Graphic Novels: What Elementary Teachers Think About Their Instructional Value

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ABSTRACT

Survey methods were employed to learn more about teachers' attitudes toward graphic novels and how graphic novels are used in their classrooms. Questions explored participants' attitudes and actual classroom use. The survey research sought to determine if teachers are open to using graphic novels and the extent of their willingness to do so. Though teachers report willingness to use graphic novels and other graphica, they are limited in their attempts to do so by lack of instructional models, lack of graphic novels in the classroom, and their own level of comfort with the genre.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES: NEW DEFINITIONS OF LITERACY

From the 1970s to the present day, the notion of literacy has slowly encompassed more than just basic proficiency with written text to include other types of texts and sign systems (cf. Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Expanded definitions permit scholars and practitioners to refine and improve instruction, such that students learn to construct meaning from a variety of text types, including visual images. These new literacies are often conceptualized in relation to the rapid advances in technology with which schools must contend (e.g., Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004). However, the new literacies also require increased attention to emerging or nontraditional forms of text, such as the graphic novel, that are not often privileged in PK–12 schools.

The visual image is pervasive in the newer forms of literacy. Meaningful images may be defined partially by their boundaries, the information that is in an image and that which might have been included, but is not present. The artist's perspectives also give order and significance to the subject of the image. Style choices, such as use of color, also convey a message to the person viewing the image. Thus, art is a kind of text conveying information about the subject of the image and also informing the reader about the perceptions and identity of the composer (cf. Barthes, 1953/1967).

Visual Literacy

The skills and strategies students bring to a visual text, or that they may be taught when approaching it, are of particular interest to our study of graphica, generally defined as graphic novels and comic books, but limited to graphic novels in this article. When educators value visual texts as important sources of information, as evocative content, or as inspiration for students to create their own visual texts, they are more likely to attend to important features of the visual media and teach students how to do so, as well. As Burmark (2008) notes, visual images are subject to interpretation as are linguistic texts. However, the proficiencies and interpretive frameworks necessary for students to understand an image may be somewhat different from those they bring to the alphabetic texts they commonly encounter. Similarly, Rakes (1999) suggests that students should be taught to read visual images, skills she indicates are of special importance as electronic media increase the amount of graphic information students encounter and use.

Images and Texts

Photographs, artwork, and technical drawings (e.g., maps or graphs) have long accompanied alphabetic or linguistic texts. The ubiquitous PowerPoint with images from clip art databases is one example. Other examples that have persisted for much longer are the illuminated manuscripts of the medieval period. Between the era of the illustrated manuscript and the era of PowerPoint and other electronic environments, the picture book and graphica have melded images with words.

For some time, reading researchers have studied the cues art provides to young readers of picture books. When images and words are paired together, a sort of transaction may be said to occur between the image, the words, and the reader. Croce, Martens, Martens, and Maderazo (2009) studied third-grade students as they learned to attend to the art cues in picture books (they spell picture books as one word, "picturebooks") and found that their comprehension of the alphabetic text generally improved, as well. In addition, Strasser and Seplocha (2007) learned that when pictures are paired with words in a picture book, young readers learn rich and deep meanings for vocabulary. Just as the artwork in a picture book interacts with the words to help young readers (Sipe, 2008) and those struggling with unfamiliar content (Moss, 2008) to make sense of texts, we suggest that the images, the layout of the page, and the words in a graphic novel interact to scaffold complex concepts and inspire new understanding.

Reading the Word

Of particular relevance in understanding the practical uses of graphic novels with PK–12 students is dual coding theory (DCT) (e.g., Sadoski & Paivio, 2004). The dual coding theory of reading rests on the assumption that reading is a function of three constructs:

decoding (or more precisely, recoding), comprehension, and response. Although these three constructs overlap in many ways, they can explain many functions of reading behaviors and processes. DCT differs from other theories in important ways, but central to our work is the argument that knowledge is not divorced from the perceptual mode that originally informed the knowledge. In other words, what is learned verbally tends to be coded in memory verbally. What is learned nonverbally tends to be coded as a function of the nonverbal information.

While a comprehensive review of the complexities of DCT is beyond the scope of this article, it is worth noting that this theory posits a referential process between verbal and nonverbal codes (Sadoski & Paivio, 2004). This idea may be illustrated through use of another example. Hibbing and Rankin-Erickson (2003) recount the story of a student named Teyen who was confused by a sentence in a story (verbal information) where a character sold his caterpillar. Teyen was unable to construct a mental image of a person selling an insect destined to become a butterfly until his teacher showed him a photograph (nonverbal information) of a tractor built by the Caterpillar Corporation. The referential process associating verbal information with nonverbal information helped Teyen develop the appropriate mental constructs needed to comprehend the text.

Images, words, and layout characteristics work together in graphica and make it worthy of consideration as a medium and genre in its own right. At the same time, knowledgeable teachers working with readers who struggle, who are on grade-level, or who have advanced reading proficiencies may find graphica suitable as an access point for more traditional literacy instruction. Words paired with images appear to produce a synergistic effect in many contexts, and graphica are no exception.

A Variety of Genre

Many educators are motivating their students to read by augmenting the commonly read classics with a wider array of genre. As McTaggart (2008) suggests, one possible supplement might be quality graphic novels because, "The reading of graphic novels promotes better reading skills, improves comprehension, and complements other areas of curriculum" (p. 33). Supportive of this position is research by Carter (2009) who notes, "They have piqued his students' interest in learning and increased their success in literacy" (p. 39). Also a proponent, Weiner (2004), states that when graphic novels are used in the classroom, they "can enrich the students' experiences as a new way of imparting information, serving as transitions into more print-intensive works, enticing reluctant readers into prose books and, in some cases, offering literary experiences that linger in the mind long after the book is finished" (p. 115). In a previous study, Frey and Fisher (2004) found that "visual stories allowed students to discuss how authors conveyed mood and tone through images" (p. 21). Others, however, not in agreement with a need to expand the list of classics students should read suggest that by substituting texts, teachers "put their students at a disadvantage when competing against traditionally educated young people" (Fairbrother, 2000, p. 6) in the world of

work and school because "without the knowledge of classical works of literature, today's high school students would be denied access to a specific section of our 'national language'" (p. 2).

Defining the Graphic Novel as an Instructional Tool

Graphic novels began as comics, often advancing controversial societal changes. Graphica as a popular genre has flourished for 125 years. Many traditionalists feel they are best left outside the classroom (Starr, 2004), but in some classrooms, teachers think that graphic novels have the potential to scaffold struggling students into fluent readers and enhance the literacy experiences of more proficient readers. Once again graphic novels are affecting societal change, as there is growing interest in the concept of using them in the classroom. The number of schools teaching with graphica is increasing (NACAE, 2007), and the evidence is growing to support effective use of the genre in the classroom. If teachers are to recognize the value of graphica, their perceptions of the format are critical.

Although graphic novels and comic books are closely related in that each uses a layout in frames, and each relies on artwork as a primary source of information for meaning making by the reader, the present study focused on graphic novels. According to White (2004), "Graphic novels aren't just 'literature lite'; they're a genre readers can use to explore philosophy, history, human interactions, visual literacy, and more" (p. 1). Frey (2010) concurs; graphic novels are a genre worth exploring in their own right. This suggests that graphic novels may be studied as a separate genre, or enhance content learning. While those who create graphic novels may tend to think of their work in a medium, our purpose here is to describe a reading process across text and graphics; thus, the term "genre" applies in the sense that Holman and Harmon (1992) think of the term as a dynamic and flexible one related to literature. Graphic novels give students another choice (Cary, 2004) for relating to literature, relating literature to other subjects, and connecting literature to the student's real world (Webster, 2002). If we can introduce challenging concepts such as transcendentalism through the use of a popular cultural resource like graphic novels, then studying Thoreau later on will be based on prior knowledge instead of being relatively new input.

In a study conducted by Frey and Fisher (2004), graphic novels were found to enhance the multiple literacies of struggling students in an urban, low income, west coast high school. Because the limited amount of text was suited to students with lower reading levels while dealing with complex and more mature themes, graphic novels appealed to readers who struggle with grade-level texts. However, some students were so excited about reading Japanese graphic novels, they wanted to learn the Japanese language to gain a better understanding of the culture of the stories. Interest like this is hard to generate in any subject, much less language arts. Connections and bridges to learning are possible when students are engaged.

Graphic novels are becoming more highly regarded in mainstream culture (Jacobs, 2007). In Jacobs's view, reading graphic

novels involves complex, multiple literacy skills and can help students develop as critical thinkers. According to Wright and Sherman (2006), graphic novels can be a powerful instructional component in literacy curricula. When Deaf students at a high school in California were afforded the opportunity to read graphic novels as part of a summer school curriculum, they immediately gravitated toward the genre (Smetana, Odelson, Burns, & Grisham, 2009). Because Deaf students are learning American Sign Language (ASL) as a first language, English is a second language for them in many ways.

Teachers are not the only educators who acknowledge the graphic novel's qualities. School librarians state that typically the graphic novel collection consists of less than 5% of the entire collection; however, graphic novels account for approximately 40% of circulation. Part of the reason for the inroads into the classroom is the fact that graphic novels on appropriate topics are increasingly available (Gorman, 2004) as the large publishing houses see the potential for profit.

With interest increasing in the use of graphic novels as an aid to literacy and a genre worth studying in its own right, we used survey methods to determine teachers' openness to graphic novels and awareness of the possibilities of utilizing graphic novels in the classroom as another stepping stone to fluency, comprehension, and literacy.

METHODOLOGY

With struggling readers and writers populating the language arts classrooms, it is important to engage students in captivating lessons that will scaffold literacy skills and introduce them to the visual demands of new literacies. Can graphic novels be utilized as a strategy to capture student interest in reading, develop comprehension skills required for traditional and visual texts, and improve writing competence? And if so, are teachers open to classroom use of graphic novels, which historically have had a reputation as debased, second-class literature (Jacobs, 2007)? Are elementary teachers willing to use graphic novels in their classes, and have they done so? In this study, we used survey methodology to learn more about teachers' attitudes toward graphic novels and how graphic novels are used in their classrooms. Questions on the survey were constructed in parallel such that a question about the participant's attitude would also pair with a question elsewhere in the survey about actual classroom use. A pilot survey was developed and tested in the year prior to the survey reported in this article.

Population

The participants were a group of 60 teachers attending a summer institute for graduate degree candidates in education. Since all attendees (100%) at the conference were selected as participants, this is a nonprobability sample, in which respondents were chosen because of their availability. They were stratified according to grade level. Attendance at the conference indicated the participants' desire to increase their knowledge of current teaching techniques and to improve their teaching. Fifty-five teachers were female (92%), and five (8%) were male. Of the sixty participating teachers, 27 had been teaching 1 to 3 years. Eleven teachers had 4 to 6 years of experience; six teachers had between 7 and 9 years of experience; and four had been teaching for more than 10 years. Eleven teachers had just completed their credential program. One did not respond to this question.

Participants described their classrooms as having an average of 35 students per teacher; however, the responders included teachers who teach more than one class session. Teachers in this metropolitan area estimated that, on average, 42% of their students were English language learners. Their estimate of students with individualized education plans (IEPs) was just under 8%. Thirty teachers (51% of teachers who responded to this question) estimated that the majority of their students could be characterized as from a lower socio-economic status family. Twenty-nine teachers (49%) indicated their students were from mid- to upper socio-economic status families.

Characteristics of the respondents as readers of graphic novels were studied, as well. Forty-five of 58 respondents (77.6%) indicated they do not currently read graphic novels on their own. When asked if they read graphic novels or comics as a child, only 32 of 58 respondents (55.2%) responded negatively, indicating an increase over their present habit. For comparison, we asked how many respondents were interested in reading graphic novels, and found that their interest in reading graphica corresponded with their reading habits. Twenty-five respondents were not interested in reading graphica at the time of the survey; a few had no or little interest; 20 were only mildly interested in doing so; while 13 respondents had medium-high or high interest in reading graphica. In the open response portion of the survey, one respondent stated, "I have read graphic novels as an adult but I don't seek them out to read." When asked if they were able to think of a title of a graphic novel, eight participants were able to respond. Only five respondents could think of a title they had used in their classrooms. These responses suggest that the majority of these teachers have very limited knowledge or experience related to reading graphic novels, but more than half are interested in reading graphica. It seems to be a very important finding that a significant number of teachers recognized the genre as something with which they should be familiar and that they should consider reading, given the fact that outside of their classrooms students are eagerly reading graphic novels.

Instruments

The actual survey tool that was used to collect data was designed for this study. Because we did not want to confuse the teachers, "graphic novel" was defined, and the term was used interchangeably with "comic" for purposes of this study. The quantitative survey instrument (Appendix A) shows the categorical scales (yes/no), a Likert-type scale, and frequency of use scale. The modified Likert scale had a range of value scales of "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree." The data collection tool was a self-administered questionnaire. This survey was cross-sectional, with the data collected at one time. Since all

attendees responded to the survey, there is no response bias affecting the overall responses.

Data Analysis

A frequency distribution of teacher responses regarding attitudes toward graphic novels and their efficacy in the classroom was used to analyze the data collected from the questionnaires. Since each grade level has different needs, abilities, and standards, the data were organized into five levels or categories: kindergarten through grade 2 (23 respondents), grades 3 through 5 (14 respondents), those who teach multiple elementary grades across the two previous categories (9 respondents), and middle and high school grades 6 through 12 (9 respondents). Because of the small size of the respondents from the middle and high school grades, their data are not included in the disaggregated figures. In two cases, respondents who taught third grade also taught another grade. When the grade level was above third, the respondent was grouped with the upper elementary teachers; when the other grade was below third, the respondent was grouped with the primary grade teachers. A total of 55 participants responded to the question about grade level taught during the previous school year. Four respondents did not indicate a grade level, and their responses were not included in the analysis of actual and potential use of graphica in the classroom when broken down by grade-level band. Patterns or tendencies that could be determined from the frequency distributions have been summarized at the end of the results section.

FINDINGS

A rank order question requires that respondents choose one item over others, and thus an indicator of the priority the respondent places on the indicators provided is highlighted. Five common perceptions of graphic novels as instructional tools were included on forced choice items. Of 58 respondents to this question, 39 (67.2%) rated the appeal of graphic novels to students' interests and the most compelling strength of the genre (high or medium high ranking). Twenty-four respondents (41.3%) ranked the strength of graphic novels to appeal to readers who are bored as their first choice. Note that percentages are distributed across a forced choice continuum, so the totals are horizontal rather than vertical (that is, 41.3% of respondents who ranked the "bored reader" category ranked it as a high or medium high strength). Seventeen respondents (37%) indicated that the strength of graphic novels as a reward for completing other reading tasks was low. Conversely, 20 respondents (40%) thought that a strength of graphic novels is that they are useful as an enrichment tool. Respondents were distributed across the rankings as to the strength of graphic novels as a tool for young readers who are not on grade level. Nineteen (44.2%) ranked this in the middle as "medium" in terms of graphic novels utility or strength in the classroom. Thirteen respondents ranked it as high or medium high, while 11 ranked this criterion as medium low or low. These data are quite interesting illustrating two contrasting views of graphic novels as texts to be used in the classroom. While the

majority of the teachers believe that graphic novels hold high interest and motivation for readers, the majority also found their utility in the classroom to be average or below.

Pedagogical Purposes for Graphic Novels in the Classroom

The purposes for using graphic novels, the frequency of such use, and the intentions of teachers to use graphic novels as instructional reading material formed the basis for this study. We queried teachers about how they actually use graphic novels and how they value those uses. Often, because of variables including access to graphic novels, availability of time in the school day, demands of the prescribed curriculum, and value teachers place on particular genres, differences between actual practice and perceived value can provide useful insights.

A comparison of teachers' reported actual use of graphic novels (see Table 1) with the availability of graphic novels reveals a level of adoption that recognizes that students appreciate and value graphica because graphic novels are available in more than half the classrooms of the teachers surveyed. However, when queried about their use of graphic novels sometime in the past year, more than half in grade bands except one reported they did not use the genre in their teaching. The exception here is in the upper elementary grade band where half the teachers did report using graphic novels and half reported they did not do so.

Table 1. Use and Availability of Graphic Novels		
	Last year, I used graphic novels with some or all of my students (yes/no)	I have graphic novels available for my use in my classroom or at my school
Combined* elementary grades	Yes = 3 **No = 6** N = 9	**Yes = 5** **No = 4** N = 9
Primary grades	Yes = 9 **No = 13** N = 22	**Yes = 12** No = 9 N = 21
Upper elementary	**Yes = 7** **No = 7** N = 14	**Yes = 11** No = 3 N = 14
* Due to low sample size, middle and high school teacher responses are omitted.		

In order to better understand how often teachers used graphic novels, we asked about the frequency of use. Each frequency of use question was paired with a Likert scale response (presented later in the survey) regarding the efficacy of graphic novels as an instructional tool. The items asked teachers to respond to queries about populations of students with whom they might use graphic novels and curricular elements that might or might not be perceived as appropriate for inclusion of graphic novels as an important component of instruction. The data uncover additional contrasts and disparities between reported use of graphic novels and the perceived value of graphic novels (see Table 2) as we describe below.

In every category, "never use graphic novels" contains the largest number of responses, most often more than half. However, in the category for use with students who struggle with reading tasks, a larger percentage shows up in the frequency of use for once per year (17.9%) and once per month (12.5%). In the other categories of use with English language learners and use with all students, those respondents who do use graphic novels do so at least once per year and sometimes once per month or once per week. On the other hand, compare the frequency of use data with the efficacy scale data. While teachers do not report using graphic novels frequently in most cases, they do appear to recognize that graphic novels are useful texts for different populations of students. In each of the three categories, more than half the teachers indicate their belief that graphic novels are potentially useful by indicating they agree (most common chosen in all three categories) or strongly agree (second most commonly chosen in all three categories) that they would use graphic novels with English language learners, students who struggle with reading, and all students.

Frequency of graphic novel use as a curricular component was reported most often as "never." As a supplemental program, motivational tool, or enrichment teachers reported using graphic novels in a limited way, usually once per month or once per year. When asked if they use graphic novels in their primary reading program, 67.3% indicated never, and 7.3% reported using graphic novels once per year and once per month. However, it is somewhat surprising that three teachers (5.5%) did report using graphic novels in their primary reading program every day, and one more reported doing so once each week.

The efficacy scale again provides interesting contrasts that highlight the differences between perceived usefulness and actual use. With regard to the possibility of using graphic novels as the foundation for a primary reading program, 41.4% indicated strong disagreement, but fifteen teachers agreed or strongly agreed that graphic novels could be used in this way. In the curriculum categories of motivational tool or supplemental reading, teachers overwhelmingly indicated they agreed that graphic novels would be useful in these two areas. The differences between whether graphic novels could be used as a primary reading program or in a supplemental or other capacity suggest that respondents were paying attention to the choices they marked. Further, the differences could imply that teachers employed definitions for "primary," "enrichment," "motivation," and "supplemental" that informed their choices. However, respondents may have overlapping conceptualizations for these terms that have an impact on the results. For example, a motivational use of graphica might also be a part of supplementary use.

More than 75% of teachers (combined "agree" and "strongly agree") believed that graphic novels are useful as supplemental reading and as a motivational tool. However, they did not appear to equate the term "enrichment" with either "supplemental" or "motivational." The majority of responses in this category indicated disagreement (36.2%), a few reported strong disagreement (10.3%), while a substantial number simply had no opinion

(27.6%). The "no opinion" rating was not marked often except in the enrichment and the primary reading program questions. The implications for the result of the enrichment indicator will be explored later in this article.

To further refine the data and determine details regarding how teachers at different grade bands used graphic novels and their attitudes toward graphic novels as texts they might use in their instruction, the data were disaggregated by grade band (see Table 3). The secondary levels were omitted from this figure because there were few participants at these grade levels. There were no noticeable differences by grade band than what was found when all teachers were considered together in the data in Table 2. Where teachers did use graphic novels with specific populations or as components of the curriculum, the grade bands that tended to do so more frequently were the upper elementary and middle school teachers. Primary grade teachers and combined-grade teachers tended not to use graphic novels as often.

The contrast noted in Table 2 for all grade levels between frequency data and efficacy scales appeared in the data disaggregated by grade bands (see Table 4); however, the upper elementary tended to favor graphic novels in greater numbers, more often reporting "strongly agree" when other bands reported only "agree." The pattern noted for those who would use graphic novels as a primary reading program, supplemental program, motivational element, or enrichment continued across the grade bands, as well. That is, teachers, in the main, did not perceive graphic novels as an appropriate element of a primary reading program, but they did indicate that graphic novels could be useful as supplemental or motivational reading. Combined, K–2, and 3–5 grade bands reported that graphic novels were not appropriate or they had no opinion on the use of graphic novels as enrichment.

Limitations

The size of the middle school and high school sample is relatively small and may not represent these two groups as a whole; however, when the results were included with all participants in aggregate, their responses were incorporated. For this reason we believe that these findings express the voices of elementary school teachers. Participants may also have taken cues from the survey design and title that might have influenced their responses and produced a type of halo effect that results when an impression formed early in a study influences ratings on future observations (Isaac & Michael, 1995). We did find, however, that subsequent discussions with the teachers continued to validate the perspectives evidenced through the survey data.

DISCUSSION

While graphic novels may be "hot" among their readers and, as these data showed, also among many teachers, their use in the classroom is not as "hot." The survey data indicated that a vast majority of the teachers have positive attitudes toward using graphic novels in the classroom, especially in the reading program

	Frequency scale	Frequency of graphic novel use	Efficacy scale	Efficacy
Table 2. Self-reported Frequency of Use and Efficacy for Use of Graphic Novels				
Use with English language learners (ELL)	Every day 3/week 1/week 1/month 1/year Never	7.1% (4) 5.4% (3) 10.7% (6) 8.9% (5) 10.7% (6) **57.1% (32)** N = 56	Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree	34.5% (20) **60.3% (35)** 5.2% (3) 0.0% (0) 0.0% (0) N = 58
Use with readers who struggle with reading tasks	Every day 3/week 1/week 1/month 1/year Never	5.4% (3) 7.1% (4) 12.5% (7) 17.9% (10) 5.4% (3) **51.8% (29)** N = 56	Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree	36.2% (21) **56.9% (33)** 5.2% (3) 1.7% (1) 0.0% (0) N = 58
Use with all students	Every day 3/week 1/week 1/month 1/year Never	5.5% (3) 5.5% (3) 9.1% (5) 12.7% (7) 9.1% (5) **58.2% (32)** N = 55	Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree	34.5% (20) **51.7% (30)** 6.9% (4) 6.9% (4) 0.0% (0) N = 58
Use as a primary reading program	Every day 3/week 1/week 1/month 1/year Never	5.5% (3) 1.8% (1) 10.9% (6) 7.3% (4) 7.3% (4) **67.3% (37)** N = 55	Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree	5.2% (3) 20.7% (12) 24.1% (14) **41.4% (24)** 8.6% (5) N = 58
Use as supplemental reading	Every day 3/week 1/week 1/month 1/year Never	5.5% (3) 3.6% (2) 7.3% (4) 10.9% (6) 16.4% (9) **56.4% (31)** N = 55	Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree	27.6% (16) **55.2% (32)** 12.1% (7) 5.2% (3) 0.0% (0) N = 58
Use as a motivational tool	Every day 3/week 1/week 1/month 1/year Never	9.1% (5) 7.3% (4) 10.9% (6) 23.6% (13) 3.6% (2) **45.5% (25)** N = 55	Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree	43.1% (25) **51.7% (30)** 5.2% (3) 0.0% (0) 0.0% (0) N = 58
Use as enrichment	Every day 3/week 1/week 1/month 1/year Never	7.4% (4) 5.6% (3) 13.0% (7) 16.7% (9) 7.4% (4) **50.0% (27)** N = 54	Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree	6.9% (4) 19.0% (11) 27.6% (16) **36.2% (21)** 10.3% (6) N = 58

	Scale	Combined Elementary N = 9	Primary Grades N = 21	Upper Elementary N = 14
Table 3. Actual Use Breakdown by Grade Bands				
Use with English language learners (ELL)	Every day 3/week 1/week 1/month 1/year Never	0 (0%) 0 (0) 1 (11) 2 (22) 0 (0) **6 (67)**	2 (10%) 1 (5) 2 (10) 2 (10) 1 (5) **13 (62)**	0 (0%) 1 (7) 2 (14) 1 (7) 3 (21) **7 (50)**
Use with readers who struggle with reading tasks	Every day 3/week 1/week 1/month 1/year Never	0 (0) 0 (0) 1 (11) 2 (22) 0 (0) **6 (67)**	1 (5) 2 (10) 3 (14) 3 (14) 1 (5) **11 (52)**	0 (0) 1 (7) 2 (14) 5 (36) 0 (0) **6 (43)**
Use with all students	Every day 3/week 1/week 1/month 1/year Never	0 (0) 0 (0) 1 (11) 2 (22) 0 (0) **6 (67)**	1 (5) 2 (10) 1 (5) 4 (19) 1 (5) **12 (57)**	*0 (0) 1 (7) 2 (14) 1 (7) 2 (14) **7 (50)**
Use as a primary reading program	Every day 3/week 1/week 1/month 1/year Never	0 (0) 0 (0) 1 (11) 0 (0) 0 (0) **8 (89)**	1 (5) 1 (5) 3 (14) 3 (14) 2 (10) **11 (52)**	*0 (0) 0 (0) 1 (8) 1 (8) 1 (8) **10 (77)**
Use as supplemental reading	Every day 3/week 1/week 1/month 1/year Never	0 (0) 0 (0) 1(11) 0 (0) 0 (0) **8 (89)**	1 (5) 2 (10) 1 (5) 3 (14) 2 (10) **12 (52)**	*0 (0) 0 (0) 2 (14) 2 (14) 4 (29) **5 (36)**
Use as a motivational tool	Every day 3/week 1/week 1/month 1/year Never	0 (0) 0 (0) 1 (11) 2 (22) 0 (0) **6 (67)**	3 (14) 2 (10) 1 (5) 4 (19) 1 (5) **10 (48)**	*0 (0) 1 (8) 3 (23) **5 (39)** 1 (8) 3 (23)
Use as enrichment	Every day 3/week 1/week 1/month 1/year Never	0 (0) 0 (0) 1 (11) 1 (11) 0 (0) **7 (78)**	2 (10) 1 (5) 3 (14) 3 (14) 2 (10) **9 (43)**	*0 (0) 1 (8) 3 (23) 3 (23) 1 (8) **5 (39)**

N(percentage%) Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding in all tables. * n =13

	Scale	Combined Elementary N = 9	Primary Grades N = 23	Upper Elementary N = 14
Table 4. Efficacy of Graphic Novels by Grade Band				
Use with English language learners (ELL)	Strongly agree	2 (22)	7 (30)	**6 (43)**
	Agree	**6 (67)**	**15 (65)**	7 (50)
	No opinion	1 (11)	1 (4)	1 (7)
	Disagree	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
	Strongly disagree	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Use with readers who struggle with reading tasks	Strongly agree	2 (22)	7 (30)	**7 (50)**
	Agree	**6 (67)**	**15 (65)**	5 (36)
	No opinion	1 (11)	1 (4)	1 (7)
	Disagree	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (7)
	Strongly disagree	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Use with all students	Strongly agree	3 (33)	7 (30)	**6 (26)**
	Agree	**5 (56)**	**12 (52)**	**6 (26)**
	No opinion	1 (11)	1 (4)	1 (7)
	Disagree	0 (0)	3 (13)	1 (7)
	Strongly disagree	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Use as a primary reading program	Strongly agree	0 (0)	1 (4)	0 (0)
	Agree	0 (0)	7 (30)	5 (36)
	No opinion	**5 (56)**	4 (17)	1 (7)
	Disagree	4 (44)	**9 (39)**	**6 (43)**
	Strongly disagree	0 (0)	2 (9)	2 (14)
Use as supplemental reading	Strongly agree	2 (22)	5 (22)	5 (36)
	Agree	3 (33)	**13 (57)**	**9 (64)**
	No opinion	**4 (44)**	2 (9)	0 (0)
	Disagree	0 (0)	3 (13)	0 (0)
	Strongly disagree	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Use as a motivational tool	Strongly agree	2 (22)	9 (39)	**9 (64)**
	Agree	**5 (56)**	**13 (57)**	5 (36)
	No opinion	2 (22)	1 (4)	0 (0)
	Disagree	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
	Strongly disagree	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Use as enrichment	Strongly agree	0 (0)	2 (9)	0 (0)
	Agree	1 (11)	5 (22)	3 (21)
	No opinion	**5 (56)**	4 (17)	3 (21)
	Disagree	3 (33)	**10 (43)**	**5 (36)**
	Strongly disagree	0 (0)	2 (9)	3 (21)

(as opposed to the writing program), however they are not using them to an extensive degree. Third- through eighth-grade teachers who actually used graphica in the classroom did so with a limited frequency of once or twice a month, sometimes only once a year. Teachers working toward the master's degree generally agreed that graphic novels could be used to enhance literacy skills, however a discrepancy remained between their acceptance of the idea that graphica would be an appropriate classroom genre and their inclusion in the everyday curriculum. More specifically, while teachers did report that graphic novels could serve useful purposes as indicated by the efficacy scales (Tables 2 and 4), the discrepancy between generally positive attitudes and actual use is intriguing and causes one to ponder possible reasons such as lack of access and imposed contextual constraints.

One possible reason for this discrepancy between teacher interest in graphica and its limited use in the classroom may be related, in part, to availability of graphic novels in the classroom (Table 1) and at the school. In some places, it may be that teachers simply do not have access to these types of texts. Budgetary resources to support teachers' decisions about curriculum and resources accompany restricted curricular choices at the classroom level. In an open-ended question at the end of the survey, teachers were asked if there was anything else they wanted to share with the researchers. One teacher summed up the problem and expressed

a sentiment that characterized how many others responded to the open-ended query:

> I did not grow up reading graphic novels, nor were they promoted in my schooling. However, I feel that this is a great way to teach inferencing and visualization with all students, as well as supporting struggling readers and English Learners. I am going to make it a goal of ours to implement graphic novels next year across our 4th grade, supplementing the reading curriculum.

Opportunity and increasing acceptance of graphic novels as a legitimate genre and useful instructional tool was noted by another teacher:

> I like how some publishers are taking a more academic perspective on graphic novels through such books as Max Axiom. I hope they make their way into our school materials.

In responding to the efficacy questions, teachers seemed to work from definitions that positioned graphic novels as tools that either motivate readers or are supplemental in character. They did not think of graphic novels as enrichment, an interesting contrast. We speculate that enrichment is a term most often associated with advanced readers or academically talented students. Thus, the value of texts that rely on visuals as a substantive part of the narrative or other information may be perceived as valuable for readers who struggle for any of a variety of reasons or for students whose teachers need to find appealing genre as a motivational device. Graphic novels may not be perceived as appropriate for students who routinely exceed literacy expectations or who are otherwise in need of enrichment.

To compound this difficulty, teachers working with populations who struggle with literacy tasks or who work in schools challenged by accountability measures are frequently least able to make curricular and materials choices that they believe would benefit the students they serve. Without access to graphica in sufficient quantities to match the needs and reading preferences of students, it would be difficult for teachers to use the genre in their classrooms.

Contextual Constraints

There may also be other possible explanations for this discrepancy. Policy decisions in the current culture of accountability often restrict the capacity of teachers to be the gatekeepers of what materials to use and how best to use them. It may be that schools in need of adequate yearly progress (AYP) improvement require teachers to strictly adhere to the use of approved textbooks rather than selecting reading materials for students (Demko & Hedrick, 2010).

Day-to-day decision making in the context of the classroom is driven by demands that are occurring on the outside of the classroom and the realm of the teacher. Although instructional contexts are varied, accountability initiatives driven by policymakers have greatly influenced what occurs within the context of the classroom. Teachers have little room to initiate curriculum outside of what is legislated and tested. The current reality of what happens within the context of school is driven by the mandates of legislated curriculum, prescribed uses of time, and accountability. Curricular prescriptions have narrowed instructional options and severely limited teacher decision-making. Most national accountability initiatives and curricular demands exclude time for introducing new media such as graphica, and professional development time to learn how to include graphica appropriately.

If a lack of access to and use of graphica are accurate characterizations of the difficulties teachers face, it follows that they also would not have access to adequate models of how graphic novels might be used in classroom practice. Without access to graphica, teachers could not use the genre in their classrooms, discuss effective practices in professional development, or develop collegial models others might emulate and build upon. These analyses certainly cause one to ponder a final question of whether the lack of use is due to lack of availability or the culture of constrictive accountability that may be an equally plausible reason for the discrepancy between teacher interest and curricular implementation. This discrepancy definitely invites future investigation to determine if, with the advent of the new Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010), graphica will find its way into the context and culture of the classroom. It is also intriguing to wonder if, with less restrictive mandates, classroom teachers will regain decision-making powers regarding the materials they select and the ways they use them for instruction.

Such wondering is driven by the finding that although study participants did not use graphic novels in substantive ways in most classrooms, they did indicate overall the possibility that the attributes of graphic novels would make them potentially useful supplements to existing reading materials already in use. Further, most participants recognized the possibility that graphica might serve as important pathways to the critical thinking that they value for their students. Thus present study findings lend support for the possibility of additional research, possibly in the qualitative tradition, to determine if graphica might be instructionally useful. For example, participant responses as to "When would graphic novels be useful in instruction?" "How can graphic be used instructionally?" and "When would graphica not be appropriate for instruction?" offer questions for study. Demographic data regarding the ages of teachers would be helpful to gauge generational bias. Additional questions were raised that also suggest further research: Why is there greater acceptance of graphic novels in intermediate and middle grades than in primary grades? Why are graphic novels not available, since so many teachers would use them? Do graphic novels show efficacy as a tool for teaching literacy? What is the relationship between current school policies related to accountability and teachers selection of instructional materials, including graphic novels? How do graphic novels contribute to the development of the new literacies? Research needs to determine the actual benefits and effectiveness in specific contexts when teachers have opportunities for classroom use. Given this information, graphic novels could arrive like super heroes in tomorrow's classroom.

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APPENDIX

Demographics (about me and my students)

1. Female   Male

2. I have taught school for (choose one)
   • 1–3 years
   • 4–6 years
   • 7–9 years
   • 10 or more years

3. Students at my school mainly fall into the following category (choose one)
   • Low socio-economic status
   • Medium socio-economic status (middle class)
   • High socio-economic status

4. The grade level(s) I taught in the 2009–2010 school year (check or circle all that apply)
   preschool   kindergarten   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11   12

5. The average number of students in my classes is _____.

6. My best estimate of the number of second language learners is _____ percent.

7. My best estimate of the number of students in special education or with an IEP is _____ percent.

8. My best estimate of the number of students who are fully included is _____ percent.

About Graphic Novels

9. In the last school year, I used graphic novels with some or all of my students: Y/N

10. Do you have graphic novels available to use in your class or school?   Y/N

Please rate the degree to which you currently use graphic novels in your class(es):

	Every Day	3 Times/Week	Once/Week	Once/Month	About Once/Year	Never
11. I use graphic novels with English language learners						
12. I use graphic novels with readers who struggle						
13. I use graphic novels with all my students						
14. I use graphic novels as my primary reading program						
15. I use graphic novels as a supplement to my reading program						
16. I use graphic novels as a means of motivating students						
17. I use graphic novels as enrichment						

Please rate the degree to which you agree or not with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
18. I would use graphic novels with English language learners					
19. I would use graphic novels with readers who struggle					
20. I would use graphic novels with all my students					
21. I would use graphic novels as the primary reading program					
22. I would use graphic novels as a supplement to my reading program					
23. I would use graphic novels as a motivation to read other texts					
24. I would use graphic novels as enrichment only					
25. Graphic novels are excellent texts for teaching inferences					
26. Graphic novels are excellent texts for teaching visualizing					
27. Graphic novels are useful for teaching students about dialogue					
28. Graphic novels are useful for teaching outlining skills					
29. Graphic novels harness students' natural interests					
30. Graphic novels acknowledge 21st century students' visual world					
31. Graphic novels can be used to help students achieve California standards					
32. Graphic novels can be used to enhance students' writing skills					

33. Please rank order the main strengths of graphic novels in order from highest to lowest:

    a. Appeals to students' interests
    b. Readers who are not at grade level are still able to read graphic novels
    c. Readers who are bored may like graphic novels
    d. Graphic novels may be best for readers who need enrichment
    e. Graphic novels may be used as a reward after other reading tasks are complete

34. Did you read comics as a child?   Y/N

35. Do you currently read comics or graphic novels?   Y/N

36. Rate your current interest (1-low to 5-high) in reading graphic novels or comics.   1   2   3   4   5

37. Please share any other comments you have about how you currently use graphic novels in your class.

38. Please share any other comments about how you would use graphic novels if you had access or were permitted to do so.

39. If you can think of a graphic novel you have read recently, please name it here.

40. If you can think of a graphic novel you have used in your classroom, please name it here.