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Educators and researchers advocate for including graphic novels in both the school library and curriculum, as a wide range of literacy benefits have been identified for both specific groups of youth—and students as a whole. Despite this professional advice however, school librarians differ in the extent and manner in which they collect and promote these materials. This research examined school librarian attitudes, behaviors, and collection habits regarding graphic novels to better understand the reasoning behind collection choices and how these factors were affected by librarians' knowledge of graphic novel benefits. Interview data and collection analyses comparing libraries with study-specified strong and weak collections showed that expressed belief in the importance of graphic novels did not always translate into accompanying levels of use. Those libraries with the strongest collections, however, promoted the format heavily in their own libraries and advocated graphic novel use throughout their schools.

Headings:

Collection development in school libraries

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THE GRAPHIC NOVEL GAP: COLLECTION STRENGTH AND SCHOOL LIBRARIAN
UNDERSTANDINGS OF GRAPHIC NOVEL BENEFITS

by
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Introduction

Graphic novels have seen a surge in both scope and critical recognition in recent years. Regarding their scope, it's necessary to realize that graphic novels are a literature format, not a genre (Moeller, 2013). *Graphic novel* is a broad term that includes many types of literature such as typical genre fiction, biographies, autobiographies, and non-fiction accounts. The *novel* portion of the term should "be taken as a reference not to the content of the work, but rather to its physical form" (Karp, 2012).

Graphic novels are being recognized by critics for their literary quality as evidenced by their inclusion in the following award lists: Michael L. Printz Award (*American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang), National Book Award Finalists (*American Born Chinese* and *Boxers & Saints*, both by Gene Luen Yang), Scott O'Dell Award (*Storm in the Barn* by Matt Phelan), Coretta Scott King Author Honor (*Yummy* by G. Neri), and Robert F. Sibert Medal for Non-Fiction (*To Dance: A Ballerina's Graphic Novel* by Siena Cherson Siegel). Professional library organizations such as the Young Adult Library Services Association—YALSA—and the Association for Library Services to Children—ALSC—also publish their own award lists which frequently include graphic novels. YALSA also publishes the *Great Graphic Novels for Teens* booklist annually.

Educators and researchers writing in such varied journals as *School Library Journal*, *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *Teacher Librarian*, *Reading Teacher*, and the *Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults* advocate for including graphic novels in both the school library and curriculum (Alvermann and Xu, 2003; Chun, 2009; Gavigan, 2012; Mouly, 2011; Ranker, 2007; Schwarz, 2002). Additionally, graphic novels are a frequent presence on the websites of professional organizations such as YALSA, ALSC, and AASL—American Association of School Librarians (www.ala.org/yalsa; www.ala.org/alsc; and www.ala.org/aasl, respectively).

A wide range of benefits to the reading of graphic novels have been identified for many different groups of students. Graphic novels can assist with the literacy development of struggling or low-level readers (Krashen, 2004; Ujiie and Krashen, 1996). Struggling, male teen readers who were encouraged to read graphic novels reported more self confidence with reading and were motivated to read more frequently (Gavigan, 2011). The visual component of graphic novels is beneficial to English Language Learners (Chun, 2009; Ranker, 2007). For students with disabilities, exposure to graphic novels can increase reading interest (Gavigan and Tomasevich, 2011; Smetana, Dara, Heidi, and Grisham, 2009). Due to their multiple forms of literacy and combination of images and text, graphic novels have been identified as particularly appealing to students who are visual or spatial learners (Lyga and Lyga, 2004).

In addition to assisting with promoting literacy with specific groups, graphic novels have benefits for all students. Graphic novels can help connect classroom learning with popular culture, making the curriculum more significant for students (Schwarz, 2002; Xu, Sawyer, and Zunich, 2005). Graphic novels also support the learning and practice of multimodal literacy skills (Hammond, 2009; Mouly, 2011).

Despite the professional advice advocating for the inclusion of graphic novels in their libraries, school librarians differ in the extent and manner in which they collect and promote these materials (Gavigan, 2014; MacDonald, 2013). This research examined school librarian attitudes, behaviors, and collection habits regarding graphic novels to better understand the reasoning behind collection choices. Previous researchers have investigated librarian attitudes regarding graphic novels (Gavigan, 2014; Horner, 2006; Priest, 2002; Siekkinen, 2012), but this research is specifically interested in how these attitudes relate to librarians' understandings about the benefits of graphic novels.

Review of Related Literature

The majority of the professional and scholarly literature concerned with graphic novels focuses on the introduction and advocacy of the format, practical advice about shelving and promoting, information about selection tools, examples for connecting to the curriculum, and selection recommendations (Siekkinen, 2012). There is less research concerned with the two main foci of this study: analyses of graphic novel collections and investigations into which factors influence the decisions librarians make when they are collecting and promoting graphic novels.

Researchers' analyses of graphic novel collections have primarily focused on university libraries. Werthmann (2008) evaluated the graphic novel collections of academic members of the American Research Libraries (ARL) list, using an original list of 77 core award-winning or prominent titles. He found that, in general, ARL institutions do not have strong graphic novel collections and that their collections generally were comprised of titles published by mainstream publishers (Werthmann, 2008). Similarly, Wagner (2010) also studied the graphic novel collections of academic ARL libraries, although she chose to focus only on award-winning works, cross-checking those titles against individual institution's catalogs. She found even less agreement between the study's list and the catalogs, noting that one-third of the titles on her list were held by

less than 5% of the nation's ARL libraries and only 2% of the study's titles were held by more than three-quarters of the ARL libraries (Wagner, 2010).

In contrast to the majority of graphic novel collection analysis research, the literature regarding librarian attitudes towards graphic novels is often placed in the context of school and public libraries. Several researchers have found that librarians have positive attitudes regarding graphic novels when certain conditions were present. In a study on public librarians, Snowball (2007) found that the most important positive factor for graphic novel collection was the culture of the individual library. Gill (2007) discovered that elementary school librarians who were active collectors were motivated by research on the popularity of the format and student requests. Similarly, Horner (2006) found that librarians were focused on students, as those who had positive attitudes regarding the graphic novel format were more likely to believe that graphic novels might help struggling readers. Priest (2002) interviewed school librarians from various settings—tasking them with sorting a selection of thirteen popular graphic novels into groups based on how likely they were to purchase the novels. She determined that favorable impressions were focused on either the artwork and binding of the novel or librarians' perceptions of the specific worthiness of the title (Priest, 2002).

For librarians who have not expressed positive attitudes regarding graphic novels, what has the literature found to be the driving force of their concerns? Both Priest (2002) and Snowball (2007) found that librarians had a lack of knowledge and familiarity with

the format. Snowball also identified a fear of negative community response. For those librarians in Gill's study (2007) who resisted collecting graphic novels, the reservations identified were a concern for quality and uncertainty—uncertainty for both the appropriateness of the format and in regards to specific titles. Concerns about the format were also a theme in Clark's 2013 study of school of education students, as she found that reservations about the graphic novel format can affect planned use. In her study of pre-service teachers, Clark found that even though the future educators found graphic novel resources to be “engaging and beneficial for student learning,” they were not planning on using them in their classrooms due to perceptions that those resources would not be accepted by the school community (Clark, 2013).

A commonality between all of the above graphic novel literature is its singular focus—either on the physical collection **or** librarian attitudes. Two recent studies have sought to collect data from both of these areas, offering a more nuanced picture of graphic novel collection.

In Siekkinen's (2012) study, she compared catalog data from the OPAC holdings of twenty private schools to information gleaned from a content analysis of those schools' websites. With this analysis, she was interested in possible correlations between graphic novel collections and characteristics of school library programs, such as a utilization of Web 2.0 tools. Her study design also included a survey of librarians working at private schools throughout North Carolina to assess factors that determine

graphic novel collection. Siekkinen found that rates of collection vary, but that graphic novel collecting is positively correlated to three librarian factors:

- Librarian reads a library-related professional journal.
- Librarian personally likes reading graphic novels.
- Librarian has an MLS degree.

Librarians reported that they collected graphic novels due to student requests and research that graphic novel reading can build literacy and/or lead to reading more text-based books. For librarians in Siekkinen's study who refused to collect graphic novels extensively—or even at all—the most common reasons given were: worries about parents and teachers, concerns about violence and sexual content, and that the format was not worthy of budget expenditures. Her collection analysis found that the majority of graphic novels were part of a series; fewer stand-alone titles were collected, even those appearing on award-winning and professional lists (Siekkinen, 2012).

Even more pertinent to this research is Gavigan's (2014) study on graphic novel collections and librarian attitudes across six middle schools. Gavigan was the first researcher who sought to link specific librarian attitudes with those same librarians' collections. To investigate school collections, she began by analyzing two percentages related to graphic novels: the percentage of collection titles that were coded as graphic novels and the percentage of the yearly circulation that was attributed to those graphic novels. For all of the libraries, the first percentage [collection %] was lower than the second percentage [circulation %]. For example, one library had 709 graphic novels,

representing 5.75% of its total collection. Check-outs for those 709 titles, however, represented 17.64% of the library's total circulation (Gavigan, 2014).

To focus on librarian attitudes, Gavigan queried six middle school librarians on the following factors related to the collection of graphic novels: selection and ordering; cataloguing and marketing; and, patron characteristics. Information about the physical collection—including shelving location, presence of any spine stickers, and display inclusion—was discovered through interview questions. Also included in her interview guide were questions asking if English Language Learners or Special Needs students used the graphic novel collections. Gavigan found that the types of patrons using graphic novels differed greatly between the six schools and theorized that this supported studies showing that graphic novels “can be used effectively with students with varying learning styles and abilities” (Gavigan, 2014, p. 107). In general, Gavigan found that librarians had positive attitudes regarding graphic novels. These attitudes matched their strong collections, evidenced by the titles contained in their collections, the placement of graphic novels in their libraries, and their knowledge of graphic novel collection development resources.

The goals of this research are to examine school librarian attitudes, behaviors, and collection practices regarding graphic novels to better understand the reasoning behind those collection choices. Previous researchers have investigated librarian attitudes regarding graphic novels (Gavigan, 2014; Gill, 2007; Horner, 2006; Priest, 2002; Siekkinen, 2012), but this research is specifically interested in how these attitudes relate

to librarians' understanding about graphic novel benefits and in identifying any common gaps in the understanding of graphic novel benefits. Libraries will be sought for inclusion in the study which have a range of graphic novel collection strengths, a variable not explored in previous studies. This research will also attempt to identify links between librarian attitudes and their graphic novel collection practices as evidenced by physical observation and analysis of their collections.

These research goals have been formulated into the following question: What understanding do school librarians have about the benefits of graphic novels and how does this relate to both their motivations for collecting—or not collecting—these materials and the relative strength of their graphic novel collections?

Research Design

To answer this research question, a mixed-methods research design was created, using quantitative data collection methods to refine the sampling procedures and qualitative methods—semi-structured interviews and physical collection observations—to assess librarian understandings of graphic novel benefits and collection practices.

Sample

The population of interest for this study was middle school librarians located in a school district with high enrollment—one of the largest 25 in the nation—in the Southeastern United States (AS&U, 2014). The 35 public middle schools—with grades 6 through 8—in the district were part of the initial study population. Using a purposive sampling framework, the study design narrowed this population further using inclusion criteria to identify two main sample groups. These groups differed by a key variable for this study—strength of graphic novel collection.

As identifying a sample of school librarians who were **not** strong graphic novel collectors was an integral part of this study's design, substantial research effort was invested in quantifying collection strength. A two-pronged approach was utilized to assess the relative strength of a middle school library's graphic novel collection: list-checking and

number of graphic novels per student. These data then informed the inclusion criteria used to populate the two sample groups.

The list-checking method has a history of being used in libraries to assess collections (Williams and Deyoe, 2014). Specific to graphic novels, Werthmann (2008) and Wagner (2010) both used the list-checking method to assess collections. Both researchers created their own lists, using award-winners as their basis. The bibliographic list created for this research was also study-specific using a combination of youth award-winning titles—from both general youth awards such as the Michael L. Printz Award and from the format-specific Eisner Award—and popular recommendations from *YALSA's Great Graphic Novels for Teens* Booklist (see Appendix A). The list of 39 titles was cross-checked against the on-line school catalog for each middle school in the study population. Schools were ranked from number 1 to 35, based on the agreement between the study list and the school catalog—with 1 representing the highest agreement and 35 the lowest.

Number of graphic novels per student was used to assess the depth of a school's collection. To calculate this figure, a keyword search for *graphic novel* was used in each middle school's online catalog. [To help ensure consistency, each school in the population uses the same cataloging software.] This number was divided by the school's population for the 2014-2015 school year to arrive at a graphic novel per student ratio. Using this ratio, schools were ranked again from 1 to 35, with 1 being the spot with the highest ratio and 35 being the lowest.

A third variable for assessing collection strength was also explored—recording the current top 10 circulated titles for each school from the district’s online catalog system to assess the percentage that were published in a graphic novel format. The presence of graphic novels on a high-circulation list could point to the presence of library promotions and/or the freshness of the collection’s titles (Gavigan, 2014). However, even though every library in the sample shared an identical on-line cataloguing system, each individual library can set the parameters of their Top Ten list independently, choosing whether to include only print materials or also school sets of technology devices. This made comparing school Top Ten lists inconsistent and would have reflected differences in algorithms more than differences in graphic novel collections.

The ranks for 1) Number of graphic novels per student and 2) Presence of Titles on List for each school were then averaged and a final list created which listed all the district’s middle schools ranked from 1 to 35, representing strength of graphic novel collection as defined by this study.

Librarians from the schools ranked 1-5 and 31-35 were sent a recruitment letter via e-mail (see Appendix B), offering a \$20 Amazon gift card as an incentive for participation in an interview. The recruitment letter did not specifically mention graphic novels, instead focusing on the researcher’s interest in collection attitudes and experience. As a priority in this study is to include librarians who may have a wide range of attitudes concerning graphic novels, the researcher did not want to preclude a librarian’s participation in the study due to any negative feelings about the study topic. The goal of

the sample design was to successfully recruit three librarians each from the “top 5” and “bottom 5” of the ranking list. [A library’s spot on the ranking list was never indicated to study participants at any stage of data collection—from recruitment to interviewing.]

Data Collection

For this interpretative study, a mixed-methods approach to data collection and analysis was used. To collect data on librarian attitudes and understandings of the benefits of graphic novels, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7 librarians—four from the sample group of the five schools with the strongest collections and three from the group of the five schools with the weakest collections. An interview guide (Appendix C) was used to conduct face-to-face interviews with the librarians in their individual schools. The interview guide was structured to identify librarians’ prior knowledge of the benefits of using graphic novels with a variety of students and learners. Differing from previous studies (Gavigan, 2014; Siekkinen, 2012), the benefits were not suggested to the librarians via potential patron characteristics. Instead, the interview questions were designed to assess the information about graphic novels which the librarian knew and could therefore communicate while discussing the collection. Graphic novels were not specifically mentioned until question 15 (out of 24) in the interview guide.

Similar to Gavigan (2014), the study design of this research also included linking information on librarian attitudes with physical collection data. However, this study design differs in that physical collection data included researcher-observed (as opposed

to librarian self-identified) collection attributes on location, classification scheme, shelf space, order, display characteristics, and ease of finding. A physical collection protocol (Appendix D) guided these observations.

Data Analysis

The study design used conventional qualitative content analysis, a common method for analyzing qualitative data (Wildemuth, 2009). This method allowed for coding of responses to identify evidence of any gaps in knowledge and understanding of graphic novel benefits.

Observed physical collection data was coded and quantified to allow for comparison between graphic novel collections and both librarian interview data and circulation statistics from the sampling phase. The coded interview data provided more detail on librarian motivations for collecting graphic novels and their knowledge and experiences with the format. The analysis of the physical collection data allowed for comparisons to be made between self-identified librarian graphic novel awareness and actual collection behaviors.

Findings

Interviews

Table 1 lists the circulation data—used as inclusion criteria—for ten schools from the initial sample, the top and bottom five. Librarians from the top three schools—Schools A, B, and C—were recruited, as well as from the bottom three schools—X, Y, and Z. Additionally, librarians from School E were also included in the study.

Table 1: Circulation Findings for Schools in Recruitment Sample

School	Enrollment	# of GNs	GN/ Student	GN/Student Ranking	Total # of GNs on List	List Ranking	Final Ranking
A	969	1324	1.37	3 ¹	37	1	1
B	1747	1113	0.64	5	37	1	2
C	1384	1013	0.73	4	31	3	3
D	1233	763	0.62	6	31	3	4
E	1203	636	0.53	11	28	5	5
V	946	168	0.18	29	13	28	31
W	848	166	0.20	28	10	33	32
X	1189	110	0.09	35	14	27	33
Y	957	121	0.13	33	12	30	34
Z	841	102	0.12	34	12	30	35

¹ The number one and number two schools for this ranking were schools with less than 90 enrolled students, causing their GNs per student percentage to be inflated. Those two schools' final ranking were 18 and 21, respectively.

Questions 1-14 in Part I of the interview were designed to elicit both librarian attitudes about graphic novels and information on the extent to which graphic novel use was embedded in their library practice.

In response to question 1—*What are the most popular items in your collection?*—six of the seven librarians specifically mentioned graphic novels.

- *My graphic novels are crazy popular. They hit the top. Raina Telgemeier.*
- *Graphic novels, they fly off the shelves. Students can read them quickly and there are a lot of series.*
- *Graphic novels. The year that Hunger Games was so popular, the graphic novel Smile was checked out more than the Hunger Games. We have a huge manga reading population and Naruto is the most popular there.*
- *Graphic novels. I think because they are easy to read, kids are drawn to them. They love the pictures. There are some kids who absolutely don't like them. The majority of the kids who like them, they want to read something they can read fast. They love Raina Telgemeier.*
- *Graphic novels, by far. The requests for them, their circulation accounts for less than 1 percent of the total collection, but 9% of the total collection. It's not just a low level thing.*
- *Graphic novels. For students who are not strong readers, they are not intimidated by them. Some kids just like that format.*

Questions 2, 8, and 10-14 were designed to discover how prominently graphic novels were used or featured in the library's programming, services, and collection without the format being mentioned or suggested by the interviewer. **Table 2** shows the instances where librarians mentioned graphic novels in this manner.

Table 2: Responses that Mentioned Graphic Novels in Practice In Part I of the Interview

School	Librarian Response
B	<i>I'm very proud of my graphic novel collection. I've been interested in them for many years and I've worked hard to get a vibrant collection.</i>
B	<i>I've used <u>The Shadow Hero</u> and <u>American Born Chinese</u> in a classroom unit on identity.</i>
B	<i>I do a unit on the elements of a graphic novel, to introduce students to the format.</i>
C	<i>When I do my Bracketology during March, I always make sure to include graphic novels and non-fiction titles.</i>

Questions four and six were developed to draw out any negative opinions librarians had about library materials. These questions elicited one mention of graphic novels, shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3: Negative Responses about Graphic Novels in Part 1 of the Interview

School	Librarian Statement
E	<i>I personally could do without the graphic novels. At some point I think you can get, well you have to be able to read something for comprehension and understanding and stop reading the stuff you can read quickly.</i>

Question five queried which “items you wish you could purchase more of?” **Table four** lists the three librarians who specifically mentioned graphic novels.

Table 4: Graphic Novels Mentioned as Purchase Goal in Part 1 of the Interview

School	Librarian Response
C	<i>More graphic novels.</i>
Y	<i>I'd love to get more graphic novels. They're expensive and with our student population, they disappear the fastest because it is mostly reluctant readers who are checking them out and with our population, the kids checking these out are transient and the books disappear.</i>
Z	<i>Graphic novels, I'm working hard to build that area up.</i>

Question nine was concerned with groups that came into the library as a class, such as English Language Learners, Remedial English classes, AIG (Academically or Intellectually Gifted) classes, or students with special needs. In response to probing about items in the collection that were popular for any groups visiting the respondent's library, four librarians specifically mentioned graphic novels as being a good fit. **Table 5** lists these responses, illustrating that librarians mentioned English Language Learners most frequently.

Table 5: Responses for Class Groups using Graphic Novels from Part I

School	Class Identified	Librarian Response
A	Special Needs	<i>I have two very high special needs classes that I work with and they are drawn to non-fiction and graphic novels.</i>
C	ELLs	<i>These are my highest circulating kids. They like non-fiction and graphic novels, including manga like <u>Naruto</u>, but more so the regular graphic novels.</i>
C	Struggling Readers	<i>The only place they typically browse is in the graphic novel section.</i>
X	ELLs	<i>We have ESL kids and their teacher sends them down regularly. The graphic novels. That is all that they check out.</i>
Z	ELLs	<i>Graphic novels are good. Right now I don't have enough materials for them.</i>

Beginning with question 15, Part II of the interview specifically mentions and focuses on graphic novels. Questions 15 and 18 were designed to identify the ways in which graphic novels were being used in the library collection, programming, and practice.

Table 6 shows these practices. Also, if responses to other questions in Part II included information on these topics, they are also included below.

Table 6: Responses that Mentioned Graphic Novels in Practice In Part II of the Interview

School	Librarian Response
A	<i>I got teachers to include a graphic novel block on their 40 book challenge.</i>
B	<i>I've tracked graphic novel circulation for students because I'm interested in these reading habits.</i>
B	<i>In preparation for a unit on Gene Luen Yang, I taught students about panels and voice bubbles and how the art gives the book its tone and style. I show a lot of examples. That was their preliminary lesson and then they read <u>American Born Chinese</u>. Also, they read a non-fiction article and then they drew their own comics and each panel was a main idea. They presented their panels to the class and then we did a Socratic seminar on <u>American Born Chinese</u>.</i>
B	<i>I worked with kids to help me review <u>The Shadow Hero</u>. I set up stations. Gene Yang wrote that as a homage to <u>The Green Turtle</u>, written by one of the first Asian American comic writers, who wasn't allowed to draw his characters as</i>

Asian, so he only showed them from the neck down. Kids read the original Green Turtle comics and then they had stations on the hero's arc and Chinese celestial gods. Then they read The Shadow Hero and they compared and contrasted the two books. We did a Socratic seminar on becoming a hero, tying it all into cultural identity.

C *I worked with the AIG teacher to make sure that graphic novels were added to the 40 book challenge here—they originally were not included. We both had to argue for it, but they're on there now.*

C *I try to always include graphic novels on displays.*

C *I include graphic novels in book talks I do with ELA¹ classes.*

C *We have 100 Book Awards for readers and teachers questioned those lists that had a lot of graphic novels on them, those students who were reading a lot of graphic novels. I simply explained that graphic novels are worthy of inclusion on that list.*

Z *I made graphic novel bookmarks. I cut out old graphic novel pages and laminated them.*

¹ English Language Arts.

Questions 16 and 20 attempted to elicit information concerning graphic novels' appeal and fit for students. **Table 7** lists the groups cited as being more avid graphic novel readers as compared to other groups.

Table 7: Observed Groups for Which Graphic Novels Hold Appeal

School	Librarian Response
A	<i>More boys than girls, but I think we are very equitable.</i>
B	<i>Well, here the ones that come in the most are the AIG students, they are really into the manga books. And the Asian students. Then you have some lower level readers that read a lot of them, too. We have more boys, but it's close. The graphic novel collection makes up 11% of our collection and it accounts for 33% of our circulation.</i>
C	<i>Mostly male, particularly Latino males. There is a social culture in the graphic novel section. They talk about them with other readers. I've seen students bond over their reading of graphic novels. Their whole conversation is happening in this little world.</i>
E	<i>More guys than girls.</i>
X	<i>I think the boys really like them. Majority is boys.</i>
Y	<i>Primarily our 'free and reduced lunch' students. Black or Latino male students, very few females. A few of our ESL girls like graphic novels. But, the Latino boys I'm talking about aren't ESL students.</i>

Z	<i>High level students enjoy them. Artistic students enjoy them. There is a subculture of kids into manga and anime and they like the connection to Japanese culture. Then there are the other kids who are struggling readers and they aren't interested in a chapter book.</i>
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When asked if teachers ever requested graphic novels be pulled for a classroom unit, all librarians answered no, except for the librarian from School B. Librarians from schools A and C indicated the ways in which they were trying to increase teacher use of graphic novels. Responses from these three schools are listed in **Table 8**.

Table 8: Teacher Requests for Graphic Novels

School	Librarian Response
A	<i>None ever ask for them, but that is a battle I am trying to fight. Relationships I'm trying to build. Trying to get some understanding. I advocate for graphic novels in response when I hear negative comments coming from teachers.</i>
B	<i>Yes. 7th grade includes genre studies and one is a graphic novel and they have a sheet where they have to fill it out. They request graphic novel titles for that unit. Some of the teachers have them doing blog entries. Some of them are using Edmodo. There are questions specific to graphic novels they are answering: 'how does the artwork add to the tone and style of the book?'</i>
C	<i>Nope, but here is what I do. I put some graphic novels like the Olympians series over in non-fiction so when the 6th graders are doing mythology and the teacher requests the books on mythology, graphic novels are automatically being pulled and ending up in a classroom unit. Also, after Project ENABLE training, I worked with our Special Education teacher and we went through lists of graphic novels together to identify those to purchase for the library.</i>

A focus of this research was gaining insight into librarians' understandings of the benefits of graphic novels. Questions 19 and 21 queried the study participants on this issue. Responses are listed in **Table 9**.

Table 9: Librarians' Expressed Knowledge about Graphic Novel Benefits

School	Librarian Response
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>They can be bridge literature.</i> • <i>They help with visual literacy.</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>There is a lot of high vocabulary that the pictures help you understand. When we look at the Lexile count, we can show some high counts if we need to go that way.</i> • <i>It's so nice to have an in-house expert .¹</i>
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The biggest thing is the excitement that it generates about reading.</i> • <i>When I first wanted to buy some 10 years ago, I just wasn't sure about them and I applied for a grant to buy 100 of them and I just saw the difference it made with circulation.</i> • <i>It's great to use with the curriculum, but for me the best use is for pleasure reading.</i> • <i>I've interviewed kids before about why they liked to read them and the big part is the story, they are easy to understand and they are good stories. They like looking at the pictures...because the art adds to the story.</i>
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>There's always that conversation about trying to meet different needs of learners so I have different levels, so it could be a capstone and it's right next to another difficult text.</i> • <i>We have such a strong expert here that provides us with information.¹</i>
E	<p><i>No. I remember that when I was working on my Masters I did stuff with it, but that was 2008.</i></p> <p><u><i>OTHER LIBRARIAN AT SAME LIBRARY:</i></u> ²</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I know there are so many researched benefits from _____.¹ I used to work with her and have seen her class and still have her information packet on the benefits.</i>
X	<i>I haven't read any literature on them.</i>
Y	<i>I haven't spent much time researching the advantages of graphic novels, other than what I've observed.</i>
Z	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Vocabulary level is higher than people imagine. It's a higher level text than people imagine. People think it's fluff and the fact is that there has been studies.</i> • <i>It requires a different kind of reading intelligence, a different approach, the visual.</i>

¹ In this school district, there is a librarian (Librarian B) who has studied and published on graphic novel benefits. These librarians are all referencing this same person—the Discussion section will contain more on this issue.

² School E had two librarians. During the course of the interview, it became clear that the first librarian was not in charge of the collection; survey questions about graphic novels were asked of the other librarian.

Table 10 lists negative statements towards the use of graphic novels that were expressed during Part II of the interview.

Table 10: Negative Responses about Graphic Novels in Part II of the Interview

School	Librarian Statement
E	<i>[In response to asking about the names of popular graphic novels in her library.] I don't know. I'm not particularly excited about them. And we do have self check-out.</i>
E	<i>I think that they have their place. They should have a place in student reading. But students should not read 40 graphic novels in a month. I'd rather see them read 4 graphic novels and two books.</i>

Collection Analysis

Table 11 lists observations on the physical collections of the selected schools. The figures for the number of graphic novels on display in the library included those which were situated on the top of shelving throughout the library, in the graphic novel section [if there was a separate section], and in any other library display.

Table 11: Observed Collection Analysis

School	Approximate Shelving Space in Feet	Number of GNs on Display in the Library	Presence of Graphic Novel Signage near Collection; Defined
A	52	113	Yes; student-created Anime poster hung from ceiling
B	48 ¹	102	Yes; large wreath made of graphic novel pages
C	50	32	Yes; two GRAPHIC NOVEL signs, Garfield comics poster
E	26	8	Yes; GRAPHIC NOVEL spelled out in letters on wall, ZAP POW BOOM artwork
X	4	0	No
Y	4	4	No
Z	8	8	No

¹ Librarian indicated: "Our collection is bigger than our shelf space. In the summer, when the books are all returned, I just pile the books on top and they are checked out immediately when school starts."

Discussion

Data collected for this research echo key conclusions from the literature. Just as researchers have found graphic novels to be a strong fit for struggling readers (Krashen, 2004; Ujiie and Krashen, 1996), interview participants indicated that graphic novels were frequently browsed and read by struggling readers. Chun (2009) and Ranker (2007) identified the visual components of graphic novels as being beneficial to English Language Learners (ELL). Likewise, ELL students were identified by this study's librarians as a prominent group using graphic novel collections.

The breadth of responses on patron use in **Table 7**—male students, AIG students, lower-level readers, artistic students, Latino, Asian-American, and African-American students, higher-level readers, and struggling readers—illustrate that graphic novels hold wide appeal. This mirrors what Gavigan (2014) found in patron usage. Also similar to Gavigan's findings in her 2014 study, were the generally positive views librarians had regarding graphic novels. Only one librarian (**Tables 3 and 10**) expressed negative views and these views were tempered by the librarian working in the same school library who had positive responses regarding the format. The librarians at the schools with the two weakest collections—Y and Z—both specifically mentioned increasing their graphic novel collections as a priority in the coming year (**Table 4**).

As opposed to the expression of negative views, the main differences in the schools with strong and weak collections were the differences between the levels of graphic novel inclusion in their library practice, mentions of advocating for the format, and physical evidence of graphic novel promotion in their library spaces.

The only librarians who independently mentioned including graphic novels in their library practice during Part I of the interview (**Table 2**) were those from schools with a strong collection (B and C). After specifically probing on graphic novels in Part II of the interview (**Table 6**), nine responses included specific ways that the format was included in library practice. Of those nine, eight came from libraries A, B, and C and these represented initiatives that supported literacy or were part of high-level classroom collaborations. The only response from a librarian from a school with a weaker collection represented a program administration activity (making bookmarks). Those librarians with strong collections were not only using their graphic novels in their libraries more, they were working to embed the format in the larger school-community. This can also be seen in that only librarians from schools A, B, and C mentioned advocating for graphic novels with teachers (**Table 8**) or with students.

A major focus of this study was generating a picture of librarians' expressed understanding of graphic novel benefits (**Table 9**). Of the eight librarians interviewed at seven schools [two librarians were spoken with at School E], four listed specific academic or literacy benefits that graphic novels can provide (A, B, C, and Z). The

second librarian at school E also articulated that she knew there were researched benefits for graphic novels and that this is why she wanted to collect them heavily. For this librarian, it was enough to know that the researched benefits were out there, and that this knowledge was coming from an expert in the field. You can also see this sentiment in the responses from librarians A and C. Only librarians from schools X and Y and the first librarian from school E reported no knowledge they had read or could remember about the benefits. Librarians from schools X and Y were able, however, to discuss benefits that they had observed with students.

Data from the physical collection analysis and observations show stark differences between libraries with strong and weak collections (**Table 11**). It makes logistical sense that the libraries with a larger graphic novel collection would have more dedicated shelf space. However, no matter the size of a collection, a library can create signage for key—and popular—sub-collections in a library. However, only libraries from schools A, B, C, and E had any signage advertising the location of the graphic novel collection.

Additionally, the number of graphic novels on display ranged from 0 (Library X) to 113 (Library A). Libraries A and B had an advantage in that their newer libraries contained large round display shelves—that they had both elected to use to showcase graphic novels. Library C—with no such new shelving, still managed to have 32 graphic novels on display throughout the library. Overall, the physical collection data matched the libraries' collection rankings much more than the librarians' professed value they placed on the format.

There was agreement between a librarian's ability to explain the advantages of graphic novels (**Table 9**) and how much they noticed about their graphic novel readers (**Table 7**).

Librarians from A, B, C, and Z were able to list myriad benefits of the format and of those, librarians from B, C, and Z were also able to articulate details on the readers who were the biggest users of graphic novels in their library. The librarian from school Y was also able to provide extensive detail about her graphic novel readers.

Interestingly, there was association between those libraries which had a set circulation time for English classes and the strength of graphic novel collection as indicated by the number of graphic novels per student, illustrated in **Table 12**. A t test to compare the means was significant at the .10 level.

Table 12: Presence of Set Circulation Time and Number of Graphic Novels per Student

School	Presence of Set Circulation Time?	Number of Graphic Novels per Student
A	Yes	1.37
B	Yes	0.64
C	Yes	0.73
E	No	0.53
X	No	0.09
Y	No	0.13
Z	No	0.12

Perhaps those librarians who are seeing students on a regular basis are more aware of circulation habits and student reading interests, resulting in a deeper graphic novel collection.

In the seven schools, one specific librarian—who is a published expert on graphic novels and a librarian at school B—was mentioned by four librarians (from the other three strongest schools—A, C, E—plus school Z). Librarians at schools A, C, and E mentioned her when discussing known benefits of graphic novels. Librarians from A, E, and Z also mentioned Librarian B’s graphic novel collection as a specific model that they either have used—or will use—when purchasing graphic novels. Additionally, Librarian B offered that she has helped librarians build specific purchase lists based on their budget and Librarian Z referenced this sort of list. These results speak to the amount of positive influence one librarian can have in a professional learning community.

Study Limitations

This study attempted to link collection data to librarian attitudes and knowledge. It is difficult to successfully make this link in school libraries due to librarian attrition and job movement. The librarians at schools Y and Z were both new to the school and expressed strong desires to improve their current collections, noting that the previous librarians did not place a value on graphic novels. Therefore, their current collections were not an accurate representation of their attitudes. Clearer connections could have been made between librarian attitudes and knowledge if the study design had excluded librarians who had been at their present positions for less than two years. This research attempted to limit this bias by making comparisons between librarians’ attitudes and behaviors and their physical collection attributes, such as the number of books on display and graphic novel signage—areas in which current librarians **do** have control.

Conclusion and Implications

Based on these study data, the outlook for continued graphic novel collection could be said to look promising. Many of the study participants were able to articulate the benefits of graphic novels—from reviewing research and/or their own observations. However, even though librarians with weaker collections expressed belief in the importance of graphic novels and recognized their high-interest level amongst students, this did not translate into their using graphic novels in the greater school community or even promoting them within their own libraries. Perhaps school libraries would benefit from specific examples of best collection practices of graphic novel collections—shared lesson plans, collection lists, and display ideas—being distributed more aggressively.

As graphic novels represent one of the most high-interest sub-collections in school libraries, further research on the format makes sense for both literacy instruction and school best practice information. Particularly, it would be beneficial to hear more from student readers about the appeal and benefits of graphic novels. Also, this study found that set circulation schedules and strong graphic novel collections were positively correlated. Additional research might gather data on other aspects of school library programs that were correlated with set circulation schedules.

The data suggests that for this district, the presence of an expert—Librarian B—exerted a positive influence on colleagues in terms of collection strength and format knowledge. It would be interesting to compare the graphic novel collections of this district with a similar district to attempt to quantify that influence. Would this then be true for other experts? For example, would having an expert at the district-level on culturally competent pedagogy or materials for ELL students lead to improved practice for fellow librarians? Perhaps more effort should be made at local levels to support librarians in their areas of expertise and provide them with more platforms for sharing their knowledge with their colleagues. This idea could be used to shape more authentic and usable professional development initiatives.

Finally, it was clear that the librarians with the top three strongest collections—A, B, and C—believed in student-centered libraries. They collected graphic novels heavily because, a) it was advantageous for their students; and b) their students were interested in them. This simple, but extremely powerful, framework should be driving all of our school library collections. These librarians clearly did not privilege one sort of reading material over another. As Librarian C stated: “I’m not going to tell a child that what they are reading is less than, because of the kind of text it is.” As research shows that engaged reading—not type of reading—is the substantial driver of reading success (Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000; Cummins, 2007; and Ivey, 2014), these librarians are building school libraries aligned with literacy research, while demonstrating that graphic novels are a necessary and essential part of this literacy framework in school libraries.

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Appendix A: Graphic Novel List

Title	Author
<i>The Adventures of Tintin</i>	Hergé
<i>American Born Chinese</i>	Gene Luen Yang
<i>Amulet [any in series]</i>	Kazu Kibuishi
<i>Anya's Ghost</i>	Vera Brosgol
<i>Avatar: The Last Airbender [any in series]</i>	Various authors
<i>Babymouse [any in series]</i>	Jennifer Holm and Matthew Holm
<i>Babysitter's Club [any in series]</i>	Ann Martin / Raina Telgemeier
<i>Bleach</i>	Tite Kubo
<i>Bone [any in series]</i>	Jeff Smith
<i>Boxers + Saints [both in set]</i>	Gene Yuen Lang
<i>Cardboard</i>	Doug TenNapel
<i>Coraline</i>	Neil Gaiman
<i>Dragon Ball Z</i>	Akira Toriyama
<i>Drama</i>	Raina Telgemeier
<i>El Deafo</i>	CeCe Bell
<i>Foiled</i>	Jane Yolen
<i>Full Metal Alchemist</i>	Hiromu Arakawa
<i>Ghostopolis</i>	Doug TenNapel
<i>Hereville [any in series]</i>	Barry Deutsch
<i>Laika</i>	Nick Abadzis
<i>March</i>	John Lewis
<i>Maus, Volume 1 and Volume 2</i>	Art Spiegelman
<i>Naruto [any in series]</i>	Masashi Kishimoto
<i>Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief</i>	Rick Riordan
<i>Persepolis [any in series]</i>	Marjane Satrapi
<i>Primates: The Fearless Science...</i>	Jim Ottaviani
<i>Rapunzel's Revenge</i>	Shannon Hale and Dean Hale

<i>Robot Dreams</i>	Sara Varon
<i>Seekers [any in series]</i>	Erin Hunter
<i>Shaman King</i>	Hiroiyuki Takei
<i>Sisters</i>	Raina Telgemeier
<i>Smile</i>	Raina Telgemeier
<i>Storm in the Barn</i>	Matt Phelan
<i>Tsubasa [any in series]</i>	CLAMP
<i>To Dance: A Ballerina's Graphic Novel</i>	Sienna Cherson Siegel
<i>Warriors Manga [any in series]</i>	Erin Hunter and Dan Jolley
<i>Wrinkle in Time: The Graphic Novel</i>	Illustrated by Hope Larson
<i>Yummy</i>	G. Neri
<i>Zeus: King of the Gods</i>	George O'Connor

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear _____,

Hello. My name is Julie Stivers and I am a master's student at UNC-CH's School of Information and Library Science. I am writing to ask if you would agree to be interviewed for my master's thesis research project focused on understanding some of the factors affecting collection development in middle school libraries. I am hoping to interview ten librarians in Wake County.

If you agree to participate, the in-person interview would last approximately 45 minutes. The questions will focus on collection development and management, including students' use of your collection, and your attitudes and perceptions about your collection items. After the interview, I'd also like to take a short walk around your library, observing how your library is set-up and shelved. This will take approximately 15 minutes and I'll only be observing your physical collection and library—I will not speak to any students or other staff.

All information gained during the course of the interview and the collection observation will be kept confidential. No libraries or librarians will be identified by name in any of the research findings.

I realize that middle-school librarians are extremely busy. As a token of my appreciation for taking time out of busy schedules to speak with me, all interview participants will receive a \$20 Amazon gift card.

I can come to your library to conduct the interview at whatever time in February would be most convenient for you.

Thank you for considering participating in this research,
Julie Stivers
Master's Candidate 2015

Appendix C: Interview Guide

1. *What are the most popular items in your collection?*
2. *What do you think are the best items in your library's collection? Why are they the best?*
3. *Do you have any personal favorites that you really enjoy? Which ones? Why?*
4. *Any books or authors that you're not crazy about? Why?*
5. *Are there any items you wish you could purchase more of? Why would they be valuable additions to your collection?*
6. *Conversely, are there any items you felt you had to purchase, whether or not it was a priority? What were the reasons for those purchases?*
7. *Have you ever gotten any complaints about items in your collection? For what types of items? What were the complaints?*
8. Introduce topic of collaboration with classroom teachers. [If collaboration is happening at the school/library], *what are some of your recent collaborations?*
 - *What was the subject area?*
 - *Did you use any items in the collection during the collaboration?*
9. Find out whether any 'special' groups come into the library as a class.
 - Special Needs / Exceptional Children.
 - English Language Learners.
 - Remedial English classes.
 - Struggling Readers.
 - AIG [Academically or Intellectually Gifted] students.
 - [For any groups that do come into the library], *do you notice any items in the collection as being particularly popular?*
 - [If so], *what are they?; [and], why do you think that is?*
10. Introduce topic of book talks. [If apparent that the librarian is doing book talks], *what are some of the recent titles that you've promoted?*

11. *Do any classes visit you solely for circulation?* Find out more about any pre-talk occurring before circulation, i.e. 'Circ Chats'. *I'd love to hear about some of the recent [talks or circ-chats-->use whatever language librarian is using] you've had.*
12. Introduce topic of book clubs. [If apparent that the librarian is holding book clubs], *what are some of the book club formats you've used in the library?*
 - *What titles in the collection were popular with your book club students?*
13. Introduce topic of bookmarks/lists/bibliographies. [If librarian is producing these readers' advisory items], *what are some of the genres or types of titles you've included?*
14. For any other kind of programming initiative the librarian mentions, probe on the kinds of library materials that were used in the programming.
15. *I'm specifically interested in your collection of graphic novels and how you see students using these books. What are some of your most popular graphic novels?*
16. *Have you observed that graphic novels appear to be particularly appealing to any specific students or groups of students? Which groups of students? Why do you think they appeal to that group of students?*
17. *Are there any teachers that have requested that you gather/pull graphic novels for use in their classroom units? For what types of units?*
18. *Have you used graphic novels in any library programming?*
 - *[Expand if necessary for], in teacher collaborations? In library promotions?*
 - *In what ways have you used them?*
19. *Do you remember reading about any of the advantages of graphic novels?*
 - *[Probe for specific benefits. If necessary, offer only **one** example, specifically] for example with struggling readers?*
20. *Why do you think graphic novels are such a good fit for [any groups the librarian has mentioned]?*
21. *Is there anything else you'd like to share about any advantages or benefits you've seen as a result of students reading graphic novels? Either from your own observations or experiences or from seeing any articles in professional journals or magazines.*

22. Just one last question! Have you observed any negative outcomes from graphic novels in your library?

Thank you so much for agreeing to share your experiences and expertise with me. You have been incredibly helpful.

Appendix D: Collection Analysis Protocol

Can you see any graphic novels (GNs) from the entrance to the library?
Can you see the GNs from the circulation desk?
Where are the GNs specifically located in relation to the entrance, circ desk, and teaching areas?
Where are they located in terms of Dewey number? [741.5 or other?]
Are all the GNs shelved together? [F, NF, B]
Are there any spine designators [stickers] to indicate the book is a GN?
How are the GNs ordered within the section [i.e., by genre, author name, etc.]?
In feet, what is the total approximate shelf space dedicated to the GN section/s?
Are there any bilingual graphic novels in either the GN section or different language sections? If so, what languages?
Are there any quickly noticeable diverse graphic novels in the collection—with non-White or non-Manga/Anime characters?
Are there any GNs included in any displays, including books, pictures, or information?
What is the neatness level of the GN shelves in relation to the shelf neatness in the rest of the library? [more neat, less neat, or about the same]
What is the brightness level [lights or windows] of the GN shelves in relation to the brightness level in the rest of the library? [more bright, less bright, or about the same]
Are there any reading areas near the GN section? If yes, describe it.
List any other distinctive attributes regarding the library's GN section and [if applicable] GN books shelved in other locations.