

EXPLORING COMICS IN A PERFORMATIVE WAY

How children use language, body, voice, and things in panel readings

CAROLINE WITTIG

University of Wuppertal

Abstract

Comics are widely regarded as a medium particularly well-suited for heterogeneous learning groups (J. Hoffmann, 2021, p. 202). As a form of all-age literature in the best sense, they offer meaning to readers from diverse backgrounds, making them relevant to all stages of literary socialization (Staiger, 2021, p. 33). Despite these promising characteristics, there are still few didactic concepts for incorporating comics into aesthetic learning in schools. One notable approach is reading panels. This method involves a dynamic form of staging comics, where readers not only read the text aloud but also make sounds corresponding to the images. This practice has proven effective in slowing down the reading process and encouraging close examination of both text and images (Wittig, 2022). The complexity of the task invites students to experiment with strategies, reflect, and discuss the comic. As a cooperative learning activity (Wocken, 2014, p. 71), panel reading works particularly well in inclusive literature lessons.

This article presents qualitative empirical research on the potential of panel readings in heterogeneous learning groups. Panel readings of *Lehmriese lebt!* [Clay Giant's Alive!] (Kuhl, 2015) in elementary schools were transcribed using audio and video data. Key incidents, as defined by Kroon & Sturm (2007), were identified and analyzed using interaction analysis (Krummheuer & Naujok, 1999). The findings reveal that during panel readings, children engage deeply with one another, discussing the stories and how they are narrated, using language, body movement, voice, and things.

Keywords: Comics, multimodal communication, performative methods, heterogeneous learning groups

1. INTRODUCTION

Multimodality is a dazzling and vague term that refers to a relatively ordinary phenomenon: it involves medial and communicative actions utilizing various sign systems (language, picture, sound, etc.) (Stöckl, 2011, p. 45). The multimodality discourse (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2017; Stöckl, 2011) perceives other modalities, such as pictures, sounds, and movements, as equivalent to language. Recently, multimodality has gained attention in didactic research, encompassing learning objects like multimodal literature (Eisenmann & Summer, 2020; Dammers et al., 2020) and multimodal communication in learning processes (Ganapathy, 2016; Mayer et al., 2018). Exploring modalities beyond language introduces new perspectives on storytelling and communicative acts within diverse learning groups. This is where the panel reading comes on.

Panel readings are a presentation format for introducing new comics. They originate in the publishing industry. During panel readings, individuals take on designated roles to read the texts or speech bubbles, while sounds complement the images. Everyday objects, basic musical instruments, or digital devices can be utilized for this purpose. From a didactic perspective, panel readings effectively merge the potentials of multimodal storytelling and multimodal communication.

The article demonstrates how children—with varying abilities and diverse levels of prior knowledge—perform the comic book *Clay Giant's Alive!* [Lehmriese lebt!] (Kuhl, 2015) through panel readings. It addresses the question: How do elementary school children conduct a comic in panel readings? Additionally, it explores how panel readings facilitate aesthetic experiences. In this context, aesthetic experience refers to the encounter with sensually perceptible phenomena that is devoid of utilitarian or pragmatic purposes, and which humans reflect on emotionally (Domkowsky, 2018, p. 43).

The article follows this structure: Initially, it describes multimodal storytelling in comics, focusing on their narrative qualities that offer potential for engaging in sound production. Subsequently, it discusses empirical reception studies on multimodal literature, emphasizing that engagement with comics should be both multimodal and performative. This leads to didactic considerations regarding the staging of literature and its learning potential. Building upon this foundation, the article highlights a qualitative empirical study of panel readings in an elementary school.

1.1 *Multimodal storytelling in comics*

Comics employ sequences of pictures called panels, often incorporating specific signs like motion lines, metaphors, and written language in speech bubbles and text boxes (McCloud, 1993). This interplay of pictures, text, and various comic signs renders comics a multimodal medium. Comprehending comics requires multimodal competence—a skill to merge various sign systems into a coherent narrative (Stöckl,

2011, p. 45). Furthermore, comic reception is a sensory and imagination-stimulating process: Textual elements provoke auditory sensations, while images enhance inner visualizations, cultivating what Uhlig refers to as an ‘enriched imagination’ (Uhlig, 2013, p. 40). This enriched imagination manifests as visual concretizations, narrative embeddings, and emotional occupations.

Multimodal storytelling in comics makes intermedial connections (Wilde, 2021, p. 45) and adds dramaturgical aspects to the medium (Krichel, 2018, pp. 170–172). This multimodality engages readers’ various sensory channels; through imagination, readers can perceive sounds and even sensations like smells and tastes (Pellitteri, 2014) in a co-modal sense (Heindl, 2014, p. 166). Comics also invite readers to envision them as musical scores (Unsel, 2017, p. 56). In the subsequent discussion, I will delve into the incorporation of sounds within comics, focusing initially on pictures and comic signs, then exploring linguistic and graphic text aspects.

1.1.1 Sounds within pictures and comic signs

Sounds depicted within pictures and comic signs can appear directly or symbolically. Directly integrated sounds manifest as musical elements, sound-related objects, spaces, or actions within images, evoking specific sound associations (Bachmann, 2014, p. 10). Moreover, elements within images prompt readers to imagine corresponding sounds (ibid.). Certain comic signs, especially emphasis signs and pictorial metaphors, suggest sound. By accentuating actions and emotions of the characters, these signs encourage readers to perceive or simulate related auditory elements. Additionally, various pictorial metaphors refer to specific sounds and noises (e.g., small clouds rising from the nose suggesting snorting).

1.1.2 Sounds within linguistic and graphic texts

In textual elements, sound words and character speech imply auditory suggestions. Sound words, either as inflections or onomatopoeias, hint at sounds (e.g., ‘bark’, ‘woof’). Speech bubbles provide characters with a voice and offer sensory descriptions that readers ‘hear’ with their eyes (McCloud, 2006, p. 146).

The language of comics always encompasses a graphic dimension. The amalgamation of pictures, text, and sound elements in comic texts signifies their audibility across dimensions such as location, timing, duration, and intensity (Schüwer, 2002, p. 208). Conventions in font design—boldness, size, slant, and italics—convey volume and sound characteristics (McCloud, 2006, p. 147). Phonetic instructions and typographic variations also dictate sound representation (Heimgartner, 2014, p. 175). Additionally, font background, colors, and symbols indicate speech style and tone (Bachmann, 2014, p. 10), while text placement within panels highlights sound sources.

1.2 Empirical reception studies on multimodal literature

Comics are usually perceived as suitable literature for readers of all ages. They play a pivotal role in the process of literary socialization (Staiger, 2021, p. 33). Notably, they offer considerable potential for diverse learning groups within classroom settings (J. Hoffmann, 2021, p. 202). Despite this, the full aesthetic value of comics remains underappreciated in schools. While some German literature educators view comics as transitional materials (Staiger, 2021, p. 30), empirical evidence underscores, that comics can significantly contribute to both motivating and promoting reading habits (e.g. Aldahash & Altalhab, 2019; Cook, 2017; Setyawan, 2018). However, many educators hesitate to incorporate comics due to their uncertainties in navigating this medium and the lack of clear educational guidelines (Block, 2013; Lapp et al., 2012). Recognizing this need, didactic research has started to address this gap by offering guidance on the practical application of comics in classrooms through academic articles and thematic journal issues (e.g., Bakis, 2012; Engels et al., 2021; Jaffe & Hurwich, 2019).

This study aims to explore the concept of panel readings in response to the growing interest in comics, focusing on their aesthetic potential, particularly within diverse learning groups. Drawing from empirical reception studies on graphic literature, key findings are presented below.

Empirical research reveals that children and adolescents demonstrate interpretative skills when engaging with graphic and linguistic stylistic devices within multimodal literature (Chase et al., 2014; Connors, 2013; Dallacqua, 2012). Comics play a significant role in fostering reflections on both the 'what' and 'how' of multimodal storytelling. Conversational analyses of graphic narratives highlight that children express themselves vocally and playfully within comics, often using gestures and facial expressions (J. Hoffmann, 2015, p. 177, 2019a, p. 173). In doing so, children resort to performative modes of representation (Wulf, 2014, pp. 111–112), such as in the scenic reenactment of situations, especially in movement representations (J. Hoffmann 2019a, p. 176). Particularly, this scenic interpretation aids multilingual children in conveying the atmosphere of visually depicted stories (J. Hoffmann, 2019b, p. 62). Elementary school children predominantly engage scenically with language compared to their preschool counterparts, whose scenic interpretation leans more towards physical actions (ibid.)

These findings emphasize that aesthetic experiences with comics require more than just language; they necessitate diverse forms of creative expression, especially through voice and body. Comics, being multimodal mediums, evoke sensory and interpretive processes, urging scenic play. Preparing texts with multiple modalities enhances learning channels, encompassing various semiotic modes such as language, design, images, color, smell, sound, and movement (Mayer, 2018, p. 212). Creative and playful methods prove particularly effective when interacting with images (Krichel, 2018, p. 186). Given children's inclination towards performative presentation modes in discussions about multimodal literature (J. Hoffmann, 2019a,

b), exploring body, voice, and "thing practices" [Ding-Praktiken] (Rabenstein, 2018) in literature engagement becomes highly valuable. The expression 'thing-practices' illustrates that the meaning of things is not rigidly fixed, but emerges through the way we deal with them, as will be shown later. The subsequent chapter delves deeper into the significance of scenic approaches to literature.

1.3 Staging literature

The study adopts three distinct concepts of staging: 'On stage', 'in the head', and 'in the text' (Lösener, 2017, p. 35). These staging approaches are interconnected. While each stage production remains unique, it becomes repeatable through a shared mental performance plan, termed as mental staging. The mental staging begins right at the start, as participants contemplate various performance methods even before the initial rehearsal run. During subsequent rehearsals, they harmonize their diverse mental interpretations to achieve the final on-stage rendition. Moreover, texts or images contribute to this process through implicit staging (*ibid.*).

The way readers shape a stage production is also influenced by their experiences with performed staging in general. The (re)enactment of stories scenically commences in early childhood through role-playing. Consequently, elementary school children already possess substantial experience in using language, voice, and body (Andresen, 2017)—fundamental components of theater performance. Both professional theater and role-play involve a dynamic interplay of doing and observing (C. Hoffmann, 2007), rules and spontaneity (Wetzel, 2005), as well as speech and action. In their play, children experience through the interaction of doing and observing that operate simultaneously in both the field of sight and the field of significance (Vygotskij, 1981). In the field of sight, players remain themselves, objects retain their literal meanings, and space-time exists as in reality. However, in the field of significance, children take on roles, reinterpret objects, and transform spaces for their play. This interplay creates a mix of planned and situational play, blending rules and spontaneity. Consequently, children not only engage in play but also narrate and comment on it. To distinguish between play and non-play moments, they employ vocal (Bose, 2003) and linguistic (Andresen, 2017) cues. As demonstrated by Andresen, this includes metacommunicative statements that explicitly describe the transformation processes of play actions and objects, such as saying 'this is now the telephone' while holding a doll's iron to one's ear (Andresen, 2017, p. 95). The verbalization happens here in combination with thing practices.

Overall, the theoretical considerations provide three crucial arguments for the panels reading. Firstly, a comic staging makes sense because the medium itself invites performative representations. The empirical reception research indicates, secondly, that children willingly and intensively make use of this performative potential. Thirdly, staging tasks encourage a more careful reading and viewing (implicit staging) as well as imagination (mental staging). Performing the panel

reading, in turn, invites the revival of childhood play experiences and engages in metacommunicative reflections on the play.

1.4 Aims and research questions

The superordinate research question focuses on the reconstruction of the staging process: How do elementary school children stage a comic in panel readings?

I examine this question using the comic *Clay Giant's Alive!* (Kuhl, 2015) as an example. In doing so, I differentiate the superordinated research question into two sub-questions:

- How do the children in the panel reading deal with the sounds within pictures, comic signs, and texts?
- How do the children use language, voice, body, and 'thing practices' to realize the staging of the comic as a panel reading? How do they distinguish between field of sight and field of significance, and how do they determine ways of playing for the stage production?

2. METHOD

A heterogeneous learning group with differences in gender, age (6–10 years), language, prior knowledge, and (reading) abilities performed panel readings of the comic book *Clay Giant's Alive!* in the context of a literature project in school.

2.1 The children's comic *Clay Giant's Alive!* (Kuhl, 2015)

Clay Giant's Alive! is about a golem created in the play of two children and his search for the purpose of his existence. The stations that the golem passes through contain numerous references to traditional as well as contemporary golem narratives. The story begins with the creation of a golem by two children. It then tells of his search for meaning and of occupations for which he was not created. Frustration over this leads to the golem rebelling and finally his rescue. In the end, the golem finds his mission in playing with the two children who created him. Thus, play is the starting point and the sense of the golem's existence. For this reason, the story seems particularly suitable for playful manners, like panel readings.

2.2 Participants

I conducted the study in Germany at an urban elementary school with a Montessori profile. Due to the pedagogical concept of the school, children are taught in mixed-grade classes (ages six to ten). Families living in the school's catchment area are heterogeneous in terms of socioeconomic background, cultural origin, and language.

A teacher at this school has agreed to allow her class to participate in the study. Of the total of 25 children, 19 took up the offer. I anonymized the names of the

children and gave pseudonyms to protect the individuals. Seven children in the learning group are seven years old (three girls and four boys), five children are eight years old (two girls and three boys), five children are nine years old (two girls and three boys), and two children are ten years old (one boy and one girl). Two nine-year-old girls need hearing aids. Seven children have an immigrant background, five of them grew up multilingual (family languages Arabic, Moroccan-Arabic and Filipino). Among the multilingual children are two girls from the second year of school attendance who speak little German at the time of the project and cannot read or write yet.

2.3 Tools for data collection, preparation, selection, and analysis

In order to answer the research questions, I have chosen a reconstructive and interpretative approach that is located in interpretative teaching research (Krummheuer & Naujok, 1999). Methodically, I proceeded as follows.

2.3.1 Data collection: Audio- and video-based observation

The children were introduced to individual chapters of the comic in various ways: discussing the story (J. Hoffmann, 2019b), participating in reading tandems where they read aloud to each other (J. Hoffmann, 2015), and performing using character and sound cards (J. Hoffmann & Wittig, 2022). Throughout and after reading the story, the children explored different approaches to the comic, engaging in speaking activities as well as sound exercises related to characters and key motifs (Wittig, 2020; 2021).

To create sounds, the children used a 'sound suitcase' filled with everyday household and natural items capable of producing diverse sounds: cans, jars, lids, spoons, sticks, pinecones, various types of paper, aluminum foil, plastic sheets, and more. Unlike musical instruments, these objects did not require musical skills; instead, they encouraged the children to freely experiment with sounds and focus on their impact. Moreover, the children were encouraged to find items themselves that could produce interesting sounds, an opportunity they eagerly embraced. The project culminated in small group panel readings, with the children selecting chapters to perform. At the project's conclusion, each group presented their outcomes to the class.

This approach facilitated an engaging and creative exploration of the comic book, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the narrative while encouraging active participation and creativity among the children. The different interactions with the comic offered the children guiding patterns, enabling them to approach panel reading through imitation and adaptation. To capture these learning moments, I used six Dictaphones and two cameras. Furthermore, I collected the children's pictures and texts. The analysis focuses on the process of arranging the panel

readings, while the additional learning activities provide context for the interpretation of the data.

2.3.2 *Data preparation: Multimodal transcription*

I transcribed the data using the conversation analytic transcription system 2 (Selting et al., 2009). This system makes interactive processes such as overlaps, pauses, and interruptions in the conversation visible. Since the spoken word alone is not sufficient for the purpose of the study, I added a multimodal perspective to the transcription system: An additional column describes extra-linguistic actions in detail with body movements and ‘thing practices’ and maps them parallel to the word utterance. The transcript shows the staged comic double page in a separate line. The presentation thus treats language, voice, body, ‘thing practices’, and the comic book as equals. Due to this extension of the transcription system, I speak of multimodal transcripts. For this article, I have translated the original German transcripts into English. The transcript also includes an English translation of the original German-language comic. You will find the most important transcription conventions in the appendix.

2.3.3 *Data selection: Comparative procedure and key incident analysis*

Initially, I conducted a rough pre-selection of all data related to the panel reading, following the comparative procedure (Naujok, 2012, p. 112). Eventually, I chose to analyze the first rehearsal run of three distinct groups that staged different chapters. I chose the first run because here the children engaged in discussion and playful exploration. Building from this choice, I identified contexts pivotal for interpreting the rehearsal, notably encompassing the initial reception and subsequent staging approaches in further runs.

In the next step, I selected specific scenes from the first rehearsal as well as situations from the first reception. In this process, I employed the concept of key incident analysis (Kroon & Sturm, 2007). Key incidents are important passages of the transcripts that refer to more abstract and general structures. As J. Hoffmann (2011, p. 124) suggests, identifying key passages involves a linkage between literary reception research (Wieler, 1997) and reconstructive social research (Bohnsack, 2000). My selection of key incidents depended on three main factors: In a first step, I examined the linguistic interactions among the children—entailing substantial conversations or discussions regarding the comic or its staging. In a second step, I identified vocal, ‘thing practical’, or physical actions within the transcript. In a third step, I considered the comic *Clay Giant’s Alive!* and its implicit staging. In this way, the process of data selection resembles a ‘pincer movement’, where a problem is tackled from different angles (Naujok, 2012, p. 114): On one hand, it draws from established theoretical knowledge, while on the other, it aligns with salient features observed in the material.

2.3.4 Data analysis: Interaction analysis

The interpretation of the chosen sequences within the panel readings is grounded in interaction analysis principles (Krummheuer & Naujok, 1999). Interaction analysis focuses on unveiling principles, structures, and communicative practices rather than quantifying distributions, spreads, or statistical correlations. It aims to reconstruct how subjects produce shared interpretations in interaction and what they negotiate in the process. Following J. Hoffmann (2011, p. 125) with reference to Krummheuer and Naujok (1999, pp. 69–70), I proceeded in three steps.

- 1) Outlining the interaction unit and providing a general description
- 2) Conducting a detailed analysis of individual utterances and a turn-by-turn analysis
- 3) Summarizing the interpretation

In the subsequent paragraphs, only the overall interpretation of the sequence is presented. It summarizes the entire analysis steps in a compressed form and appears as an *epigram*, a characteristic of key incident analysis. Each scene is titled (*lemma*) using a brief quotation extracted from the transcript. Presenting the transcript (*pictura*) alongside the interpretation allows for the exploration of alternative readings to the existing interpretation.

3. RESULTS

I will summarize the key findings of the study using a specific example from a group of four children who performed the chapter “At the ice cream seller [Beim Eismann]” as a panel reading. Analyses of the data presented here have already been published in the study *Panellesungen in der Grundschule [Panel Readings in Elementary School]* (Wittig, 2022).

3.1 Selected group and staged chapter from the comic book

The selected chapter depicts the golem’s initial encounter with his creators, Ulla and Olli, on the day after his creation. After buying ice cream, the two children observe their clay giant walking through the city gate. While keeping a safe distance, they watch as the golem takes an ice cream without paying, apparently unaware of its cost. Wandering aimlessly, the golem settles on a bench, perplexed about what to do with the ice cream, which eventually melts away entirely. Finally, the golem puts the ice cream cone on his head like a hat. Ulla and Olli watch all of these events from a hiding place.

Veronika (nine years old), Anika (nine years old), Mustafa (seven years old), and Ahmed (seven years old) form a group to stage the chapter in a panel reading. Both, Veronika and Anika use hearing aids, and they find background noise disruptive during their working sessions. On their request, the group works outside the classroom in the school hallway. Veronika, Anika, and Ahmed speak German at

home, while Mustafa's family speaks Moroccan-Arabic. Reading is challenging for Mustafa and Ahmed. Therefore, they prefer roles with a minimum of text. Veronika, being the oldest, takes on the role of a director for the panel reading. The other group members accept her leadership. Although the group has two copies of the comic, they only use one, always kept by Veronika, symbolizing her role as the director. Thus, the group operates in a hierarchical structure. Before beginning with the staging work, Veronika breaks down the complex task into steps. In the initial stage, they allocate speaking roles based on individual preferences within the group (Table 1).

Table 1. Speaking role distribution

Group: Veronika, Anika, Mustafa, Ahmed	
Chapter 4: <i>At the ice cream seller</i>	
Character	Spoken by ...
<i>Olli</i>	<i>Ahmed</i>
<i>Ulla</i>	<i>Anika</i>
<i>Ice cream seller</i>	<i>Veronika</i>
<i>Golem</i>	<i>Mustafa</i>

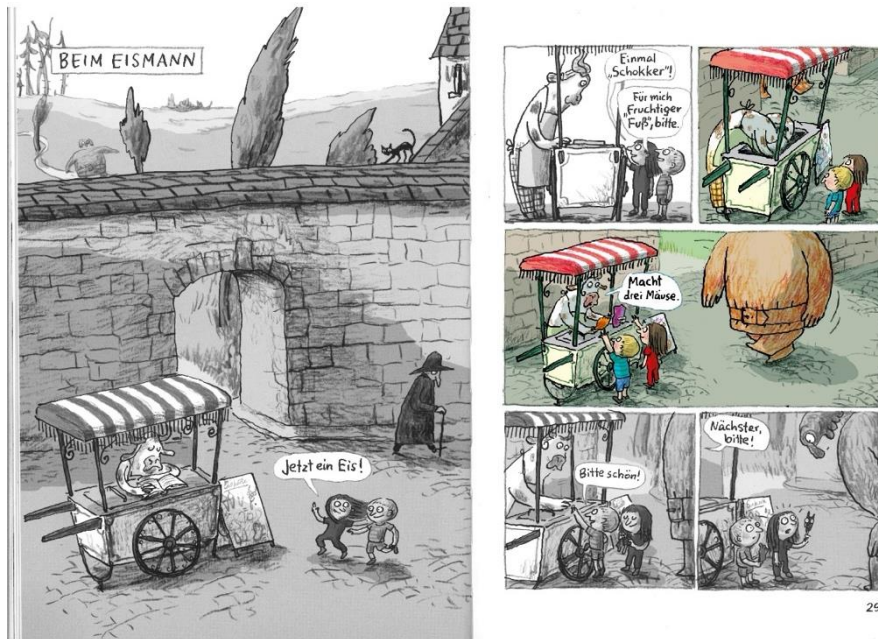
In the second step, the children engage with the sounds within the comic. Initially, they feel frustrated, presuming there are no sounds present in the chapter. Shortly after, the group realizes that pictures might also convey sounds. Subsequently, the children skim through the chapter, searching the panels for elements they can transform into music. Once they identify a sound, they experiment with various ways of how to produce it. After deciding for a method, the children write down who creates the sound and how it is made (Table 2).

Table 2. Sound Distribution

Group: Veronika, Anika, Mustafa, Ahmed		
Chapter 4: <i>At the ice cream seller</i>		
Sound (page)	The sound is made by...	How the sound is made ...
<i>Golem (p. 38)</i>	<i>Mustafa</i>	<i>Tin</i>
<i>Olli (p. 30)</i>	<i>Ahmed</i>	<i>Mouth</i>
<i>Ulla (p. 30)</i>	<i>Anika</i>	<i>Mouth</i>

These preparatory activities are followed by a first rehearsal: The children read their texts in their assigned roles and make sounds. A total of four rehearsal runs take place during the entire project. The following scenes from the first rehearsal run are presented in chronological order. To provide an overview of the staging of the entire chapter, each scene is dedicated to a different double-page spread from the chapter. However, it does not describe the staging of the entire page, but only that of a single panel or that of a sequence of images. The pictures, which are not staged or discussed, are grayed out. The first scene starts immediately after Veronika's start signal (SO now it's starting.)

3.2 Scene one: You can use the aluminum foil for the noise below



Kuhl, 2015, p. 28–29 (graying out: Wittig); © Reprodukt, Berlin

line	Acting person (age)	Language & voice	Body & use of objects
1	Veronika (9)	<<loudly> =mAKes->	
2	Anika (9)	three;	
3	Veronika (9)	wait a second; wait a second-	
4		<<imitating a sound> tr: tr: tr:>	With each sound, Veronika bobs her upper body and moves her upper arms as if she were digging in a box.
5		[mAKes three bucks]	
6	Mustafa (7)	[hey I am the giant.]	Mustafa transitions from a seated position to standing on all fours and gazes at Veronika. Due to the altered posture, he is now much closer to the book than before.
7	Anika (7)	ah you can use the aluminum foil for the noise below.	
8	Mustafa (7)	<<imitating Veronika's sound> tr: tr: tr:>	Mustafa is still standing on all fours. He imitates Veronika by alternately stamping his two arms in a rhythmic pattern.
9		<<sighing> I am the giant.>	Veronika reaches for a piece of aluminum foil lying next to Mustafa. She promptly puts it back on the mat. Anika takes the
10	Veronika (9) Mustafa (7)	but not YET- (surely.)	

11	Ahmed (7)	<<reproachfully> why are you now using the WHOLE.>	aluminum foil and extends it towards Mustafa. Meanwhile, Veronika grabs the entire roll and tears off a piece of aluminum foil, creating a crackling sound.
12	Veronika (9)	i have NOT.	Mustafa mimics her by making his own piece of aluminum foil crackle.
13	Anika (9)	she gets (-) she takes a little bit for what we need for it now. (-) that's enough. that's enough. that piece is enough.	

The scene can be segmented into two distinct parts based on the children's methods of representation:

Lines 1–6: Sound discovery and realization with the voice

Veronika starts reading her character's speech bubble but abruptly shifts to produce sound effects for the ice cream seller taking ice cream from the freezer. She vocalizes this action with the repeated consonant sequence "tr: tr: tr:" (line 4) while mimicking the physical movements of the ice cream seller. However, Mustafa misinterprets Veronika's portrayal, assuming she enacts the golem's actions, leading him to complain about her taking his role.

Lines 7–14: Substitution of vocal sounds with aluminum foil

Anika interprets Veronika's consonant sequence as the ice cream seller making a "noise down below" (line 7) in the freezer. She suggests the use of aluminum foil for this effect. Mustafa insists on his interpretation, defending his speech role by imitating Veronika's realization "tr: tr: tr:" (line 8) with rhythmic hand movements mimicking walking. While Veronika's movements imitate the ice cream seller, Mustafa's movements remind of the steps of the approaching golem. In this way, both act on a performative level (Hentschel, 2007, p. 93). They transform the different actions of the characters into music in the same way (tr: tr: tr: speaking), although they intend different meanings. Veronika, following Anika's suggestion, initially reaches for used foil but changes to an unused piece of foil. This choice sparks Ahmed's concern over wastefulness. As Veronika tries to create sound with the new foil, Mustafa imitates this use of a 'thing practical' by utilizing previously used foil to make the sound of the walking golem. In subsequent rehearsals, only Veronika uses the aluminum foil as an instrument. The misunderstanding between Veronika and Mustafa gradually dissipates during the staging process.

3.2.1 Change of scene and page

After discovering the golem at the ice cream truck, Olli and Ulla sit together on the curb, enjoying their ice creams. The sounds they make while licking their treats are represented in the comic by the onomatopoeic words 'lick' [schleck] (Kuhl, 2015, p. 30) and 'slurp' [schlürf] (Kuhl, 2015, p. 30). These sound words are visually integrated into the panel using borders that echo elements of the environment, like drops of melted ice cream and the colors of the chosen treats. Before the rehearsal, Veronika and Anika establish a rule for this panel: Anika and Ahmed, portraying Ulla

and Olli, are required to ‘lick, lick, lick’ without making any noise (as noted in Table 2). Despite seemingly clear instructions, the first rehearsal reveals some room for interpretation.

3.3 Scene two: Lick lick slurp slurp



Kuhl, 2015, p. 30–31 (graying out: Wittig); © Reprodukt, Berlin

line	Acting person (age)	Language & voice	Body & use of objects
1	Veronika (9)	wait a second, (--) which now? (-) you so now so=-	Veronika places the book in front of herself and Anika on the carpet.
2	Anika (9)	=no:=-	
3	Veronika (9)	=i so=-	
4	Anika (9)	=[we] first need to-	Anika points to a picture.
5	Mustafa (7)	[i?]	
6	Anika (9)	ahmed you do then <<slowly and rhythmically>> lick [lick slurp slurp]>>	
7	Ahmed (7)	<quietly and quickly> [lick lick lick lick lick]>>	

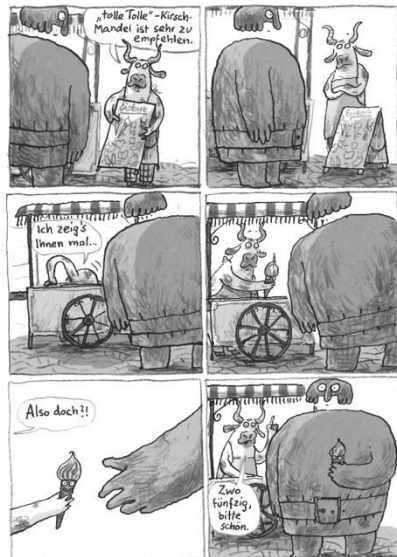
Veronika starts reading her speech bubble text when Anika interrupts, emphasizing the need to translate the sound words from the previous panel into music—an

aspect they had overlooked until then. Anika assigns the phrase 'lick lick' (line 6) to Ahmed and 'slurp slurp' (line 6) to herself, based on the colors of the word borders and their placement in the picture. Anika's suggestions follow the reading direction: Ulla's action on the right side is mirrored by Olli's on the left side. Ahmed, portraying Olli, adheres to Anika's pattern, rapidly articulating 'lick' several times (line 7) to convey a sense of swift eating. Despite 'lick' and 'slurp' appearing once in the image, both Ahmed and Anika repeat their respective phrases numerous times, indicating a longer duration of the action. This repetition suggests Olli and Ulla leisurely enjoying their ice creams, perhaps basking in the sun. Such interpretation extends the single image by enriching it imaginatively and vividly (Uhlig, 2013, p. 40). This spontaneous extension becomes a part of the staging: In subsequent rehearsals, Ahmed repeatedly says 'lick' up to seven times, while Anika waits for his cue until she slurps up to two times per cue.

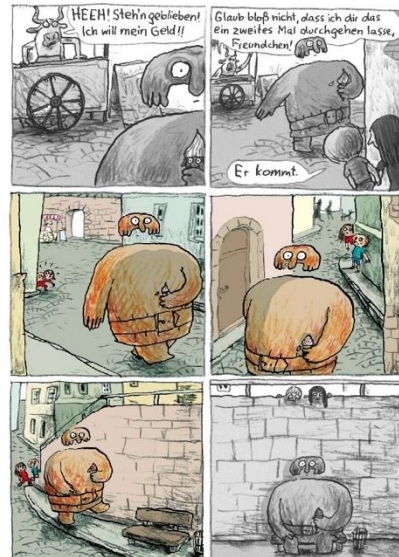
3.3.1 *Change of scene and page*

In the following panels, the clay giant walks aimlessly through the streets and finally settles down on a bench. Ulla and Olli secretly follow him. Veronika instructs the group on how to move through the city.

3.4 Scene three: How to run



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Kuhl, 2015, p. 32–33 (graying out: Wittig); © Reprodukt, Berlin

line	Acting person (age)	Language & voice	Body & use of objects
1	Veronika (9)	and now ahmed you again and anika -	
2		<<making a sound> psch psch psch->	Veronika moves her upper body and arms to the right and back again. The arms are bent, and the hands are clenched into fists.
3	Mustafa (7)	<<chuckling> hahahahaha>	Mustafa points to Veronika and Anika.
4	Veronika (9)	yes what=-	
5	Anika (9)	=what then,	
6	Veronika (9)	or RUN; how to run-	Mustafa gets up to run down the hallway
7		<<panting> hehehehehehehehehehehe] >	Sitting, Veronika moves with her upper body as if she were running. The arms go along with this movement at the side. Anika, after a short time, joins in both movement and vocal sound.
8	Anika (9)	[yes like THIS. (-) hehehehe]>	Mustafa, meanwhile, runs down the hall to the door and back.

9	Veronika (9)	yeah okay; (-- great; and now, (---)	Ahmed also timidly moves his arms as if he were running. Anika turns to Mustafa, who is on his way back from his run.
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The sound settings divide the scene into two units.

Lines 1–5: "Psch"

Veronika instructs Ahmed and Anika to make the sound "psch psch psch" (line 2) for their characters Olli and Ulla, scoring their rapid movement through the changing streets. However, this suggested repetition earns laughter from Mustafa and prompts the two girls to pause their play, transitioning the playful action into an observation of their game (C. Hoffmann, 2007).

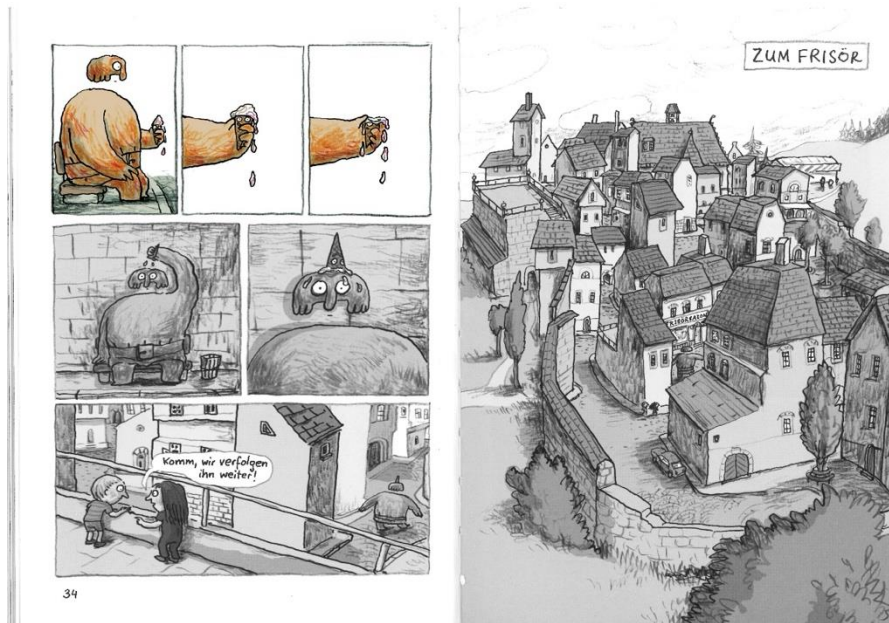
Lines 6–9: "hehehehe"

Veronika's question "how to run" (line 6) concerns the sound of running, not the physical act of movement. The challenge of linking movement to sound becomes apparent. Veronika and Anika initially attempt this physically: they imitate the running movement with swinging arms and torso motions, finally discovering a suitable sound, a panting "hehehehe" (line 7). Their accompanying movements support a convincing enactment of exhausted panting. Mustafa, however, runs through the hallway, experimenting with how running sounds. His findings don't influence the staging, as the girls have already found a sound setting that Ahmed (as Olli) timidly joins. Despite the panel reading not requiring physical play, the children practice the corresponding movements while voicing the sounds. The movements make clear what the sound signifies. By labeling the movement as 'running' instead of 'sneaking', they also express their understanding of pursuit speed, bridging the space between the panels. Ulla and Olli run to keep pace with the giant's big steps, linking the pictures, embedding them narratively (Uhlig, 2013, p. 40), and narrating what happens between the panels.

3.4.1 *Change of scene and page*

The journey through the city streets concludes at a bench where the clay giant finds a resting spot. Seated on the bench, the giant holds the ice cream cone upright, observing as the ice cream slowly melts.

3.5 Scene four: How to MELT the ice cream



Kuhl, 2015, S. 34–35 (graying out: Wittig); © Reprodukt, Berlin

line	Acting person (age)	Language & voice	Body & use of objects
1	Veronika (9)	wait a second (-) now the ice cream is melting; (-) how can you melt the ice cream; (-) how can you MAKE like that;	
2	Anika (9)	sh::	Anika strokes her head.
3	Mustafa (7)	<<whistling> hui hui hui>	Anika forms her hand as if she was holding an invisible ice cream cone in it. Veronika does the same.
4	Anika (9)	no like this; (-) plop [plop plop plop plop]	Anika holds out her invisible ice cream cone to Veronika.
5	Veronika (9)	[plop plop plop plop]	
6	Teacher	[exactly that drips]	
7	Veronika (9)	plop plop ALL of us say that. (1.0) plop plop ALL of us say that.	
8		[plop plop plop plop plop plop plop plop plop]	
9	Anika (9)	[plop plop plop plop plop plop plop plop plop]	
10	Ahmed (7)	[plop plop plop plop plop plop plop plop plop]	
11	Mustafa (7)	[plop plop plop plop plop plop plop plop plop]	

The scene is divided into two phases based on the themes and staging methods discussed.

Lines 1–6: Melting ice cream

Veronika interrupts the scene with the signal phrase "wait a second" (line 1) and recognizes that the ice cream is melting. She overlooks the motionless clay giant and queries the other children about how they could depict the ice cream melting (line 1). Anika proposes a sound variation, the elongated sibilant "sh::" (line 2). Mustafa, in turn, produces a whistling sound as a potential alternative. Anika promptly dismisses both her own suggestion and Mustafa's, adopting the posture of the clay giant on the panel. She mimics the golem holding an imaginary ice cream cone. Subsequently, she suggests a rhythmic "plop plop plop plop" (line 4). Veronika, also gesturing an imaginary ice cream cone, readily joins in. Both girls thereby immerse themselves in the roles of clay giants in the field of significance. The teacher trainee encourages the girls in their idea of speaking in parallel. The expression chosen here is reminiscent of sound words in comic language and makes it clear that the children in the panel reading draw on literary patterns of the genre.

Lines 7–11: Speaking in unison

Veronika expands on Anika's suggestion: "plop plop ALL of us say that " (line 7). The group's collective chanting amplifies the sound and emphasizes the drip-by-drip melting process. Contrary to the three-part panel sequence, the children chant 'plop' nine times successively. This extended repetition conveys the passage of time between and across the panels, illustrating that the ice cream doesn't vanish abruptly but slowly melts away as the clay giant remains seated, puzzled about what to do. By chanting 'plop' in unison, the children bridge the three panels. As seen in previous scenes, capturing the sound of the image requires physical enactment in the field of significance, where the imagined ice cream cone held in their hands becomes essential. In subsequent rehearsals, the group experiments with variations. Veronika predominantly vocalizes the melting in multiple repetitions, occasionally using the word 'blub' instead of 'plop', evoking associations with comic language.

4. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

What learning potentials arise from the four scenes of panel readings regarding multimodal communication and aesthetic experiences with multimodal literature, especially in heterogeneous learning groups? What are the limitations of the study's methodology, and where is the need for further research? Finally, what pedagogical implications emerge from the overall results of the study? These questions are addressed conclusively.

4.1 Learning potential regarding the use of multimodal communication

The panel reading stimulates the use of multimodal language by challenging the children to exchange in different modalities about the staging plan (as mental staging), and to create the panel reading (as performed staging) (Lösener, 2017, p. 35). These requirements involve a dynamic interaction between doing and observing (C. Hoffmann, 2007) and between the fields of significance and sight (Vygotskij, 1981), both inherent to theatrical performance. In all scenes, children use words, their voices, and body movements to communicate and indicate their respective fields of engagement. Using metacommunicative expressions (Andresen, 2017, p. 97) like "I so" (scene two), they signal a transition into the field of significance. Phrases like "wait a second" (scene one, scene two and scene four) indicate a pause in the scene, marking a return to the field of sight. These similar communicative actions underscore the resemblance between panel reading and free children's play.

The four different scenes from the panel reading show that children use thing practical, physical, and vocal expressions alongside verbal ones. They depict images using 'thing practices' (such as using aluminum foil to simulate extracting ice cream from the freezer in scene one) or through vocalization with typical comic words and sounds (like 'psch' for running in scene three and 'plop plop' for melting ice cream in scene four). Additionally, they narrate spoken texts from speech bubbles and incorporate sound words (e.g., 'lick' and 'slurp' in scene two), often enhanced by rhythmic, choral, or melodic forms (such as 'plop plop' in scene four). To find suitable sounds, children resort to physical actions. Engaging in a performative way (Hentschel, 2007, p. 93), they accompany actions with sounds: mimicking Ulla and Olli running (scene three) and holding an imaginary ice cream cone as the clay giants does (scene four). In this way, they make the meaning of sound visible to others.

Although the visible level of the panel reading takes place on the pictures of the comic, their physical performance concretizes what is transformed into music. Such performative modes of representation (Wulf, 2014, pp. 111–112) are an integral part of human communication and expression. Encouraging these modes is crucial in language education. Particularly, children with diverse prior knowledge and abilities benefit from a multimodal and performative approach to literature education. This inclusivity is evident in the collaboration within the diverse learning group. While Veronika, as the oldest member, takes on a directorial role, others contribute ideas and actively participate in the performance.

4.2 Learning potential regarding aesthetic experiences with multimodal literature

Due to the numerous possibilities for implementation, the task of staging the comic as a panel reading is initially challenging for the children. At first, the children cannot even decide, whether a chapter of the comic contains any sounds at all. This changes when they start staging. In the creative process, they find numerous sounds in the

comic through their imagination. Here it becomes apparent that they expand the sound table they created at the beginning and use new objects for this purpose (e.g., aluminum foil). The children transform pictures into music (the ice cream seller takes the ice cream out of the freezer in scene one) and sound words (lick, slurp in scene two). They tell the story by filling the empty space between the panels (running in scene three), and by enacting events depicted in panel sequences (the ice cream melts in scene four). In doing so, they express their understanding of time in the comic: Olli and Ulla lick and slurp their ice cream for quite a while (scene two), there is running instead of sneaking (scene three), and it also takes some time for the ice cream to finally melt (scene four). With these visual concretizations, narrative embeddings, and emotional occupations, the children show different forms of enriched imagination (Uhlig, 2013, p. 40). They narrate what happens between the panels and express the characters' actions and feelings through body movements and voice. The interplay of implicit, mental, and performed staging makes it necessary to look more closely at the images, texts, and signs of the comic, to examine them, and to exchange ideas about them. The children therefore relate the ideas for the staging to the comic as a score. In doing so, the task highlights the unique characteristics of both narrative forms: those found within the comic book and those of the panel reading. Contemplating how to 'run' or 'melt the ice cream' brings these media reflections into clear focus. Likewise, the children justify the temporal order of their panel reading based on the spatial structure of the comic page and the single picture. Specifically, textless panels offer the chance for sounds to accompany the visual narrative. The panel reading allows the children to encounter sensually perceptible phenomena and (emotionally) reflect on them (Domkowsky, 2018, p. 43). Thus, panel readings enable aesthetic experiences regardless of age, gender, and abilities.

4.3 *Limitations*

Although it is a single-case study influenced by multiple variables—such as children's prior knowledge, the enacted chapter in the comic, and group composition—, some findings might be applicable in other learning groups: The panel reading stimulates the use of multimodal language and enables aesthetic experiences with literature. To extract this insight from individual scenes it requires a microanalytical, reconstructive approach that captures the events from a multimodal perspective. The study made this perspective visible through multimodal transcription. Yet, the methodological challenge persists in describing and interpreting the non-verbal actions of the children. Further research is imperative to delve deeper into the interpretation of nonverbal actions and to solidify their place in pedagogy.

This study's detailed descriptions of 'thing practices', encompassing the utilization of voice and body, present an initial foundation that invites further exploration and expansion in subsequent research endeavors. Valuing these non-verbalized reception processes marks the inception of a journey toward a language

and literature education that is richly multimodal. Recognizing the value of individualized and multimodal approaches to accessing literature remains an ongoing challenge for educators and researchers alike.

4.4 Pedagogical implications: Process orientation and performative modes of action

The analysis of the creative process of the panel reading shows the complexity of engaging with literature. The children not only talk about the comic, but transform texts, pictures, and narration in a multimodal way. Developing a panel reading requires creativity and openness in dealing with literature. This openness is not expected from the children alone, but equally from the teachers. When the focus shifts from presenting panel reading to its development process, a wide range of learning potentials becomes evident, largely independent of the final outcome. Panel reading not only allows children to participate in aesthetic experiences (Domkowsky, 2018, p. 43) and cultivate enriched imagination (Uhlig, 2013, p. 40) but also promotes multimodal interaction and performative modes of representation (Wulf, 2014, pp. 111–112). This approach encourages inclusivity across age, gender, and prior knowledge. Furthermore, the interplay between implicit, mental, and performed staging prompts a closer examination of the comic's elements and encourages reflections on narrative forms. This study significantly contributes to the pedagogy of comics for diverse learning groups, emphasizing the importance of not solely approaching comics from a cognitive perspective. Traditional explanations of narrative functioning in comics often overlook the potential of this multimodal medium. Exploring storytelling in comics performatively, capitalizing on their qualities as a score, adds a meaningful dimension.

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