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Teacher perceptions of graphic novels

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study is to ascertain classroom teachers' dispositions toward graphic novels as quality literature and the rationale for their beliefs and attitudes. Of particular interest in this study is how teacher dispositions toward graphic novels may differ across teacher age groups. In conducting research, a survey was given to a variety of classroom teachers. These participants are language arts teachers for grades three through eight and range in age from 20 to 60 years. The researcher recorded the frequencies and percentages of responses, looking for teachers' perceptions of graphic novels, the origin of these perceptions, and a correlation between teachers' ages and attitudes toward using graphic novels in their classrooms. The researcher discovered that most teachers surveyed use graphic novels no more than once per year, though they do believe that this text format is beneficial and motivating to students. The majority of teachers have not had training in the uses of graphic novels, but indicate that they would likely use them more often if they had more knowledge about them. While younger teachers were more often introduced to graphic novels in their pre-service education, these teachers were not necessarily more likely to use graphic novels with students. In fact, little correlation existed between teachers' ages and their perceptions of graphic novels.

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF GRAPHIC NOVELS

A Graduate Research Paper
Submitted to the
Division of School Library Studies
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
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by
Katherine Block
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Titled: Teacher Perceptions of Graphic Novels

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts.

Date Approved

Graduate Faculty Reader

Date Approved

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study is to ascertain classroom teachers' dispositions toward graphic novels as quality literature and the rationale for their beliefs and attitudes. Of particular interest in this study is how teacher dispositions toward graphic novels may differ across teacher age groups.

In conducting research, a survey was given to a variety of classroom teachers. These participants are language arts teachers for grades three through eight and range in age from 20 to 60 years. The researcher recorded the frequencies and percentages of responses, looking for teachers' perceptions of graphic novels, the origin of these perceptions, and a correlation between teachers' ages and attitudes toward using graphic novels in their classrooms.

The researcher discovered that most teachers surveyed use graphic novels no more than once per year, though they do believe that this text format is beneficial and motivating to students. The majority of teachers have not had training in the uses of graphic novels, but indicate that they would likely use them more often if they had more knowledge about them. While younger teachers were more often introduced to graphic novels in their pre-service education, these teachers were not necessarily more likely to use graphic novels with students. In fact, little correlation existed between teachers' ages and their perceptions of graphic novels.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Jane, an unmotivated reader, and her third-grade class come into the library for their normal book check-out session. As she is searching for something that will be of interest, she comes across *Smile* by Raina Telgemeier. After flipping through the pages, she decides this could be the one. She takes it to the teacher librarian to check-out, but is intercepted by her classroom teacher and told that if she is going to get that book, she can only read it at home. “Those books are not going to help you as a reader,” her teacher explains. Jane quietly returns the book to the shelf, disappointed and even more unmotivated to read than before.

Problem Statement

This scenario happens often within elementary schools. “Despite the endorsement by many librarians, many teachers have been reluctant to include graphic novels in their curricula” (Ruppel, 2006, p. 2). Educators may not understand the effect graphic novels, such as *Smile* by Raina Telgemeier, have on student interest and learning. Classroom teachers may not regard these novels as quality literature nor recognize the role of the images for comprehension of the story. In fact, *Smile* is one of H.W. Wilson’s most highly recommended titles within the *Children’s Core Collection* and The American Library Association’s 2011 Top Ten Graphic Novels for Teens (Penny, 2011). Students are often denied the option of choosing graphic novels for independent reading and reading fluency development. The Cooperative Children’s Book Center (2007) indicates, “There are GNs [graphic novels] that relate to subjects across the curriculum, while the format itself offers opportunities to engage various types of learners” (para. 4). Not only

do these books meet the instructional needs of students, but they also engage students that are typically unmotivated.

Quality literature can appear in many different formats. The Association for Library Services of Children (2008) defines quality literature in terms of (a) interpretation of the theme or concept; (b) presentation of information including accuracy, clarity, and organization; (c) development of a plot; (d) delineation of characters; (e) delineation of a setting; and (f) appropriateness of style. Within the graphic novel format, authors are clearly able to meet these criteria. In fact, Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale - My Father Bleeds History*, a nonfiction graphic novel of a father's survival of the Holocaust, was the first graphic novel to win a Pulitzer Prize. Katharine Kan, editor of H.W. Wilson's *The Reference Shelf* series *Graphic Novels and Comic Books*, stated in an interview with Karen Green from *Publisher's Weekly* (2011) that "they (graphic novels) provide a wonderful springboard for creative writing, for art, for use in science and social studies, even math" (para. 14). Therefore, not only can they be used in reading instruction, but in other academic areas as well.

Often struggling and unmotivated readers turn to graphic novels because they are able to interpret meaning from the illustrations in addition to the text. According to *The Lexile Framework for Reading* (2012), "The combination of art and text appeal to readers of all abilities, but particularly motivate a struggling reader to engage with a text" (para. 6). In *Teacher Librarian*, Karen Gavigan (2012) identifies several research studies justifying the use of graphic novels in classrooms. These studies indicate an increase in reading motivation and enjoyment within several groups of students, including English language learners, male readers, and students with learning disabilities.

Much of the research on this topic has focused on how to incorporate graphic novels into content areas or has examined the increase in student motivation when reading graphic novels (Edwards, 2009). Mathews (2009) researched uses for graphic novels in the social studies classroom, and Nesmith, Cooper, and Schwarz, (2011) addressed how to implement the use of graphic novels into elementary mathematics and science curriculum. Edwards (2009) focused on student motivation to read as a result of reading graphic novels. This study will focus on the perceptions of classroom teachers toward graphic novels.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research study is to ascertain classroom teachers' dispositions toward graphic novels as quality literature and the rationale for their beliefs and attitudes. Of particular interest in this study is how teacher dispositions toward graphic novels may differ across teacher age groups.

Research Questions

1. What attitudes do teachers have related to the quality of graphic novels and their uses in the classroom?
2. Where do teachers' perceptions of the quality of graphic novels originate?
3. What differences exist in perceptions of graphic novels within varying generations of teachers?

Definitions

A graphic novel is a novel or complete story in comic-book format with a beginning, middle, and end and continuing characters and plots (Bruggeman, 1997).

Graphic novels stand alone as complete works, as opposed to comic books, which are usually short serials (Burdge, 2006).

Assumptions

Teachers' attitudes toward graphic novels tend to influence the opportunities for students to read graphic novels. These attitudes may even shape some students' dispositions toward graphic novels.

Limitations

This study will focus on six elementary schools and two middle schools within one school district. Students have access to a limited number of graphic novels within their school libraries.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to ascertain teachers' dispositions toward graphic novels as quality literature and the rationale for their beliefs and attitudes. The research also examined differences in these attitudes between teachers of various generations. Prior research related to this topic fell into several categories: student attitudes toward graphic novels, teacher education on graphic novels, graphic novels in content areas, and the use of graphic novels for improving reading comprehension skills.

Student Attitudes toward Graphic Novels

Edwards (2009) set out to determine the impact reading graphic novels and comic books and participating in free voluntary reading (FVR) has on intrinsic motivation, reading comprehension, and vocabulary development. Edwards conducted this study with four groups of seventh grade students. Group one had access to graphic novels and FVR time provided; group two did not have access to graphic novels, but did participate in FVR; group 3 had access to graphic novels, but did not have FVR time; and group four was the comparison group. This eight-week study included a pre- and post-assessment of vocabulary, comprehension, and reading motivation, and also analyzed student reading logs, answers to reflective questions, and teacher observations. Edwards stated that students claimed to enjoy reading graphic novels and they became more skilled in reading. Participants also noted an increase in intrinsic motivation toward reading. Following the study, students chose to read graphic novels during free time.

In a similar study of student reading motivation regarding graphic novels, Simmons and O'Briant (2009) researched genres that would encourage high school boys

to read. The researchers surveyed 1,200 high school students, asking for suggestions of magazines, books, topics, and/or services they would like to see provided within their school library. These results were then separated by the participants' gender. Upon categorizing the data, Simmons and O'Briant reported that the most highly suggested improvement from both groups was to include a larger collection of graphic novels and manga, a Japanese style of graphic novels and comic books.

Unlike Edwards (2009) and Simmons and O'Briant (2009), who included student participants, Botzakis (2009) focused his study on adult comic book readers. Botzakis examined how the reading choices of adults have affected their lives and the implications this has for "literacy practices of broader populations" (p. 3). This study involved twelve adults, ranging in age from 26 to 37, each having been reading comic books for at least 17 years. The researcher used discursive practices to categorize information from interviews, field notes, the researcher's log, and artifacts into overarching literacy concepts. Botzakis noted that comic books could be very powerful in enhancing student interests and learning. This finding further emphasizes the importance of student choice in book selection; however, although the comic book format may motivate students to read, it does not guarantee student success.

Teacher Education on Graphic Novels

The purpose of Lapp, Wolsey, Fisher, and Frey's (2012) study was to determine the willingness of elementary teachers to use graphic novels in their classrooms as a way of improving literacy skills. The researchers also analyzed the ways in which graphic novels were being used within these classrooms. Throughout this study, 60 teachers attending a summer institute for graduate degree candidates were surveyed. These

participants varied in grade level, teaching experience, and included male and female teachers. Classrooms covered a wide range of socio-economic statuses. Frequency distribution was used when categorizing the data into five grade-level groups. Lapp et al. indicated most participants recognized a need for reading graphic novels themselves, given that many of their students were interested in the format. While the majority of those surveyed agreed that graphic novels motivate students, more than half of the K-2 teachers surveyed reported not using graphic novels, whereas half of the grades 3-5 teachers reported using them. Though most teachers indicated a positive attitude toward using graphic novels within the reading curriculum, inconsistencies arose between attitudes and actual use. In general, graphic novels were seen as a tool to engage unmotivated and struggling readers rather than a form of enrichment for high-achieving students.

While Lapp et al. (2012) surveyed practicing teachers, Mathews (2011) focused on pre-service teachers. Mathews's study examined the potential of pre-service teachers to use graphic novels within the social studies curriculum. Furthermore, she sought the reasons behind the perceptions of pre-service teachers toward graphic novels. Within the study, twelve pre-service teachers, all from similar backgrounds, created written book reports and participated in classroom discussions and interviews after reading the text, and again after student teaching. Mathews determined that many of the findings were impacted by personal beliefs and interactions. Overall, Mathews (2011) states, "pre-service teachers support using graphic novels in order to provide an alternative perspective to traditional texts or to increase engagement amongst emerging or struggling readers" (p. 416). However, pre-service teachers were not supportive of graphic novels

focusing on controversial issues or including violence. Though many of the participants were not familiar with graphic novels prior to the study, they did contend that they could be useful in motivating students and in stimulating deep discussions.

In considering the resources pre-service and practicing teachers have available during their education programs, Williams and Peterson (2009) investigated the extent to which academic libraries, those supporting teacher education programs and those supporting library science programs, collect graphic novels recommended for teens. In conducting their research, Williams and Peterson created a representative list of 100 quality graphic novels from YALSA's (Young Adult Library Services Association) Great Graphic Novels for Teens lists from 2007 and 2008. Of the libraries included in the study, 652 provided teacher education programs and 47 provided ALA (American Library Association) accredited library science programs, with 27 of these libraries providing both programs. As a result of the study, Williams and Peterson discovered that libraries for ALA accredited programs held an average of 11.2 titles from the list, whereas libraries for teacher education programs contained an average of 4.6 of the titles. In fact, 84% of the included libraries contained fewer than ten titles and 25% did not have any of the listed titles. Williams and Peterson (2011) emphasized that "without access to graphic novels, future teachers and librarians cannot learn to evaluate them, assess their appropriateness for instruction, and use them to promote reading to teenagers" (p. 172).

Graphic Novels in Content Areas

Multiple studies have been conducted related to the use of graphic novels to enhance content area curricula. Cooper, Nesmith, and Schwarz (2011) explored the perspectives of elementary educators toward graphic novels, specifically in the content

areas of math and science. In addition, the researchers wanted to determine the benefit of graphic novel use to support these areas. In doing so, they formed two focus groups consisting of a total of ten elementary classroom teachers and university educators. Using evaluation forms and recordings of the focus group discussions, the researchers performed a qualitative data analysis; that resulted in a list of potential benefits of using graphic novels in the classroom. Cooper, Nesmith, and Schwarz concluded that training is required for teachers to understand the effectiveness of graphic novels within these content areas. The researchers suggested it would be beneficial if professional organizations and teacher librarians could evaluate graphic novels for use within classrooms as well.

In a study focusing on the social studies curriculum, Bosma (2010) researched the effectiveness of graphic novels on students' recall of important facts and interest in the topic, as well as the attitude students develop toward reading and history. Throughout the research, 22 fifth-grade students were divided into two groups. The first group read two graphic novels related to historical events, while the second group read illustrated nonfiction texts on the same topics. Upon completion of these books, the groups switched formats, group one reading books on two other historical events, group two reading graphics novels. After each reading, students reported important parts of each event and completed a survey to indicate reading enjoyment. Bosma discovered that students reading graphic novels correctly recalled an average of 8.6 ideas from their reading, while students reading illustrated nonfiction texts recalled 7.1 ideas. An increase in reading enjoyment and in the interest students showed toward the historical events was significantly higher when reading the graphic novels. Bosma (2011) concluded, "the

efficacy of graphic novels shows they should be employed more often into the school curriculum” (p. 4).

In a similar study of student achievement when using graphic novels, Fisher and Frey (2004) worked with urban high school students to determine the effectiveness of using graphic novels, anime, and the Internet on the improvement of students’ writing skills. Conducted in a poor, urban community high school, containing 2,200 students, more than 30 languages, and many students from low socio-economic status, the participants consisted of 32 ninth-grade students struggling in reading and writing. Fisher and Frey began the unit by using graphic novels as story starters; then with much scaffolding, students created their own illustrated stories. In this culminating project, the researchers noted an increase in sentence length, the effective use of dialogue, and improvement in creativity as compared to the beginning of the unit. Students were engaged in authentic writing and included aspects of dialogue, tone, and mood; “Our students became not only better writers, but also more knowledgeable consumers of ideas and information” (Frey & Fisher, 2004, p. 24).

Continuing in the content area of literacy, Hughes, King, Perkins, and Fuke (2011) examined how adolescent readers make meaning from images, texts, and sounds and how their literacy skills are developed. Data were collected within two separate programs, both with participants who perceive themselves as struggling readers and writers. The first program consisted of six male high school students in a workplace preparation English class. This group spent six weeks reading two graphic novels, participating in literature circles, and creating their own sequential art panels. The second program consisted of six male and female multi-grade alternative high school

students. In a six-week study of visual literacy, students read a variety of graphic novels independently and created one of their own. Through the use of videos, photos, and materials from class sessions, as well as interviews with students and field journals, a qualitative analysis was conducted. Throughout the study, students became excited about the project and applied an understanding of characterization, setting, and space, while further developing their literacy skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Such results led the researchers to conclude that graphic novels should be used in reading and writing to engage unmotivated students.

Graphic Novels Improvement of Reading Comprehension Skills

In the area of reading comprehension, graphic novels have shown many positive effects. Dallacqua (2012) reported on a study she had conducted in 2010, in which she explored the ways in which students engage with graphic novels. Four fifth-grade students, all avid readers with strong communication skills, participated in in-depth discussions of two graphic novels. Prior to these discussions, pre-teaching was done on vocabulary and background knowledge related to the specific texts. Drawing conclusions from discussions, individual student interviews, and the teacher's journal, Dallacqua reported that, "Graphic novels, like the ones used in this study, stand equally with print-based literature as complex, academically challenging, and rich with literary elements and devices" (p. 376). The graphic novel format was found to keep students attention and effectively model literary concepts.

In a similar study conducted with high school students, Hammond (2009) investigated how students make meaning from graphic novels and whether students recognize serious issues when presented in this format. Within a political science class of

23 twelfth-grade students, participants read *American Born Chinese*. Based on the reader-response theory, qualitative methods were used to interpret the data collected from students' oral and written responses, reading questionnaires, interviews, researcher field notes, and student-created comics. Reading graphic novels was new to the majority of the students, but they did enjoy the text. Hammond determined that many students improve multimodal literacy skills with the use of graphic novels as a format for teaching within the curriculum.

Summary

Many studies have been conducted relating to the effectiveness of using graphic novels in classrooms at elementary, middle, and high school levels. Graphic novels have been shown to increase student motivation in reading and engagement with the subject matter taught through them. Therefore, graphic novels can lead to better student understanding and success in literacy and other content areas. Research has also shown varying degrees of willingness for practicing and pre-service teachers to use graphic novels within their classrooms, especially with average or high achieving students. The current study will further examine perceptions classroom teachers have toward the literary quality of graphic novels, while also analyzing the origination of these misconceptions. In their work, Lapp et al. (2012) suggested further research on the existence of a generational gap in attitudes toward the quality of graphic novels; therefore, the current study will also assess this gap in practicing teachers.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Student motivation and interest in reading is crucial in developing reading skills. Many research studies have shown a relationship between graphic novels and student motivation (Edwards, 2009; Simmons & O'Briant, 2009). Teachers' misconceptions about the quality of graphic novels may stand in the way of students' exposure to this format, therefore affecting their joy of reading and their learning. Prior research published on this topic has not focused on the perceptions of graphic novels of teachers within varying generations. The purpose of this study was to ascertain classroom teachers' dispositions toward graphic novels as quality literature and the rationale for their beliefs and attitudes. The research also examined differences in these attitudes between teachers of differing age groups.

Methods

In order to determine teacher dispositions and student reading preferences, as well as the rationales for these dispositions, the researcher conducted a survey study. Wildemuth (2009) states that a survey study "supports the collection of a variety of data, including the beliefs, opinions, attributes, and behaviors of respondents" (p. 256). Previous research has been done on this topic; however, it has not examined the relationship of generational differences and teacher dispositions toward graphic novels. "Survey research is a useful method, enabling researchers to statistically estimate the distribution of characteristics in a population, based on a sample that is only a fraction of

that population” (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 256). The researcher of this study used the survey results to reveal teacher perceptions of graphic novels.

Data Sources

The population used in this study included classroom teachers, teaching grades 3 through 8, in a suburban, Midwestern school district. This included 75 teachers from six elementary schools and 26 language arts teachers from two middle schools. Teachers and their locations were gathered from the 2012-2013 district website. Each teacher was personally delivered a survey (see Appendix A), which was returned to the researcher via the school mail system.

The survey used in this study was short and easy for respondents to complete. It was divided into three sections: introductory questions to encourage participation, substantive questions to get the essential data, and classification questions to be able to group respondents appropriately. The questions were close-ended, clearly stated, and unbiased (Wildemuth, 2009).

Data Analysis

Dillman (as cited in Wildemuth, 2009) indicates that conducting survey research allows the researcher to “estimate the distribution of characteristics in a population” (p. 256). In this study, the researcher calculated the frequencies of responses to the survey questions using raw data and percentages. The data was clustered by age categories to look for correlations between age and disposition toward graphic novels and their uses in the classroom.

According to Wildemuth (2009), “Correlation is a statistical analysis method that helps you to examine the relationship between two variables” and can be “graphically

represented by a scatter diagram” (p. 375). After data collection, the researcher created a scatter diagram using the variables of age and the extent to which teachers were introduced to graphic novels during teacher education and professional development. This sought to reveal if a relationship exists between a teacher’s age and their preparation with graphic novels.

The researcher also used the data collected to determine frequencies, percentages, and averages related to teachers’ age and their Likert scale responses of their perceptions of graphic novels. In doing so, graphs and tables were created using Likert scale responses indicating teacher education and professional development with graphic novels as one variable, and Likert scale responses indicating teacher perceptions of graphic novels as the other variable.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Teachers may not understand the effect graphic novels have on student interest and learning. Misconceptions can prevent educators from sharing the experience of graphic novels with students. These teacher perceptions may be related to the age of the teacher and training the teacher has experienced related to this format.

The population of this study consisted of language arts teachers of grades three through eight. All participants are current teachers in a suburban, Midwestern school district, including six elementary schools and two middle schools. Each teacher was delivered a survey at their school and asked to return it to the researcher through school mail. Of the 75 participants who received the survey, 55 responded for a return rate of 73%. Respondents covered four age ranges, including 19 teachers ages 20 to 29; 27 teachers ages 30-39; eight teachers ages 40-49; and one teacher age 50-59.

Origin of Perceptions of Graphic Novels

Because teachers have varying perceptions of graphic novels, this study sought to determine the exposure to and training related to this format. Of the 55 teachers surveyed, 45, or 82%, had not read graphic novels or comic books as a child, while ten, or 18%, teachers had. Similarly, 43 teachers (78% of those surveyed) have not read a graphic novel within the past year for their own enjoyment. Table 1 shows the number of graphic novels read by teachers in the past year.

Table 1

Graphic Novels Read by Teachers for Enjoyment Within the Past Year

Number of Graphic Novels	Number of Teachers	Percent of Teachers
0	43	78%
1-2	10	18%
3-5	2	4%
More than 6	0	0%

Training during pre-service education may also have an impact on teachers' perceptions of graphic novels. Of the 55 teachers surveyed, eight (15%) had exposure to graphic novels as pre-service teachers, all described as a "brief" or "very brief" introduction; while 47 teachers (85%) had no introduction during pre-service teacher education.

Sixty-four percent of all teachers surveyed also indicated that they had not received professional development related to graphic novels since they began teaching. Of the 22 teachers indicating they had received instruction since teaching, 21 stated that this introduction was "brief" or "very brief." Overall, the majority of teachers surveyed have not received any instruction related to using graphic novels in their classrooms.

Teacher Attitudes Toward Graphic Novels

What are teachers' overall feelings about using graphic novels in their classrooms? Table 2 shows the teachers' reactions to this idea. While no teachers indicated, "I hate them" or "Other people could use them, but I never will," only five

specified, “I use them whenever I can.” The most frequent response was, “I like them in some situations.”

Table 2

Teachers’ General Feelings About Using Graphic Novels

Feelings	Number of Teachers	Percent of Teachers
I use them whenever I can	5	9%
I like them in some situations	29	54%
If I knew more about them, I might use them	20	37%
Other people could use them, but I never will	0	0%
I hate them	0	0%

Teachers were also asked how often they currently use graphic novels with their students. Table 3 shows these responses. By far, the most popular reply was, “never,” given by 38% of participants, followed by 24% indicating, “once per year.” Nine teachers (16%) stated they use graphic novels with their students at least once per week.

Table 3

Graphic Novel Use

Responses	Number of Teachers	Percent of Teachers
every day	2	4%
3 times per week	1	2%
once per week	6	11%
once per month	12	22%
once per year	13	24%
never	21	38%

Though many teachers did not use graphic novels with their students, 50 (91%) of the 55 participants allowed students to read this format during independent reading time. Forty-two teachers (76%) also indicated that they use graphic novels to motivate readers, while 24 teachers (44%) used them to assist struggling readers. Table 4 displays how teachers are using graphic novels.

Table 4

Uses for Graphic Novels

Uses	Number of Teachers	Percent of Teachers
Supplement the reading curriculum	8	15%
Enrichment within the reading curriculum	4	7%
Supplement the language arts curriculum	5	9%
Motivate readers	42	76%
Teach concepts/topics outside of reading and writing	7	13%
Assist English Language Learners	3	5%
Assist struggling readers	24	44%

Of the teachers that have used graphic novels in their classrooms, 76% noted that their use has increased student motivation toward reading. While the majority of participants used graphic novels with struggling and unmotivated students, four participants (7%) used them for enrichment. Table 5 shows the benefits of using graphic novels that teachers have noticed in their students. Only four teachers (7%) indicated they had not noticed any changes; however many teachers saw improvements in the areas of both reading and writing.

Table 5

Benefits of Using Graphic Novels

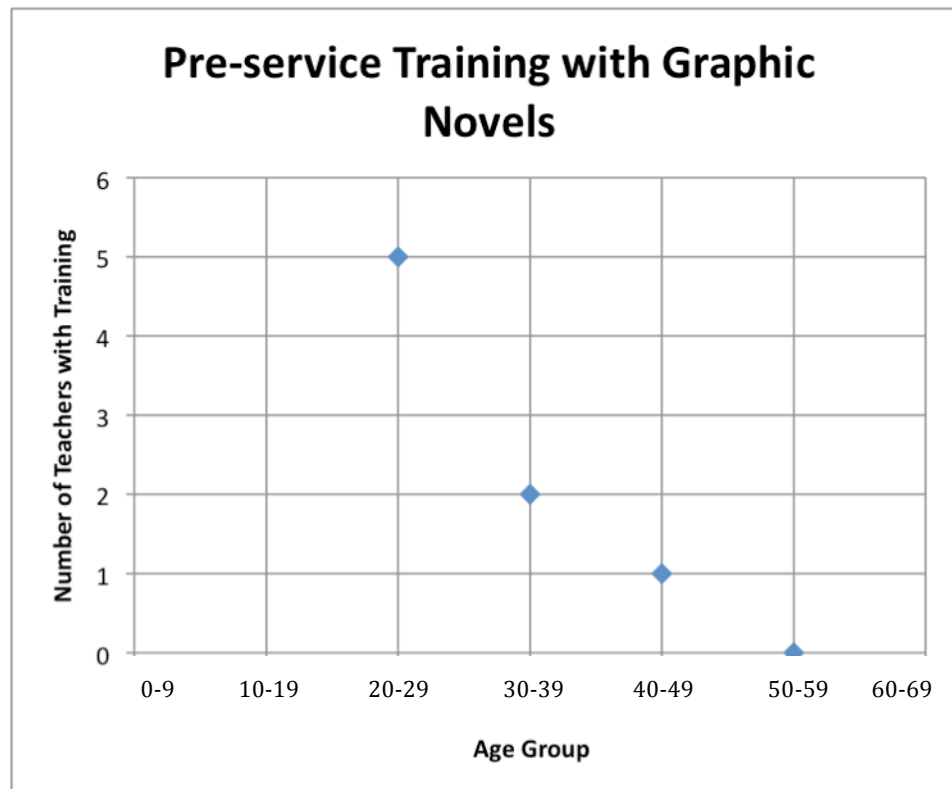
Benefits	Number of Teachers	Percent of Teachers
I haven't noticed any benefits	4	7%
Increased student motivation toward reading	42	76%
Increased student motivation toward writing	12	22%
Improvement in reading skills	10	18%
Improvement in writing skills	2	4%

Overall, teachers that used graphic novels with their students or allowed students to read graphic novels in their classrooms noticed benefits in their students' reading and writing. In particular, a substantial majority of these teachers considered graphic novels to serve well to motivate students to read. Though a large percentage of teachers do not use graphic novels, many would be more inclined to use them if they knew more about them.

Generational Variations of Perceptions

Figure 1 shows a direct correlation between teacher age and training in graphic novels prior to teaching. Older teachers had less experience with graphic novels during their teacher education courses than younger teachers. Five teachers ages 20-29, two teachers ages 30-39; one teacher age 40-49; and zero teachers ages 50-59 were given instruction related to graphic novels. Since these two factors are directly correlated only the teacher age was analyzed for relationships to their perceptions of graphic novels.

Figure 1

Teacher Training in Graphic Novels

Although a correlation exists between teacher age and pre-service training in graphic novels, the same pattern is not always present when it comes to using graphic novels in the classroom and teacher perceptions of graphic novels. Figure 2 displays the number of times teachers of different age groups used graphic novels per year.

Figure 2

Average Use of Graphic Novels Per Year

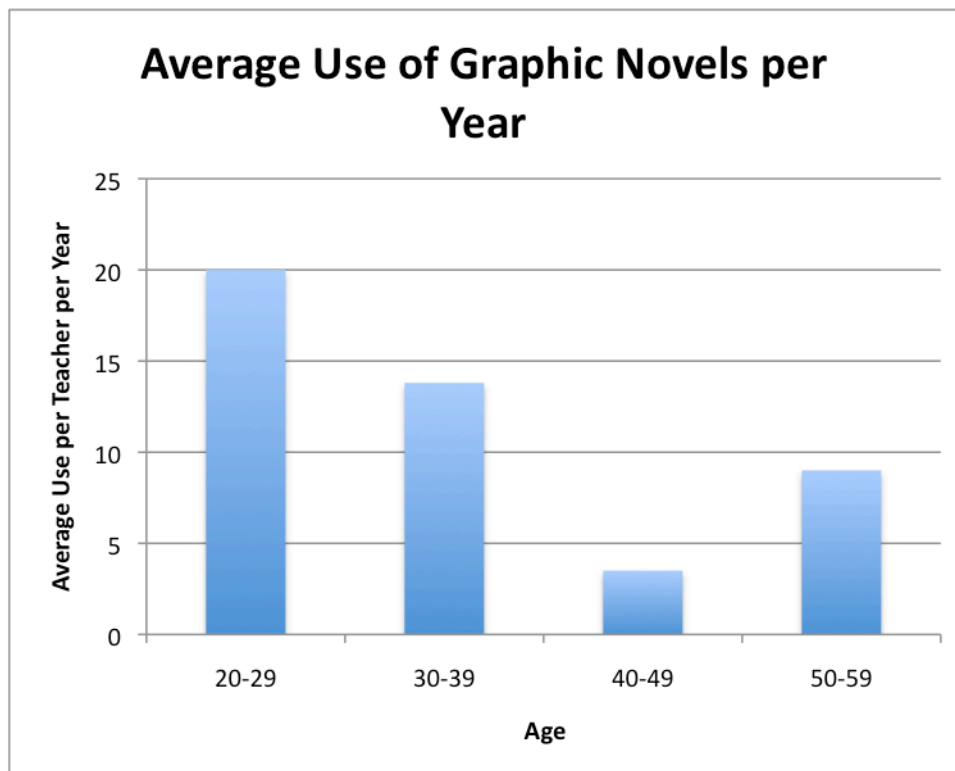


Table 6

Number of Respondents per Age Group

Age Group	Number of Respondents	Average Use per Teacher per Year
20-29 years	19	20
30-39 years	27	13.8
40-49 years	8	3.5
50-59 years	1	9

By far, teachers aging from 20-29 use graphic novels more often on average than any other age group; however, teachers ages 40-49 have the lowest use per year. This pattern is very similar to that of the pre-service teacher training; the younger the teacher, the more likely they are to use graphic novels. Teachers in the 50-59 age group show an average use of graphic novels as 8 times per year; yet only one teacher from this age group participated in the survey.

Conversely, Figure 3 shows the percent of teachers in two age groups who agreed and disagreed with the idea that graphic novels have benefits in their classrooms. The percentage of teachers supporting this theory differs very little between younger and older teachers. Of the younger teachers (ages 20-39) surveyed, 87% of teachers believed graphic novels are beneficial, whereas 88% of older teachers (ages 40-59) agreed.

Figure 3

Graphic Novels Have Benefits in the Classroom

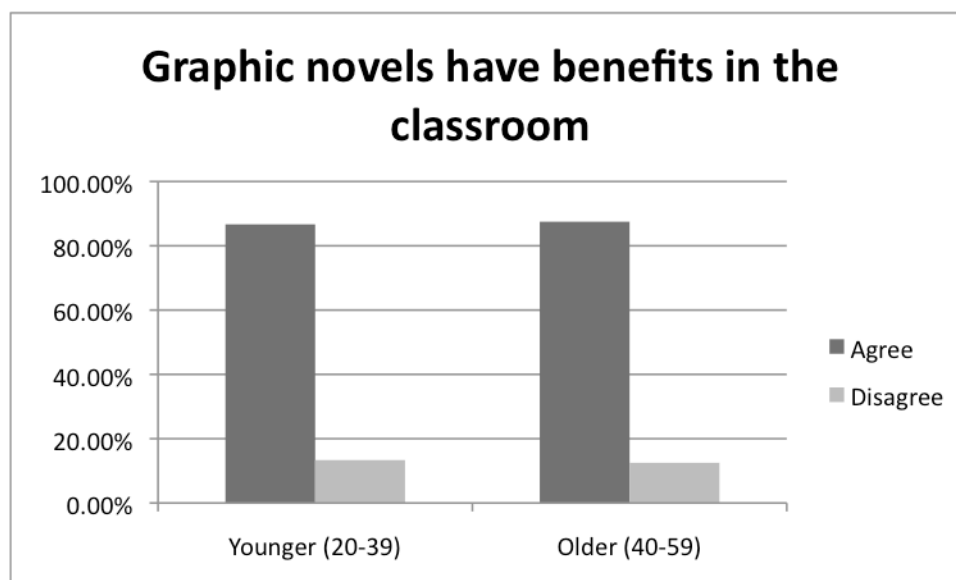
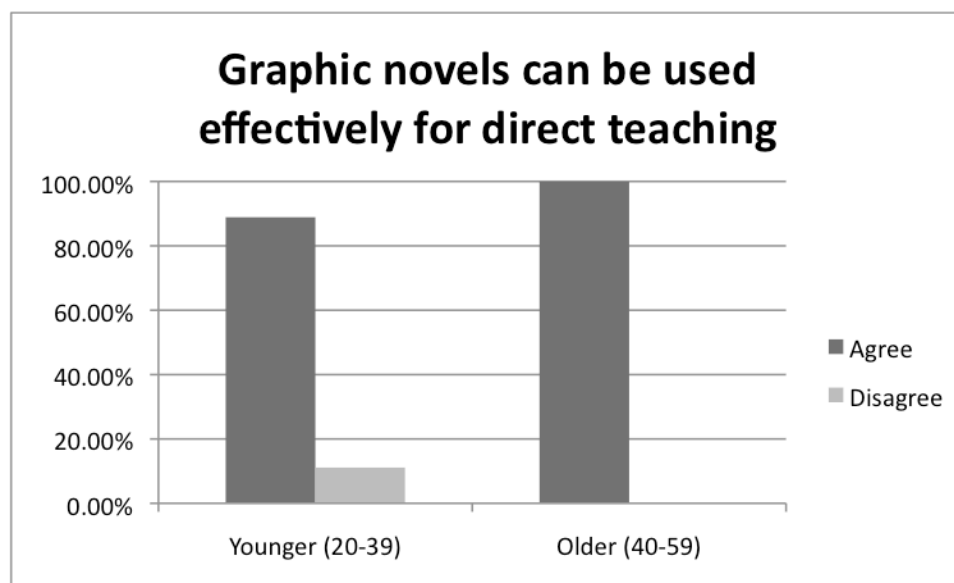


Figure 4 identifies how teachers felt about using graphic novels for direct teaching. According to the data, all nine teachers surveyed aging from 40-59, stated that

using graphic novels for direct instruction can be beneficial, while 89% of teachers ages 20-39 agreed.

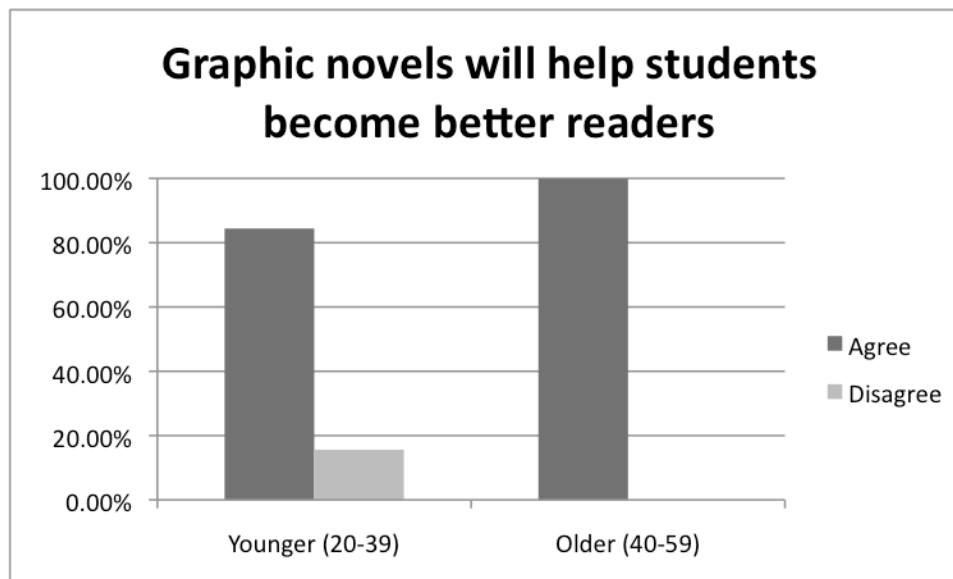
Figure 4

Graphic Novels can be Used Effectively for Direct Teaching



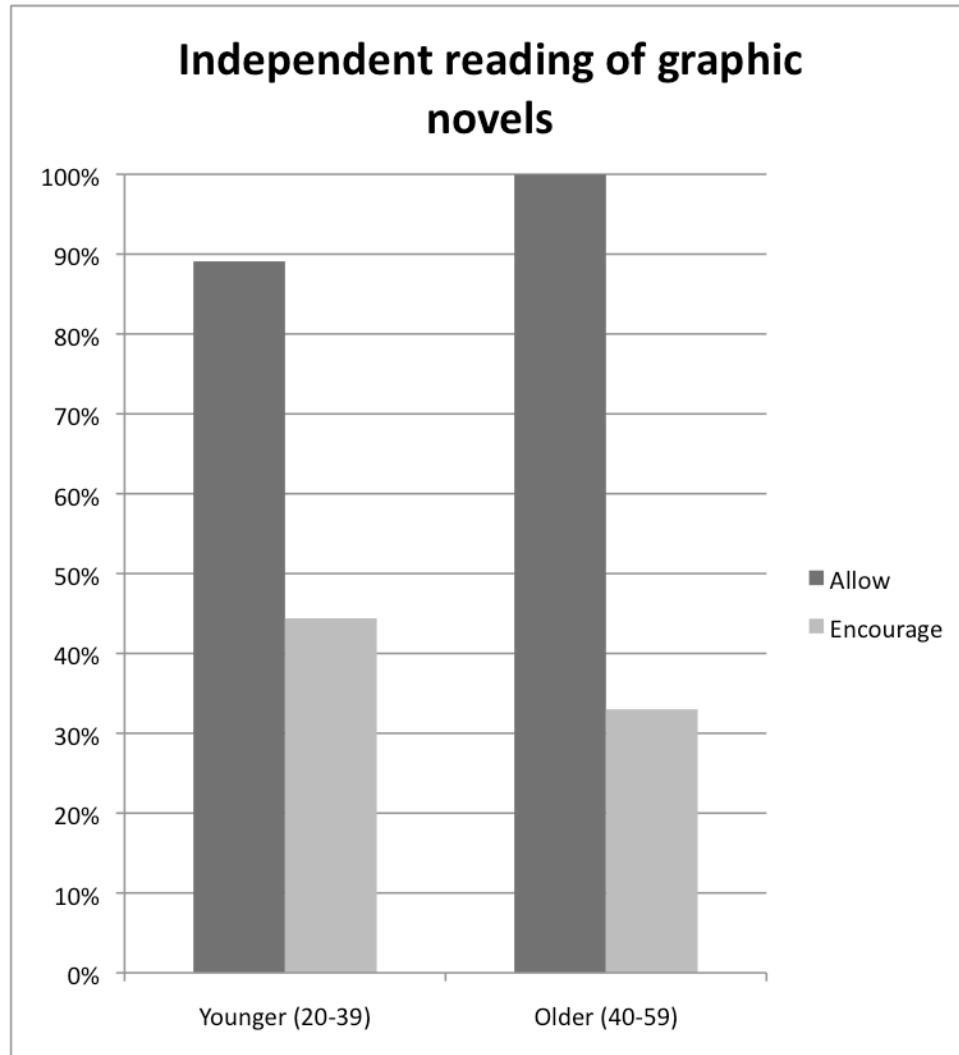
Similarly, Figure 5 indicates that all teachers in the older age groups (40-59) believe that graphic novels can help students to become better readers, while 84% of younger teachers agree. This data suggests that regardless of age, most teachers agreed that graphic novels can be effective when used for direction instruction.

Figure 5

Graphic Novels Will Help Students Become Better Readers

Though all teachers between 40 and 59 years of age believed graphic novels will help students become better readers and all of them allowed students to read them during independent reading times, only 33% encouraged students to read books in this format. On the other hand, 44% of teachers in the 20-39 age group “encouraged” students to read graphic novels, while 89% “allowed” students to read them. Figure 6 shows the percentages of teachers in each age group that allow and encourage students to read graphic novels independently.

Figure 6

Independent Reading of Graphic Novels**Summary**

The data collection showed that most participants had very limited experience with graphic novels, in exposure during childhood, adulthood, and teacher education. Many teachers who were not using graphic novels with their students would be interested in learning more about ways in which they can be used effectively.

Teachers surveyed indicated that graphic novels are used most often with lower readers. Students struggling with reading skills and/or motivation are viewed as gaining the greatest benefit from using graphic novels; however, some teachers saw benefits in writing as well. Few participants considered graphic novels as a way of providing enrichment to students.

When comparing teacher age to perceptions of graphic novels, one substantial difference appeared. The data indicated that younger teachers have had more pre-service training on graphic novels, on average, and encourage students to read them more often. The data also indicated that the majority of teachers, regardless of age, agreed that graphic novels can be beneficial in the classroom, effective for direct teaching, and can help students become better readers.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Teacher perceptions of graphic novels vary greatly and many are unaware of the effective ways graphic novels can be used with students. Many studies have shown the positive results of using this text format in elementary, middle school, and high school classrooms, including Dallacqua (2012), Cooper, Nesmith, and Schwarz (2011), Fisher and Frey (2004), and Hughes, King, Perkins, and Fuke (2011). Monnin (2013) supports the use of graphic novels by showing their connection to the Common Core Standards in stating that, “Combined print-text literacies and image literacies, like those found in graphic novels, are reflected and valued in the Common Core Standards” (p. 52).

Teachers differed greatly on their opinions of graphic novels; however, there were some common perspectives among most participants. The large majority of teachers believed that graphic novels are beneficial to students and allowed them to be read during independent reading times due to the idea that they will help students become better readers. Nevertheless, most teachers used graphic novels no more than once per year. It was also thought by the majority of teachers that graphic novels are more effective with struggling and unmotivated readers than with readers already secure in their literacy skills. Additionally, the data show that many more teachers used graphic novels with the reading curriculum than the writing curriculum. These general opinions as to the effectiveness and current use of graphic novels for classroom use indicated that these teachers were unaware of how to implement these texts with their students. More education from teacher librarians during professional development may help these

teachers become aware of what texts are available and how to use them successfully in all classrooms.

Of the 55 participants surveyed in this study, only eight had an introduction to graphic novels during their pre-service teacher education. Of these same teachers, very few had read these books for their own enjoyment or experienced professional development related to graphic novels since they began teaching. With this background, it is not a surprise that teachers very seldom use graphic novels in their classrooms. Many teachers are unsure of the benefits of using these texts and question how to best implement them into their instruction. This may prompt teacher education programs and school districts to educate teachers in ways of using graphic novels to meet the diverse needs of students in a variety of content areas.

A clear difference exists in the training these teachers have received with graphic novels as pre-service teachers as related to the teacher's age. In general, the younger the teacher, the more likely they were to have received training with these texts. This; however, does not mean that older teachers were less likely to use graphic novels in their classrooms. In fact, teachers between the ages of 40 and 59 saw more benefits in using graphic novels in direct teaching than teachers from younger generations. Yet, younger teachers were 11% more likely to encourage students to read graphic novels independently. Due to the small sample size of this research study, a generalization regarding generational differences in perceptions toward graphic novels is unclear.

Recommendations

Although this research study used survey information from teachers ranging in ages from 20-60 years, a large portion (84%) of the participants ranged from 20-40 years

of age. It would be interesting to see if these same conclusions could be drawn if a greater number of older teachers participated in the research. In addition to the survey, the researcher could gain more information regarding perceptions toward graphic novels through interviews of teachers with varying attitudes and from different age ranges. Through such interviews, participants could further explain the origin of their perspectives and their reasons for using and not using graphic novels.

In future studies, it would be intriguing to discover how teacher librarians could provide teachers with effective professional development in the use of graphic novels in their classrooms. What are teacher librarians currently doing to encourage graphic novels with teachers? Student opinions of graphic novels would also be of interest to determine the extent to which graphic novels are motivating and effective teaching tools for students.

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APPENDIX A

Graphic Novels—Teacher Survey

1. Did you read graphic novels or comic books as a child? Y N

2. How many graphic novels have you read in the past year for your own enjoyment?

0	1-2	3-5	6+
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3. Age: 20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59

4. Grade(s) currently taught:

5. Were you introduced to graphic novels during teacher education **prior** to teaching?

Y	N
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If so, to what extent?

 - a. very briefly
 - b. briefly
 - c. often
 - d. very often

6. Have you been introduced to graphic novels during professional development **since you began** teaching?

Y	N
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If so, to what extent?

 - e. very briefly
 - f. briefly
 - g. often
 - h. very often

7. During the current school year, how often do you use graphic novels with your students?
 - a. every day
 - b. 3 times per week
 - c. once per week
 - d. once per month
 - e. once per year
 - f. never

8. How have you used graphic novels this year with students (mark all that apply)?
- Supplement the reading curriculum
 - Enrichment within the reading curriculum
 - Supplement the language arts curriculum
 - Motivate readers
 - Teach concepts/topics outside of reading and writing
 - Assist English Language Learners
 - Assist struggling readers
9. Graphic novels have benefits within my classroom?
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
10. Graphic novels can be used effectively for direct teaching?
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
11. Graphic novels will help students become better readers?
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
12. Do you allow students to read graphic novels during independent reading time?
Y N
13. Do you encourage students to read graphic novels during independent reading time? Y
N
14. What are your general feelings about using graphic novels in your classroom?
- I hate them
 - Other people could use them, but I never will
 - If I knew more about them, I might use them
 - I like them in some situations
 - I use them whenever I can

15. What benefits have you noticed in your classroom as a result of using graphic novels?

(mark all that apply)

- a. I haven't used them
- b. I haven't noticed any benefits
- c. Increased student motivation toward reading
- d. Increased student motivation toward writing
- e. Improvement in reading skills
- f. Improvement in writing skills