you stand, when you journey and when you rest. Even before a word is upon your tongue, I have known it. My eyes have seen all your days. Where did you think you could hide from me? Where can you flee from my presence? I am in the height of heaven and in the depths of the underworld. Even at the end of all that is, my hand is there, holding you fast. It was I who formed you together in the womb of that rock. I made you with awe and wonder, for wonderful are all my works. I do not make mistakes, little monkey. A monkey I intended you to be. A monkey you are. Please accept that and stop your foolishness” (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, pp. 79-81)

The important message here is that we were all created as we are, with our strengths and weaknesses. Trying to change, transform or become something other results in self-abandonment. This part of the graphic novel points to the fact that the practice of acceptance of oneself as one is necessary in the development of resilience. The Monkey King is told that he was made to be a monkey and no mistakes were made during his creation. In fact, he needs to accept himself as he is. No matter how far he runs or how much effort he puts into transformation, he will always be a monkey. Just like Danny, the Monkey King is not able to escape from his true self, but as he does not accept this, the Monkey King is trapped under the mountain of rock and he can only be freed if he returns to his true form. To return to his true form is and has always been within his power, yet he stays trapped for five hundred years. Here, Yang presents the reader with the idea that if one tries to escape one's true self, one may risk entrapment. The mountain of rock represents any situation where we feel the need to be something we are not. However, just like the Monkey King, everyone has the power to return to their true self. The Monkey King is finally freed when he experiences recognition from the monk, and this leads him to experience self-recognition, which is true freedom. After this experience, it is possible to say that the Monkey King emerges more resilient than ever before and can serve Tze-Yo-Tzuh and be his emissary. Of course, this does not mean that we should not strive toward self-improvement, but self-improvement cannot take place without true self-recognition and self-acceptance. We cannot improve or become resilient by transforming into something that is not our true self. A monkey does not become a better monkey by wearing

shoes and convincing others that he is a great sage and Jin does not become a better person by being American. Therefore, true resilience or self-improvement can only be achieved through self-recognition and self-acceptance. Thus, we become more of ourselves and as a result become able to recognise and accept others, with all their strengths and weaknesses.

5.6.2 Jin

The last example of resilience in the novel occurs on pages 212 to 224. Chin-Kee's identity as The Monkey King is revealed, and The Monkey King reveals Danny's identity as Jin Wang. When Monkey King is asked who he is by Jin, he explains who he is and that Wei-Chen is his son, whom he has not been able to reach. In the first panel on page 223, the Monkey King and Jin are sitting on the curb, as Jin asks what he is supposed to do now. The Monkey King replies: "You know, Jin, I would have saved myself from five hundred years of imprisonment beneath a mountain of rock had I only realized how good it is to be a monkey" (Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 223). Reading the gutter in this section, it is clearly implied that Jin is encouraged to accept himself and his Chinese heritage as he is and not waste any more time trying to become something he is not. The Monkey King kept returning to visit Jin as Chin-Kee to point him towards his heritage, point him towards himself, to remind him of the true self. This was very uncomfortable for Jin while he was Danny, but discomfort often leads to internal change, growth, and resilience. There is no resilience without risk or exposure. It is possible to interpret that this experience of self-acceptance has transformed Jin into a more resilient and kinder person, as he is able to salvage his friendship with Wei-Chen.

5.7 Didactic potential

How can *American Born Chinese* be used as a source of insight into life skills? Because of the three separate storylines, the graphic novel may appear strange and comical at first. But as the story unfolds, the students will be able to understand the plot and maybe even the message. In terms of language and comprehension, it is possible to conclude that the graphic novel is suited for both competent and reluctant readers. This graphic novel requires prior knowledge of immigration in America, specifically Asian American immigration. If the students are to

understand all the images and metaphors that the author draws upon, they might benefit from guidance from the teacher.

To aid the students in obtaining previous knowledge, I would include a brief introduction of the history of immigration in the US, followed by the video called *American Born Chinese* from 2009 on YouTube. This video explains how Yang's cultural background is relevant to the story. After watching the video, I would introduce previous knowledge about the character of the Monkey King using *American Born Chinese Teacher's Guide*. This resource contains a video that explains the story of how the Monkey King came to existence, followed by a group research task on some important gods that are relevant to the graphic novel. The video is called *How The Monkey King Came To Be – Journey To The West* from 2015 and is easily found on YouTube. The student would be asked to research these characters in groups of four or five and present their findings to the class in a group presentation (Pop Culture Classroom, Comics Education Outreach, p. 9). These activities should be sufficient to provide the students with all the previous knowledge they need, and they will be able to gain a deeper understanding of the graphic novel while reading. During this process, the student would be addressing the core elements of communication and learning the language by exploring different sources and employing them in oral communication (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

American Born Chinese is ideal in addressing the issue of racial stereotypes through the character of Chin-Kee. It is a challenge teaching a graphic novel that contains such a “deliberately and blatantly over the top stereotype that manifests years of racism and insensitivity towards not just those of Chinese descent, but all Asian people” (Pop Culture Classroom, Comics Education Outreach, p. 3). However, it is necessary to address the issue of how common stereotyping is and how we all stereotype people to a certain extent. To aid the students in reflection, they could discuss these questions from the *American Born Chinese Teacher's Guide*:

1. On page 48, we are introduced to a very controversial character. Consider the artwork on this page. Consider also how the author expresses the way Chin-Kee speaks. How do you reconcile the arguably offensive character of Chin-Kee in your reading of the novel? Why is he in the book at all?
2. On pages 112-113, Chin-Kee demonstrates aptitude at academics. Why does Danny show increasing frustration and embarrassment by this?

3. When Danny starts to get defensive (pg. 123-130), what sets him off? Why is he really angry? (Pop Culture Classroom, Comics Education Outreach)

After discussing these questions, the students could do the Stereotype/Archetype Project provided in Teacher's Guide on page 15:

The character of Chin-Kee is an obvious (and offensive) stereotype of those of Chinese descent. His presence in the novel is meant to both expose the nature and repugnance of passive racism as well as create a test for the character of Jin/Danny. Consider modern popular culture and identify another character that serves a similar purpose in another work. This can be a film, book, graphic novel, music video, etc. Write an analysis of this character in which you identify the text, author, character, and plot. Explore the appearance, mannerisms, and actions of the character and why they are considered offensive. Consider why this character exists and what purpose he/she serves in the work (Pop Culture Classroom, Comics Education Outreach, p. 15).

This project addresses the core elements of reflecting, interpreting and critically evaluate English texts, the students gain knowledge of language, culture and society (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

This graphic novel is highly suited as a source of insight into life skills in the English classroom. The story offers insight into young people's struggles with identity. It is, like Doughty notes, a story that deals with transformation, becoming something other. The struggle for identity is universal for all young people, whether they struggle with personal or national identity, gender identity or sexual identity. Students could be made aware of any identity struggles they might be facing and reminded that being true to one's soul is the only way of being free. To aid and assist the students in their reflection I would use these questions from American Born Chinese Teacher's Guide:

1. What kinds of challenges does Jin face as the child of Chinese immigrants?
What kinds of challenges do you face each day when you prepare to attend school?
2. On page 60, the Monkey King reveals his new form. How is it different from the way he looked before? Why do you think he changed his appearance?

3. How does the concept of changing appearances factor into Jin's story? How and why does he change the way he looks? Are there similarities to what the Monkey King does?
4. The Monkey King's path to escaping his captivity lies in returning to his true self. The same is true of Danny/ Jin and the Monkey King's son. Have you ever been tested in such a manner? Was there a time when you needed to be true to yourself in order to move forward?" (Pop Culture Classroom, Comics Education Outreach, p. 10).

The students could first discuss this in groups and then each student could write their individual answer that could be handed in to the teacher. The students could also be assigned the Mask Project in the Teacher's Guide page 15:

In the book, many of the characters alter their appearance in order to attempt to fit in with those around them. The Monkey King becomes taller and stands upright, Jin turns into the blonde-haired Danny, and Wei-Chan disguises himself as a human. In our world, we don't use magic to change how we look, but we do adjust our appearance for one reason or another. Identify the ways that you change your "look" in order to fit in socially. Using thick paper and other materials, create a mask which represents those changes (and any other adjustments you would like to make) (Pop Culture Classroom, Comics Education Outreach, p. 15).

Alteration 1: Have students wear the masks and interact. They can ask specific questions like "What is the most significant change you want to make," "Why did you want to change _____," or "What surprises you most about what I have changes?" (Pop Culture Classroom, Comics Education Outreach, p. 15).

Alteration 2: A writing piece can accompany this project in which the student crafts a short reflection on the experience of creating the mask and revisits changes which they have deemed necessary for a successful social existence (Pop Culture Classroom, Comics Education Outreach, p. 15).

While working on this project, the interdisciplinary topic of health and life skills is addressed and students develop "the ability to understand and influence factors that are important for mastering their own lives and this helps students in dealing with success and failures as well as personal challenges" (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

6 Conclusion

In this thesis, my objective was to show how graphic novels can provide a source of insight into the interdisciplinary topic of life skills. As the curriculum emphasises use of texts in the teaching of the interdisciplinary topic of life skills, graphic novels can be considered a relevant genre to explore and use for Norwegian L2 learners of English in upper secondary. By exploring what concepts make up life skills, discussion of theories about reading and comprehension, and finally analysis of three different graphic novels, I answered the thesis question I posed in the introduction: How can graphic novel serve as a source of insight into life skills?

Graphic novels as a genre are highly motivating, they develop important literacy skills as well as employ both visual and verbal modalities. They can also transport the readers into new spaces through new themes and topics. It is easier to comprehend a text when it is supported by visual expression, thus the graphic novels are suited for both competent readers and reluctant readers. The combination of visual and verbal modalities allows the students to see the whole situation and make it easier for them to read between the lines or read the gutter. Unlike other visual media, like film and video, the graphic novel is “permanent” and therefore the students are in complete control of the information presented in the story. This makes the graphic novel a powerful educational tool. Although graphic novels have suffered a setback because of bad reputation, it is possible to conclude that the genre is suitable for Norwegian L2 students in upper secondary.

The graphic novels I have chosen to analyse are cognitively accessible to students in upper secondary, they provide main characters that are close to the age group of the students and the graphic novels can contribute in the teaching of the interdisciplinary topic of life skills. The graphic novels take us into very different worlds and into the destinies of very different characters. We have met the couple Callum and Sephy that live in a discriminating society, a young Persian girl that is sent to live by herself in a foreign country, and finally, a superhero monkey and Chinese American boy who struggle with their identity. Although the characters belong in different historical, political, social, and cultural contexts, similarities can be found in the fact they are all affected by people close to them. All three characters experience recognition and nonrecognition, and this affects the development of their identity. They are all subjected to cultural and racial microaggressions, and as a result, each of the main characters struggles for recognition in their own way, and consequently they show various degrees of

resilience depending on their circumstances. In conclusion, the three graphic novels provide an example of how graphic novels can serve as a source of insight into the interdisciplinary topic of life skills, as well as a starting point in the discussion of historical, social, and cultural issues.

I have also pointed out that the graphic novels can be employed as a starting point for discussion of historical events, cultural and social issues such as racism, political oppression, and oppression of women, as well as racial microaggression and cultural dominance. In the sections that deals with didactic potential, I explore how the graphic novels can be employed in the achievement of several of the core curriculum objectives. I have suggested both pre reading, while reading, and post reading activities that approach the interdisciplinary topic of life skills. In addition, the tasks deal with how to employ the novels in the classroom to explore historical and political events, as well as social, cultural, and racial issues. I also include suggestions on how to approach how to include the interdisciplinary topic of democracy and citizenship. All the tasks and activities suggested are supported by the core elements in the curriculum and students should acquire knowledge of language as well as knowledge of different cultures and societies.

A limitation of this project is that it is merely theoretical. As a result, the analysis and didactic activities are theoretical suggestions to how the interdisciplinary topic of life skills could be approached using these specific graphic novels. Therefore, it would be beneficial to explore how these suggestions would work in a classroom setting in upper secondary. That would make it possible to explore different teaching methods and practical implications. One alternative for further research could be to conduct a qualitative research project in the form of reader response. Some of the writing activities suggested in the didactic potential section may be useful to elicit response to the texts. Such a project would make it possible to investigate how effective graphic novels are in creating awareness of life skills and whether students are able to relate the characters and the themes they have studied to their own lives.

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