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Article

Comics, questions, action! Engaging students and instruction librarians with the Comics-Questions Curriculum

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Abstract

In a four-session Summer Bridge programme, we experimented with new curricular and pedagogical ideas with a group of incoming freshmen. We developed the Comics-Questions Curriculum (CQC), which melds students' question asking with a focus on comics. The purpose of this paper is to describe the rationale for and ongoing development of the CQC as well as the ways the CQC fosters engagement of students and librarians, builds upon students' existing skills but propels them forward toward college-level work, and positions librarians as partners in students' college work. Although it was designed for a specific purpose initially, the CQC in its current state is widely adaptable to other contexts beyond the original scope.

Keywords

action research; comics; first-year undergraduates; graphic novels; higher education; information literacy; pre-entry; question-asking; Research as Inquiry; transition; US

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1. Introduction

What would you do if you were given free rein to design four instruction sessions with a cohort of students about to start their first year of college (pre-freshman)? Rather than teaching the same material that we will in their first-year composition course, we experimented with new curricular and pedagogical ideas. Our choices led to a collection of innovations which had a ripple effect on our own pedagogical work and that of our colleagues. The curriculum we developed melded students' question-asking with a focus on comics: the Comics-Questions Curriculum (CQC). With the CQC, we shift our instructor role to that of facilitator, rather than expert-lecturer, and we empower and engage our students as they take a leading role in shaping their own learning.

We developed the CQC in 2015 and have used it for the past three years with groups of incoming freshman in the SEEK Summer Bridge programme. Although we have made modifications to the curriculum over the years, our pedagogy continues to centre on students asking questions about comics and examining those questions with a critical eye. The curriculum is designed to take place over four class periods, each 75 minutes long, meeting twice each week over a period of two weeks. The CQC classes are built into the students' intensive Summer Bridge schedules which also include English, mathematics, science, and other academic support workshops. SEEK is a

higher education opportunity programme in the senior colleges of the City University of New York (CUNY), of which Hunter College is one (Hunter College Percy Ellis Sutton SEEK Program, n.d.). Summer Bridge is required of all new SEEK students prior to matriculation in the subsequent fall semester. Incoming SEEK students make up a small percentage of the incoming freshman class; SEEK cohort sizes ranged from 157 in 2015 to 76 (2016) to 87 (2017). We used a team approach: each section included 20-25 students working with two librarian-instructors. We designed the CQC to be student-centred and participatory. In practical terms, this meant developing a highly structured curriculum with sufficient prompts and directions for the instructors to guide the student experience. Key innovations are the focus on questions and question-asking, the use of comics as source materials for this process, and our action-research approach to collaborative, reflective and ongoing development of the curriculum from year to year.

2. Literature Review

Our work reflects a shift that is underway in information literacy (IL) instruction. Foasberg (2015) offers an excellent analysis of the changes from the earlier Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Standards for Information Literacy (2000) to the Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education (ACRL, 2015). We see movement from the skills-based Standards to 'IL as a social practice' giving voice to our ideas about students asking questions (Foasberg, 2015, p.700). Additionally, there is a shift in pedagogical philosophy from positivist to constructivist (p.702), a broader understanding of 'the value of particular information objects' giving potential to comics (p.705) and a change in how we think about students, adding instruction that builds on their prior knowledge (p.706) and becomes 'more situated and participatory' (p.708), all of which are incorporated into the philosophy of our CQC.

2.1 Question-asking

Question-asking is a critical skill in the research process, as recognised by the Research as Inquiry Frame in the ACRL Framework (2015), asserting that 'Research is iterative and depends upon asking increasingly complex or new questions...' (p.7). Head's (2016) Project Information Literacy (PIL) Staying Smart study concurs, defining 'Framing Questions' as one of five Competencies and Skills in the Critical Thinking Indices (Figure 19, p.46), a follow-up to an American Association of Colleges and Universities study that determined critical thinking to be one of the key skills that employers are looking for when hiring recent college graduates (p.44).

Yet when we reflected on our own teaching, we realised that we rarely taught question-asking in our one-shot classes. This was despite the fact that we often see students struggle with formulating questions to develop their own research topics. Frequently, students seeking information sources for research papers at our library are not able to articulate their topics as questions and are therefore not fully engaging with the inquiry process foundational to solid academic research. The absence of question asking from college curricula is reflected more broadly in national trends, as seen in Head's Staying Smart study (2016). While 76% of their participants felt well-prepared in terms of 'us[ing] information effectively', only 27% felt that 'college had helped them develop the skill of asking their own questions and staying motivated as continued learners' (p.47).

Badia (2016) confirms many of these assertions. She cites earlier studies suggesting that librarians have traditionally shied away from teaching question-asking. As Badia notes, it can be harder (and more intimidating) to teach abstract concepts like question-asking, compared to more concrete tasks like database searching. Further, in the context of a library instruction session, students often don't have the intrinsic interest in question-asking that they would in database searching. Question-

asking is critical to effective database searching, but those connections are not always clear to students (p.211).

Question-asking enables us to build on students' extant skills. Rothstein and Santana of the Right Question Institute (2011), assert that building on existing skills develops 'more confident learners' (p.7). Toddlers and young children ask a lot of questions in order to make sense of their world, but the number and frequency of question-asking drops off, as students develop other literacies (Kelley-Mudie & Phillips, 2016, p.16). Perhaps one reason why we tend to shy away from question-focused teaching is because it seems too elementary, both to us and to our students. However, these skills need to be further developed and adapted to new purposes as students approach and pursue their college-level work.

Our small group activities, centred on question-asking, also promote student engagement and provide critical steps toward student-centred learning. Rothstein and Santana (2011) acknowledge the necessary rigour, and find it 'offers students the invaluable opportunity to become independent thinkers and self-directed learners' (p.3). Our own informal observations concur, and we note, as do Kelley-Mudie & Phillips (2016), that 'teaching students to become fluent questioners also increases their engagement in learning' (p.16). Donhauser, Hersey, Stutzman, and Zane (2014) agree that 'Every stage of the inquiry process is essential for transformative learning, but the state that propels the process forward like none other is when students are developing their own questions' (p.10). Rothstein and Santana (2011) push these ideas further, finding 'essential thinking and self-advocacy skills' (p.6) which will serve students well in all future endeavours.

We developed the CQC in 2015 prior to reading Rothstein and Santana (2011); their influence added further meaning to the CQC in 2016 and subsequent years. Specifically, their Question Formulation Technique (QFT) and the 'four essential rules for producing your own questions', referred to by our students as just 'The Rules' (p.25), offered additional structure to the lessons. Between 2015 and 2016 we also added daily reflections and made some changes to our own lessons on improving and prioritising (setting the context for) questions. The QFT explicitly employs divergent and convergent thinking, along with metacognition. The full influence can be seen in comparing the CQC in 2015 to that of 2016 (Brown, Margolin, & Ward, 2015, 2016).

2.2 Relevance of comics

Comics offer a unique pairing of both visual and textual information that is also part of a larger narrative or story arc, making them complex and interactive. This complexity requires the reader to make meaning by deciding where and what to look at first and incorporating their own knowledge with the information presented to them on the page (Jacobs, 2014; Schwarz, 2006, 2007; Upson & Hall, 2013; Williams, 2008). Comics, in bridging the visual and the textual, illustrate the multiple and 'multimodal' literacies suggested by Harris (2006), which '... all interact along with information literacy strategies' (p.214). ACRL's Visual Literacy Competency Standards (2011) reinforce the importance of teaching multiple literacies at the college level. Hoover (2011), in describing the 'increasingly complex information environment' in which our students exist, emphasises that 'the need for instruction in texts that contain multiple modes of information and require active participation on the part of the reader … is perhaps greater now than ever before' (p.176). These combined literacies are crucial to helping students become well-informed and savvy consumers and producers of information in an increasingly visual and multimodal culture.

Instead of launching new college students directly into heady academic texts, using comics has 'the potential to engage learners who may not excel or exhibit interest in library instruction or information literacy … and appeal to their preferences' (Upson & Hall, 2013, p.33). Additionally, a

few studies discuss student perceptions of comics, citing their outsider status as one of the benefits of using comics in the classroom (Green, 2014; Hoover, 2011). Comic books are frequently thought of as 'disposable adolescent popular culture detritus' (Duffy, 2010, p.199), therefore new college students may feel a greater sense of engagement with, and ownership of, this non-academic material (Norton, 2003).

2.3 Action research

Action research is a process in which participants plan, implement, observe/evaluate, reflect, and revise for the next cycle (Jefferson, 2014). Because we were working with a new curriculum, we needed to determine what was effective and what needed to be clarified or changed in a timely fashion. The action research methodology aligns perfectly with our approach to curriculum development and improvement. Our process is described in the Findings section below.

3. Methods

3.1 Curriculum design and evolution

In 2015 we first implemented the CQC. As the curriculum developers, we acted as observers and assistants in order to get a clearer picture of how the lessons were working. The CQC changed a great deal each year, though perhaps most dramatically during the first summer. All three versions of our curriculum are available (Brown et al., 2015, 2016, 2017). While the CQC is highly structured, we keep our learning outcomes very simple. At the end of the library sessions, students will be able to:
- generate questions based on material given in class
- identify open-ended and researchable questions.

The simplicity and sharp focus allow us to build the students' skills in this important area, while demonstrating the great importance that we put on these skills. To clarify, we are not grading or assessing the quality of students' questions; we are bolstering their pre-existing question-asking skills.

Students work in several different ways within the CQC. There is individual work, work done in small groups which we cap at four students, and full class discussions. Our classroom spaces are flexible, and we arrange desks and tables in quads. We group students as they sit on the first day; that is, we honour their seating and team preferences. In order to build engagement and better keep track of materials, each group is given a superhero team name and assigned a group folder, which the instructors bring to class each day.

In designing our instruction, we break up the already fractured medium of comics, starting the students off looking at a single panel. By removing the context of the adjacent panels that comics rely on for sequential storytelling, we are imposing a different degree of interaction with the comics. By eliminating the transitions in the comics, students are required to tap into their own imaginations in order to make sense of the panels, giving them even more fodder about which to ask questions.

In the 2017 curriculum, the outline for the four lessons is:
1. Ice breakers and asking questions. Following some icebreaker activities, students are introduced to the rules of the QFT, and then work in small groups for their first question-asking session about a single comic panel. Reflection prompt: What do you think we're going to do next?
2. Analysing questions. Class discussion of open- versus closed-ended questions. Working in their groups, the students analyse their own questions to identify which are open and which

are closed, and which questions they think will help them understand what's happening in the comic panel. Reflection prompt: How might this work might apply to college?

3. Asking more questions. Working individually, students are given the full page from which their previous panel was taken. They are asked to read the page, individually, keeping questions from the previous lesson in mind, and take notes about whether or not their questions were answered. Then, back in groups, students repeat the question-asking exercise they did in lesson 1, only with the full page this time. Reflection prompt: Identify an open-ended question and a question that invites exploration beyond the comic book.

4. Taking it to the scholarly level. Individually, students are asked to read an excerpt from a scholarly journal article about comics (see curricula for details). They are given the prompt to imagine that they have to write a 5-page paper and this is the first article they are reading. As they read, they are tasked with writing down any questions that occur to them. Following their reading, there is a class discussion where students share their best 'researchable' questions and, as a group, discuss whether the reported questions are open or closed, how hard/easy the process was compared to asking about comics, and how they can tie the work we did in these four lessons into their academic work in college.

3.1.1 Icebreakers

When we first conceived of the CQC, we were very interested in how this series of classes might influence students' feelings about the library, or college research more generally. In the 2015 version of our curriculum, we explicitly note this Project Goal (Brown et al., 2015). To that end, in both 2015 and 2016, we started the first session with students completing a brief worksheet. On the front, students replied to some brief demographic questions, including questions that addressed their experience with research, with librarians and their interest in comics. On the back, there was an image of two Sesame Street characters in front of some bookshelves, and students completed a word bubble with 6 words that best described their feelings about doing college-level research. Upon completion, students posted their work – word bubble side up – around the room and the class did a gallery walk, with the librarians verbally establishing commonalities in terms of students' feelings about college research.

We learned quickly that, when asked to do something, students are willing to participate. The work was light, the stakes were low, and no one took it too seriously. While some students did seem to write what they thought we wanted to read (for example: 'I feel comfortable doing college research'), an equal number of students seem to have written responses to make their classmates laugh or get their attention ('Why do we research? Wiki[pedia] helps.'). This exercise was an effective ice breaker as it got students talking to us and to each other and moving around the room.

In 2017 we shifted gears. In order to better introduce the themes of the class and invite the students to engage with the material, we experimented with two new and different ice breakers, run simultaneously. In the first, and more popular, we display a series of Batman images around the room. Students recognise Batman smiling, frowning, yelling, and other distinct emotional states that we started calling 'The Batman Scale'. When they enter, each student is given a small sticky note on which they write one word that describes how they felt about walking into the library. They then post the note on the Batman that most looks like how they feel. We are thus asking them to describe their feelings about approaching an academic library (in many cases for the first time) in both words and images.

We also had a slideshow running on the smartboard when students entered. The slideshow includes images and headlines from recent news and online articles addressing issues of race and

gender in comics and comic-related movies. We asked students, "What questions come to mind about the materials in this slideshow?" and invited them to respond in writing on the whiteboard.

Ultimately, we discovered that students were more eager to complete the single word and add it to a Batman image. As seen in the earlier ice breakers, many seem to select words for the express purpose of entertaining their friends ("Sleepy," "Yikes" and "Shit" as three examples). While students were happy to participate, one word was perhaps not enough for us, as instructors, to understand their feelings about the library.

3.1.2 Reflection prompts

Another key feature of the CQC is the daily use of reflection at lesson's end. Each day's reflection invites the students to think more deeply about the material they have worked on in class. Students write their reflections, along with their superhero team name and the names of the others in their group, in a zine created for the Summer Bridge programme.

In the final class session, the students completed metacognitive activities. In 2015 and 2016, we handed back to the students their Sesame Street comic panels from day one. They were asked to look at those and reflect on our work together over the four sessions. Then we gave them supplies to make another comic panel, effectively a post-test, asking them once again how they felt about college research. We intended to use these pre- and post-test comic panels as a way to measure a change in the students' affect from day one to day four. In 2016 we also asked the students to write one piece of advice they would give to new students. The advice turned into a nice reflection for the students to think back on what they had learned in their brief time at the college, and to recognise that they did in fact have an advantage compared to other incoming freshman who hadn't had the benefit of the Summer Bridge programme.

In 2017 we made some more changes to the final reflections. First, we revisited the Batman images. Again, we asked students to describe their feelings, but the prompt was slightly revised to build on their experience. We asked "Now that you've worked in the library with us for two weeks, how do you think you will feel walking into the library on your first day of school?". Students also read and evaluated their classmates' researchable questions (see Lesson Four), voting on which questions would make the best research projects. Finally, we gave students word bubbles and asked them to produce advice for their fellow new students who have not completed the CQC or the Summer Bridge.

3.2 Selection of comics

One of our goals with this paper is to invite other librarians and educators to choose comics that are most suitable for their own students and pedagogical goals. To that end, we will discuss our own selection criteria, as well as some general guidance. Our own selections were guided by two criteria: the comic panel needed to be visually interesting and appealing to the students, and the panel needed to have enough context to encourage the asking of questions.

In order to be interesting and appealing, we seized the opportunity that Schwarz (2006) suggested: '[m]any graphic novels offer more diverse voices than traditional textbooks' (p. 62) and it is our hope that this diversity might allow the students to engage with the materials on a deeper level than if they were working with more traditional scholarly media. Students at our institution are a racially and ethnically diverse group, and we wanted to acknowledge that in the selection of a similarly diverse array of characters, beyond the superhero standard of white men in capes. Therefore we included a range of female characters, characters of colour, animals, aliens, and robots. We also

wanted some character recognition by our students, either from recent movies or television shows. The Appendix describes how we accomplished those goals.

The chosen comic panels also need to provide enough content to generate questions without being too dense, sparse or boring. We found first issues, either of books or individual storylines, to be ideal for this requirement. The narrative setup or initial world-building and character introductions are a good place for students to begin asking questions. In fact, in most books, the first panel on any given page makes a good starting point. It is also helpful to choose a panel in which a character is reacting to something out of sight. If subsequent panels on the same page include a perspective change, this gives students an easy opportunity to ask and answer questions about what the characters are seeing. Similarly, selecting a panel in which none of the characters are named invites identification questions. Team-up books, in which a familiar character shares a scene with a less recognisable one, work well by prompting questions about the unfamiliar while providing comfort in the recognisable. While we deliberately chose panels in which one of the characters asks a question, it is worth noting that students rarely, if ever, took advantage of these on-panel questions. In the future, we might directly ask students why they avoided this question prompt.

For our project, we took advantage of one of our authors' extensive knowledge and personal collection of comic books. However, teachers without such a collection or background can still make use of this exercise. In selecting materials, never underestimate the value of talking to your local comic shop purveyor. We hope it goes without saying that enlisting the help of your local librarian, either in a public or academic library, is crucial to this process as well. Interlibrary loan can provide comics for those without an extensive collection.

As stated above, we urge readers to set their own criteria, meaningful for their students and goals. We further acknowledge that our selection of comics is a work in progress. Each year, we review to see which comics are popular, and which are less so, as well as considering new additions to our list. Refer to the Appendix for a recommended list of titles, stories, and characters.

3.3 Action research

In 2015, we held pre- and post-workshop meetings with all of the instructors to prepare and review workshop content, as well as to discuss what worked, and what did not. We used these sessions and this feedback to adapt our lesson plans for the subsequent instruction sessions. Action research methodology provides opportunities for continuous revision and improvement of the CQC. This approach is time-consuming and labour-intensive. However, both instructors and students reap immediate benefits in the daily improvements to the curriculum.

Our colleagues who were teaching identified the process as 'fantastic opportunities to learn from the insights and creativity of my colleagues' (Ward, Brown, & Margolin, 2017, p. 33). Based on these discussions, which we documented via shared note-taking on a whiteboard, we updated much of the content as we planned for the following summer and thus began 2016 with a stronger, more streamlined CQC. We continued to engage in the same action research process in 2016 and 2017, though fewer modifications were required day to day. The pre- and post-workshop meetings thus evolved into an opportunity to share experiences with colleagues, strategise among the teaching teams, and discuss pedagogical issues. The benefits of the action research approach, which generated increased collegiality among the participating librarians, have extendedto our regular semester work (Ward et al., 2017).

The immediate feedback from students and instruction librarians informed identification of strengths and weaknesses in our approach and dictated the changes that were made day-to-day, and in subsequent years. After the first day in 2015, we established a mini-lesson based on the Ask Me Anything (AMA) model in response to students' frustration with not understanding the context for our lessons. We revisited this issue in 2016 by incorporating questions about their expectations into the icebreaker. In 2017, we realised that the slide-show icebreaker had several complications in implementation on day one, but we continued to value the exercise. For day two we revised the activity and then followed up with the groups that had been less successful, asking them to take another turn. The revisions to the activity were more successful than our original plans and allowed the students the opportunity to engage in the activity in more meaningful ways.

Some action research changes took place more gradually. In 2015 we provided our students with a total of 20 different panels to choose from. In 2016 and 2017, we reduced this number, as too many options increased the amount of time it took for students to choose a panel. In the summer of 2017, we provided seven panels to choose from. For our students, the most popular panels featured Spider-Man, Deadpool, Rocket Raccoon, Ms. Marvel and Adventure Time characters.

4. Findings

4.1 Student engagement

From the very first day, our CQC classrooms looked different than other library classrooms we had worked in. Students were actively discussing, responding, and interacting. These cohorts of students are together throughout the day in their other Summer Bridge classes, and they get to know each other very well. A primary goal of the Summer Bridge is team building, and the students are certainly there to make friends and become comfortable with new situations. Therefore it is critical that our contribution to the Summer Bridge, the CQC, continues this team-building ethos. Our icebreaker activities are only the first of many to highlight this and they help the students and the instructors to get to know each other.

Beginning with the question-asking activities, the students work in small groups, and we then ask these groups to report out to the class. We ask each group for their total number of questions asked, and their first and last questions, in part to contribute to the competitive spirit, and as a way to encourage conversation. We do not evaluate questions. In our classrooms there are no bad or stupid questions, but there are often questions that surprise us for one reason or another. There are cases where we observe a small group working well together, where questions pour out of the students, and one student's question leads to the next student's question. There are other cases where students seem not to be working together -- or working at all. While the latter group will get our attention, and an instructor might gently remind them of the first rule ('Ask as many questions as you can'), students are not called out for their level of participation, whether too quiet, or too raucous.

By shifting the power dynamic in the classroom, and allowing the students' voices to drive the conversation, guided by a librarian in the role of facilitator, we are doing a number of interrelated and empowering things. We are showing students that they belong here, both in college, and in the library; and we are demonstrating to the students that it is appropriate to ask questions of people in positions of power.

4.2 Building on existing skills

As seen in Rothstein and Santana (2011), the fundamental nature of question-asking enables us to build upon students' extant skills. We see evidence of this in the fact that students can engage in the question-asking exercises with minimal instruction. The focus of our work is thus transformational as we guide students' question-asking skill from reading a comic panel to thinking about open-ended and researchable questions, to ultimately reading and asking questions about a scholarly article. In the examples that they share with us, we see a mixture of informational questions and those that invite further exploration. In the four sessions that comprise the CQC, students develop their skills in preparation for the diagnostic required in their freshman composition course: reading and responding to a scholarly article.

It is not only the students that benefit from the CQC. The instruction librarians also adapt their skills to incorporate new modes of instruction. Some colleagues who taught the first summer expressed reluctance to hold back judgement, comments, and examples from the students. As a team of instruction librarians accustomed to having limited time with students, many of the people who taught that first summer felt that they were not really teaching if they were not demonstrating examples for the students. We encourage people to push through that discomfort and to see where this new method will take them. We see a shift into new modes of instruction during the regular semester (Ward et al., 2017). We have also found that individual elements and lessons from the CQC are widely adaptable to other contexts outside the four-session course for which it was developed. Most importantly, instruction librarians involved with the CQC in the various summer sessions started incorporating question-asking lessons into our one-shot instruction.

4.3 The library as a welcoming space

The shift in focus in the classroom allowed us to examine our library interactions with students with new eyes, to ask ourselves how we could make the library a more welcoming place to students. Our first focus is on ourselves, acknowledging that students identify us as authority figures, and empowering them to interact with us differently. By engaging them in the process of asking questions of us and of each other, we are ideally planting the seeds that this behaviour is desirable and beneficial in college and beyond.

In 2015 and 2016, we created a display in our main campus library's display cases for the start of the fall semester using the images with the word bubbles the students had completed. Our initial intention was for these to serve as a touchstone for the SEEK students when they entered the library, allowing them to see their work on display and recall some of the work we did together over the summer. We have since realised that these displays demonstrate to other new students entering the library that they are not alone in their feelings about starting college and conducting research. We continued this for 2017, including the students' hand-written advice for new students. The displays attract a lot of attention at the start of the fall semester and help contribute to the welcoming environment we hope to foster at our library. Since 2015, we have increased the presence of student work, of all sorts, in our displays.

5. Discussion

5.1 Librarian reflections

Programmes of this scale (three co-coordinators, a pool of about ten librarians teaching, and literally hundreds of students) often feel as if they have a life of their own, and that there is no one team that guides their evolution. Reflecting on our three years of experience, this programme is a

lot of work, but also a lot of fun. It feels like one of the places within our instruction programme where we have the greatest impact on students, in part because we see them so much in such a small amount of time, but also because they are such active participants. It is only when we take time to reflect, as in this paper, that we have the opportunity to see how each participant type (coordinators, librarians, students) has shaped the programme and made their mark.

As the developers and coordinators of the CQC we have considered the efforts and labour that have gone into the development of this project, and continue to go into its annual implementation. Frequently, throughout the spring and summer, we ask ourselves if the efforts are commensurate with the results and, upon reflection, we believe that they are. While the full CQC is replicable only in a very particular set of circumstances, the principle one being four sessions with a group of students over the course of only a few weeks, the lessons and structure of the CQC have lent, and continue to lend, themselves to a variety of different teaching contexts. While the initial outlay of effort and labour were great, related and subsequent lessons have come at a much lower cost.

We further urge others to consider ways to incorporate small elements of the CQC into their work, such as activities centred on question-asking, and allowing students' work to drive the conversation in the classroom. Several who have taught in the programme have, independently, developed one-shot lessons around question-asking, adapting work from the CQC. This work has, in turn, influenced the first year composition (FYC) course with an increasing emphasis on asking a research question rather than beginning research with an argument or debatable topic. Since we work with all sections of this course and participate in yearly programme assessments with the FYC team, it has been satisfying to see the symbiosis between our shifting instruction and their revisions and adaptations to the research paper assignment. The impact on librarians' instruction is further explored in our ACRL paper (Ward et al., 2017).

As we reflect on the implementation of the CQC, we ask ourselves whether it would be strengthened or weakened by more traditional assessments of student learning. On the one hand, Rothstein and Santana's second rule reminds students to not judge each other's work. In the interest of developing a student-centred classroom, we shared the belief that we should not judge students' questions. At the same time, we want to know what impact, if any, that our work is having, and if it is worth continuing. Each year we reflect upon ways we might assess students' work that would be authentic and meaningful to them and to us. For now, we maintain our original intention to welcome this cohort of students each summer with engaging material that would get them started asking questions and thinking about how those questions might be explored or addressed in other contexts outside of the Summer Bridge.

The SEEK programme, too, is a work in progress. As they continue developing their programmatic offerings, they communicate with us so our work can be adapted to address any changes at the programme level. The SEEK administrators are very collegial and supportive of our work, and we continue to work with them on new initiatives. Their aim is to have the students work on something tangible that they might take with them into their first semester of college, and the students' question-asking skills they hone with us are an important part of that process. We will work with SEEK leaders to help determine what shape this deliverable might take and what our role in the process might be.

Our colleagues who participate in the CQC have also made valuable contributions in shaping the CQC. We explore the transformations to our own library instruction programme in a paper presented at ACRL in 2017 (Ward et al., 2017) including widespread discussion of the question-asking process in a number of contexts.

5.2 Limitations

Our study is certainly limited by the methodology we employed. Our work would no doubt have evolved differently if we had not engaged in action research (allowing for *in situ* evolution). Evaluating student work at the end of each summer, and using that to measure and make changes would likely also have pushed our project in different directions, both philosophically and practically. Such assessments may, for example, have added a more goal-oriented focus that might negatively shift the librarians' facilitation to more traditional and structured teaching; more importantly, such a shift might have stifled the students' conversations and participation.

Speaking from a more practical perspective, the CQC relies on images from comics and therefore has limited applicability for students with severe visual impairments. This is an issue that we can address moving forward. Including image descriptions that can be read aloud to students, alongside the printouts of the comic panels, is a step that we will take in the future. The CQC could be used with materials other than comics. Students could be assigned to ask questions about their research topics, or they could be tasked with asking questions about any topics relevant to the class, as an exercise to strengthen their question-asking skills.

The student perspective is also missing from our current analysis. The SEEK programme requires participating students to provide daily feedback on every workshop they attend. However, for our project, we are more interested in their longer-term assessment: whether this work was useful in college-level research, on the job, or in their personal lives. While we can witness their active engagement in the classroom, it is a challenge to know if this had any lasting effects. Therefore, we are in the process of conducting interviews with a small number of students who participated in the CQC over the past few years who now have a semester or more of college work to reflect upon. Their voices are a crucial piece of the picture and including them in our future plans for the CQC is the next logical step.

5.3 Areas for further research

To close the loop, there is information that we have collected, in the form of student work, that we still plan to analyse in order to further improve the CQC programme. These improvements will, in turn, extend our impact in the other areas described above.

While aspects of the students' daily reflections are already used to inform daily lesson modifications, we also plan to use these to measure mastery of the CQC learning outcomes. For example, in one of the reflections we ask students to identify an open-ended question, so those responses will help us to measure the impact of that particular lesson. Additionally, with the accumulation of multiple cohorts, we can begin to dig more deeply into those responses, noting if there are patterns over time and/or adjustments that we need to make to our curriculum.

Introducing students to scholarly articles, and reading, understanding, and synthesising this form of scholarship, is a crucial piece of many FYC curricula. Therefore, we deliberately introduce students to an excerpt of a scholarly article in the CQC as an extra measure of preparation. At our institution, students' FYC courses start with a diagnostic assessment where students read and reflect on a scholarly article. Their work with the article excerpt during the CQC serves as a useful first step toward that assignment. We collect a sampling of individual students' questions about the scholarly article and are in the early stages of coding and analysis. We plan to analyse these and report our findings to the FYC instructors so that we can all better understand what we observe incoming freshman understand and do not understand as they read scholarly articles. These student questions and responses to the article excerpt may also indicate when it is time to update the

article we use. Over the course of the three summers of the CQC we have used two different academic journal articles that treat comics as subjects of scholarship, helping to connect our use of comics in the classroom to the larger landscape of academic research (Dalbeto & Oliveira, 2015; Rivera, 2007). It is our hope that, through the time spent with us working with comics and questions, students start to see a place for themselves and their interests in academia.

6. Conclusion

In summary, the CQC has proven to be an engaging experience for both students and librarians. Our work has had a ripple effect in our library and on our campus: affecting our library instruction programme more broadly, influencing the work of our colleagues in the first-year composition programme and contributing to the larger influence of the library on our college.

What began as an opportunity for a group of librarians to work closely with incoming SEEK students each summer has turned into something much larger and more rewarding than we anticipated. Our interest in continuing our work with the CQC persists as we identify new ways to adapt it to other situations. In presenting and writing about it for other librarians, we find more questions to explore with our own work and are curious to see if and how others might incorporate some of this work into their own. Speaking with students who have experienced the CQC as well as continuing the dialogue with the SEEK programme administrators will help us grow this programme in ways that are more useful to students as they start college.

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Appendix: Selection Criteria

Category	Sub-category and definition	Recommended titles/stories/characters
Visually appealing to students		
	Ethnically and racially diverse; diverse by gender. We wanted most (if not all) of our students to feel comfortable with the characters we selected, and we wanted those characters to be relatable.	Luke Cage Miles Morales Wonder Woman Squirrel Girl Princess Bubblegum Ms. Marvel Hawkeye (Kate Bishop)
	Recognisable from popular culture (movies, tv, etc.) in order to make the assignment appealing to comic book lovers and non-comic book lovers alike.	Avengers Captain America Guardians of the Galaxy Adventure Time Spider-Man Runaways
	Go beyond superheroes.	Haunt of Fear, Weird Fantasy, Strange Sports Stories, Adventure Time, Lumberjanes
	Show characters in settings that are familiar to our students, for example teenage girls talking in their bedroom, parents talking to children, couples on dates.	Ms. Marvel Chilling Adventures of Sabrina Wonder Woman

Category	Sub-category and definition	Recommended titles/stories/characters
Panels that encourage question-asking		
	First issues of books, characters or particular storylines are helpful, as they provide narrative setup, thus encouraging readers' questions.	Daredevil #1, Chilling Adventures of Sabrina #1
	Strong panel to page connections; that is, samples where some of the questions that are directly asked in an individual panel can be answered with information found on the page.	Any book
	Characters reacting to an event/image that is out of sight (in the panel), but is revealed on the page.	Any book
	Samples that mix familiar and unfamiliar characters can also be helpful.	Avenging Spider-man, Batman: The Brave and the Bold
	Short comic stories from anthologies	Haunt of Fear, Tales from the Crypt, Weird Fantasy, Strange Sports Stories