Jessica H Gill. Establishing an elementary graphic novel collection: An analysis of the most frequently utilized collection development resources. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree. December, 2007. 41 pages. Advisor: Sandra Hughes-Hassell.

A survey of 190 North Carolina elementary school media centers was conducted to determine which collection development tools media specialists utilize when they begin to establish a graphic novel collection, and which tools they find to be most effective. Follow-up interviews were conducted with 15 media specialists who had utilized collection development tools in order to find out further information regarding the usefulness of particular tools, those which were not useful, as well as collection development needs specific to the area of elementary school-level graphic novels.

Analysis of the survey data revealed that professional review journals, recommendations from media specialists and recommended title lists are the most often used tools, while recommendations from comic book stores, library science professors, and public librarians are least popular. Analysis of the follow-up interviews found that *Titlewave* and *School Library Journal* were the most commonly utilized.

Headings:

     Collection development

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ESTABLISHING AN ELEMENTARY GRAPHIC NOVEL COLLECTION: AN
ANALYSIS OF THE MOST FREQUENTLY UTILIZED COLLECTION
DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

by
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of the School of Information and Library Science
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
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Introduction

Over the past five years, graphic novels and comic books have increased dramatically in their popularity with patrons in both public and school libraries. While a much larger selection exists for the young adult reader, the research reporting their benefits to readers of all ages has resulted in a rapidly increasing number of graphic novels published for the younger reader. As a result, the inclusion of graphic novels into the elementary school media center collection is a task many school media specialists have begun to undertake.

While articles continue to be published, and resources developed for collection development, many elementary school media specialists are still unsure of how to approach this new, and often unfamiliar format. Examining the research makes it clear how little has been published which looks at the collection development tools that are most effective in beginning the creation of a graphic novel collection, or which collection development tool is most useful to the novice graphic novel collector. With a large number of librarians unfamiliar with this format, the traditional ways a librarian may have approached collection development may not be possible. With the quality of graphic novels ranging from abysmal to award-winning, the need for awareness of effective collection development tools so as not to waste valuable budget dollars, and add titles to a collection which will facilitate its success, are essential.

In light of these needs, the research project I have designed seeks to understand the collection development tools elementary school media specialists utilize when

establishing a graphic novel collection. Specifically, I propose that my research will answer the following question: Which collection development tools do elementary school media specialists find most effective in establishing a graphic novel collection, and what aspects of the tools make them most useful.

Literature Review

Graphic novels continue to grow in popularity with each year, from elementary school media centers to adult collections. According to Crawford (2005), "Over the last few years graphic novels have made a considerable splash in the library world, and their popularity with patrons continues to expand" (p. 36). The term graphic novel has been used broadly to refer to the variety of texts which rely heavily on images coupled with text to convey a message, however, comic books and manga also utilize this format, and their popularity has also risen in recent years. Sheppard (2007) defines graphic novels as:

> "much like comics in a trade paperback format – the story is told both through text and through images. While librarians and patrons may use the term graphic novel to refer to any type of text which utilizes visual images heavily, "(Graphic novels) …tell a story, they can stand alone from other titles… many graphic novels deal with current issues, serious subjects, and learning." (p. 12).

Comics, which have been in existence much longer, have typically been viewed by librarians in a negative way. As Weiner (2001) points out, "Because the words 'comic' or 'graphic novels' still have the stigma of being hack literature… many librarians consider this type of reading material to be inappropriate for a library and resist its acceptance" (p. 133). In an effort to show the value of comics, and alter the perception of this format:

"…comic book fans have been defending the right for this art form to be seen as just that for decades. Some of them event went so far as to start calling book-length comics graphic novels in an effort to prove the forms' worth… But whether we call this art form comics or graphic novels we're all talking about the same thing – sequential art." (Hrab, 2007, p. 8).

Manga, another commonly heard term, refers to "…Japanese comics – generally but not always released in the United States in compiled, softcover, graphic-novel format…" (Exner, 2007). One main difference between manga and graphic novels is the organization of the text – typically the reader works from back to front, and from right to left, when reading manga.

While many librarians, both public and school, are hesitant to include texts in these formats, increasingly, "more and more librarians are finding that graphic novels are powerful tools in getting reluctant readers to read" (Sheppard, 2007, p. 13). While often graphic novels are viewed in the same way as comics as not being "quality" literature, there is no denying their popularity and attractiveness to a range of readers, most notably boys, and reluctant readers. As Sheppard (2007) points out, "In our increasingly visual culture, many are finding written text boring and the act of reading as a chore. The pictures within graphic novels draw the attention of the reader" (p. 16). With ever-increasing concerns over the literacy development of children, graphic novels, as well as comics and manga, is a way to foster an interest in reading. Contrary to concerns about the value of graphic novels, "research shows that graphic novels are linguistically equal to other works of literature and bear no negative impact on school achievement or reading levels (Crawford, 2004, p. 37). In fact, researchers suggest that reading for pleasure may

actually increase willingness to read and even reading skills --students who think of reading as pleasurable, will want to read more (Simmons, 2003, p. 12).

Beyond fostering a love for reading, graphic novels also provide text features which are critical in developing a reader's ability to navigate a piece of literature. According to Simmons (2003):

> Readers of graphic novels read the images as well as text -- they must be able to understand mood, tone, character portrayal, and the relationships between the image and text. Graphic novel readers also learn how to "decode facial and body expressions, the symbolic meanings of certain images and postures, metaphors and similes, and other social and literary nuances" (p. 20).

All of these skills are crucial to becoming a proficient reader, and individuals who may not obtain these using more traditional texts are afforded the opportunity to do so with graphic novels. "I found that graphic novels help promote literacy while also encouraging the reluctant reader. Graphic novels, with their visual appeal, may be just what the library collection needs to assist the development of the students to be life-long readers" (Andera, 2007, p. 7). Yet another concern is that reluctant readers who enjoy graphic novels will only read books in this format. Sheppard (2007) found the opposite to be true, that along with being "…powerful tools that can motivate unwilling readers -- both young and old …graphic novel readers tend to also be heavy book readers. (p. 16)

While public libraries have typically found more freedom in adding to their collections, school libraries are limited in the scope of their collection development – tied to the established curriculum. "School libraries have a harder time incorporating graphic novels into their collection because many parents, teachers, and school librarians feel that

graphic novels do not support the curriculum and have a negative impact on a child's learning ability" (Schwarz, 2002, p. 263).   School librarians face pressures to purchase only materials that are viewed as relevant to the educational objectives of the patrons they serve. Graphic novels are not perceived as serving this purpose. As Schwartz (2002) points out:

> Graphic novels can be used to support the curriculum. Teachers can use graphic novels as a bridge to classic literature, create interest in science and social issues, explain complex situations, and explore alternate views of culture, history and human life in general (p. 262).

Education of teachers, administrators and parents is needed to accomplish this awareness, however, which is a role the librarian can play.

Several decisions must be made prior to beginning a graphic novel collection. As Sheppard (2007) explains, "the librarian must decide how to handle the materials, and how to budget for them. (p. 15)" When determining where graphic novels will be shelved – within the general fiction and non-fiction collections, in the 741 section of non-fiction, or in an entirely separate collection – considerations need to be made as to access and awareness of the new format. Likewise, careful consideration must be given to the amount of funds spent on graphic novels, particularly in light of the limited amount of funds available.

While librarians typically feel a sense of confidence and familiarity in collecting for specific areas, and are aware of the resources which they are able to utilize, a media which is new, such as the graphic novel, creates feelings of apprehension and often makes the librarian uncomfortable. "Many media specialists are apprehensive about

starting a collection utilizing a format for which very little is known…" (Young, 2007, p. 27). While research continues to be published about the value of incorporating this format into a collection, particularly for reluctant readers, surprisingly little research has been published on how librarians at all levels begin this process. "Though many media specialists know the importance of the format, they are often reluctant to put them into a school collection because they do not enjoy reading them…" (Young, 2007). However, "…the value cannot be ignored – Research in collection development shows that there is one format that covers a variety of genres, addresses current issues for teens, stimulates young people's imaginations, and engages reluctant readers: graphic novels" (Walliser, 2005, p. 12)

While some of the more traditional means by which a librarian evaluates which resources to add to a collection would be feasible in establishing other new areas of the collection, such as through collaboration with other professionals or reading reviews in professional literature, this is not as easily accomplished when so many are new to this format. A commonly expressed concern is the lack of knowledge about this format, and the resulting feelings of not knowing where to begin because of this, oftentimes leading a librarian to not collect in this area at all. "I sat in on workshop presentations about graphic novels and quickly became overwhelmed by the enormous volume of titles and series. Very few… titles had circulated in my former library, so I just wasn't familiar with them" (Brown et al, 2005, p. 23).

Regardless of these barriers to establishing graphic novel collections, the process is being undertaken by librarians at all levels. Librarians see the benefits in them, including the dramatic rise in circulation, and the way they attract patrons who otherwise

stayed away from the library. In essence, the benefits far outweigh the challenges a

librarian faces in collection development. As Dillon (2004) explains, "libraries can

benefit from making new forms of expression and information available to patrons, and

those of us responsible for libraries need the flexibility and foresight to turn the challenge

of new media into another means of service (p. 3). Collection development tools for

graphic novels continue to flood the market, presenting a wealth of resources,

information, and advice – both good and bad. "Graphic novels are now widely reviewed

in most major professional review journals, their representation on award lists continues

to increase, and they have become a significant part of every major library vendor's

inventory" (Crawford, 2005, p. 37).

   This in and of itself presents an additional barrier to collection development –

which tools are effective, and which are hindrances to the novice collector? With little

published research on the subject, and so many individuals in need of support in this area,

it is imperative that an analysis of collection development tools be done to determine

which enable success, and which create additional barriers.

Methodology

<u>Sample</u>

   A purposive sample of North Carolina elementary schools located in the

following ten school districts in the Raleigh-Durham area was selected was selected as

the sample for this study: Wake, Franklin, Johnston, Person, Nash, Harnett, Orange,

Chapel Hill-Carborro, Alamance-Burlington and Durham. A total of 190 schools

comprised the sample for the survey. Although the sample included schools serving

ethnically, racially, and socioeconomically diverse populations, these factors were not

taken into account in the sample selection, nor were other factors, such as the age, gender or race of the media specialist, the size of the library budget, or test scores considered.

Questionnaire and Interview Protocol Design and Dissemination

Data for the study was collected using a questionnaire and follow-up interview. The 3-page questionnaire consisted of nine questions and was estimated to take approximately 10 minutes to complete (see Appendix A). The interview protocol, designed to further examine the collection development tools and strategies used by the media specialists who completed the survey, contained nine open-ended questions and was estimated to take approximately 15-20 minutes (Appendix B).

The questionnaire, interview protocol, and cover letter (Appendix C) were reviewed and approved by the Academic Affairs Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill for use in human subjects research. Once approved, the cover letter and questionnaire, along with a self-addressed stamped envelope for returning the survey, were sent by US mail to each elementary school in the sample. Each respondent was provided with the option of completing the survey and returning it anonymously, or filling in their name and school. Address information for the schools was located on school district websites. The surveys were addressed to "Media Specialist" at the school's address.

Interview participants were selected from the returned survey pool. Each survey was screened in several subsequent sessions in order to determine who would be selected. First, the surveys were placed into two groups, based upon the respondents answer to question nine, which asked in they would be willing to participate in a short follow-up

interview. If the respondent selected yes, and provided contact information, they were placed into a group for further screening. The surveys were then evaluated based upon their response to the first four questions of the survey. If their library did not contain a graphic novel collection, the media specialist was not considered for a follow-up interview. The final evaluation session looked at the responses provided to the remaining four questions on the survey, specifically the detail provided in the answers. Several respondents failed to answer two or three of the questions, and were eliminated from the group. The remainder of the respondents, a total of 23, were contacted for follow-up interviews. Of this group, 16 responded to the request for a follow-up interview, and 12 were actually interviewed. The other four respondents were unable to be interviewed due to scheduling conflicts, or a change of mind.

The interviews lasted approximately fifteen minutes, with some interviews lasting ten minutes, and several lasting longer than twenty minutes. All interviews were conducted over the telephone. At the conclusion of the interview, each Media Specialist was asked their preference for a graphic novel to add to their collection in appreciation of their participation.

Survey Results and Discussion

A total of 65 surveys were returned, making the survey response rate 34.2%. The first question asked if the Media Center had a graphic novel collection, which, for the purposes of this research, included manga, comic books, and graphic novels.

Figure 1   Prevalence of a graphic novel (GN) collection
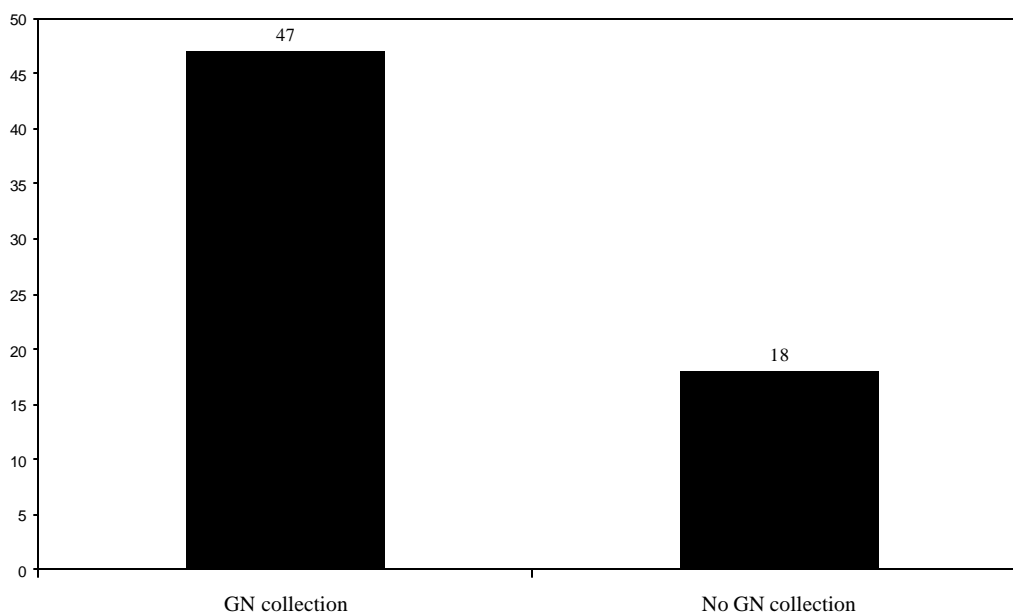
As Figure 1 shows, 72% (47) of respondents indicated they did have a graphic novel collection. The other 28% (18) stated they did not, however, of that 18, four indicated that their Media Center did have graphic novels, but that they were not placed in a specifically designated graphic novel collection. An additional two of the 18 stated that they planned to establish a graphic novel collection during the current, 2007 – 2008 school year.

The second question sought to determine how many graphic novels the Media Center had. This question did not specify that the graphic novels be shelved within a

designated graphic novel collection, rather it was assessing the number of graphic novels
in the elementary school Media Center collection as a whole.

Figure 2   Quantity of graphic novels in the collection
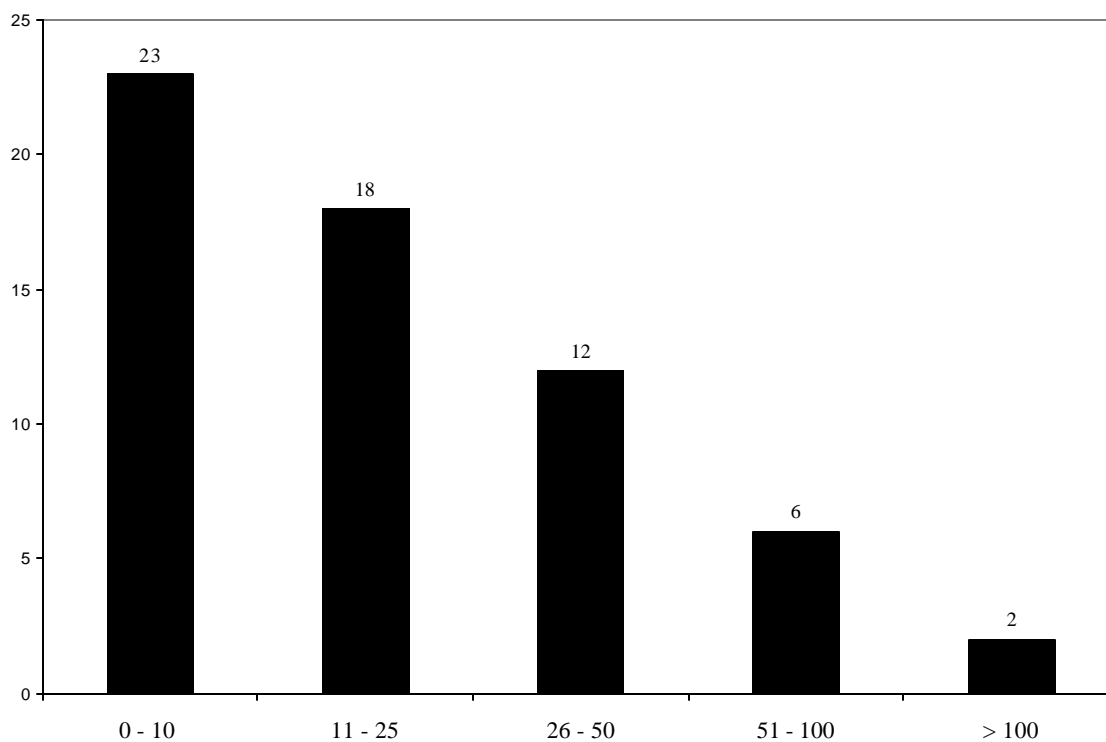
The largest number of respondents (23) indicated that their graphic novel
collections contained 0 - 10 volumes (see Figure 2). Only eight of the collections
contained more than 50 volumes. The data makes it clear that while graphic novels are
purchased for elementary school collections, the number of books in this format is still a
significantly lower percentage of the total number of books within the collection as a
whole. According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the average
number of books per student is 22.01.[1] Based upon the average number of students per
school involved in the study (approximately 700), the average collection size is
approximately 15,407. Thus, every school in the study had less than 1% of their total
collection containing graphic novels.

Question three looked at when the graphic novel collection was first established, and also had the purpose of looking at a potential correlation between the year in which graphic novels were first added to the collection, and the number of graphic novels currently in the collection.

Figure 3   Date graphic novels initially added to collection
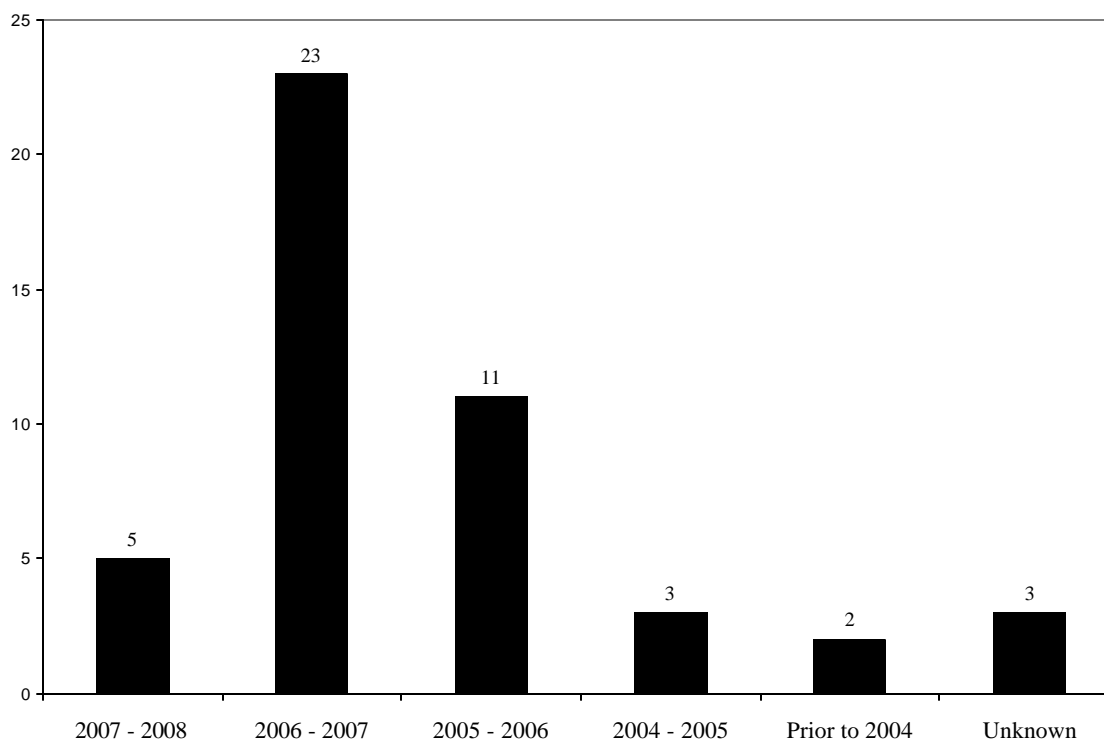
As can be seen in Figure 3, the largest numbers were in the previous two school years, with 23 of the librarians indicating that they began their graphic novel collections in the 2006 – 2007 school year, and 11 in the 2005 – 2006 school year. Surprisingly, only 5 responded that they had established a graphic novel collection in the current school year, however this may be attributed to the fact that the survey was distributed early in the school year, and perhaps if redistributed at the end of the school year, the number would be significantly higher. A noticeable trend in the data was the with each

successive school year, excluding the current, 2007 – 2008 year, the number of school

Media Centers establishing a graphic novel collection increased. There appeared to be

little correlation between the number of graphic novels in a library's collection, and the

year in which they were first added. In fact, several of the schools with larger collections

began purchasing them in the 2005 – 2006 school year, while the schools which

responded that they began purchasing them earlier seemed to have smaller graphic novel

collections.

Question four looked at which individual had established the graphic novel

collection. The purpose of this question was to identify participants for a follow-up

interview.

Figure 4   Individual responsible for initial graphic novel purchases
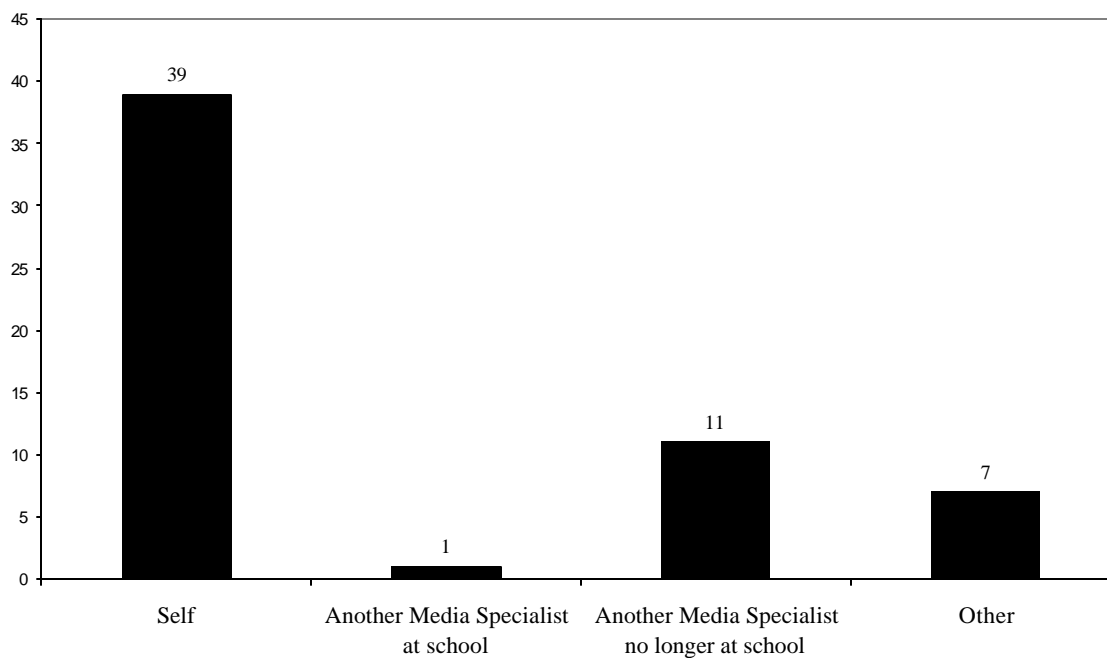
As can be seen in Figure 4, the majority of the survey respondents were the individuals who had established the graphic novel collection, or added graphic novels to the collection. What was interesting to note was the responses to the "other" option which was provided. All four of the responses for this category indicated that Central Office had added the graphic novels as part of the opening day collection for a new school. This seemed to send a clear message that lead media specialists in district-level positions identify graphic novels as an essential part of an elementary school collection.

Questions five through eight were for Media Specialists who had established a graphic novel collection. The survey directed the respondents to complete the rest of the survey only if they were the individual who had established the graphic novel collection at their school. Three respondents completed the survey although they indicated in the first part of the survey that were not the individual who first began collection graphic novels, and as a result their responses to questions five through eight were not included in the analysis. Question five looked at which collection development tools Media Specialists used in determining which graphic novels to purchase. Respondents were able to select all choices that were applicable to them, with a total of 11 choices, including an "other" category. For several of the selections, examples were provided of specific collection development tools, such as the names of professional review journals, and websites.

Figure 5   <u>Use of graphic novel collection development tools</u>
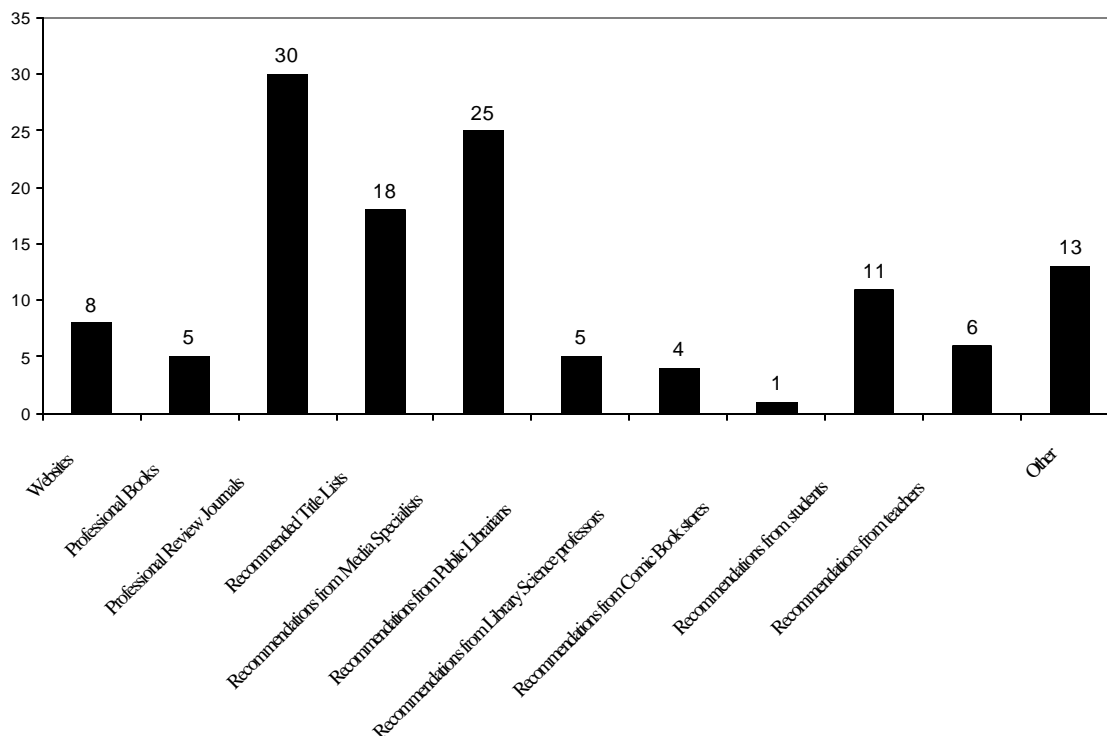
As seen in Figure 5, the most frequently utilized tool was professional review journals, followed closely by recommendations from other Media Specialists, and recommended title lists. The "other" choice was selected by 13 respondents, placing it as the fourth most popular choice. The majority of the respondents who selected this option put such sources as fellow Library Science graduate students, personal experience as a Public Librarian, recommendations from vendors (this was mentioned five times), previewing at book fairs, browsing catalogs, and ordering a set to preview. Comic Book stores, Library Science professor and Public Librarian recommendations were the least popular sources of information for collection development tools.

Question six asked respondents to write which collection development tools they would have utilized had they been aware of them when first establishing their graphic

novel collection. The question was open-ended, to provide the opportunity for any resource, rather than providing a list. Responses varied, with the majority mentioning professional books, websites, professional review journals, and vendor catalogs, as well as several other collection development tools mentioned once or twice. Most popular was professional books, which included *Children's Catalog, Best Books for Children, Graphic Novels Now* by Francesa Goldsmith, *Graphic Novels* by Paul Gravett, and *Getting Graphic* by Michele Gorman. For those who responded by stating websites, specific web addresses were not listed. Recommended title lists was written in as the response on two surveys, and LM-NET was also referenced on one survey. In thinking about the responses, all, with the exception of vendor catalogs were choices from the previous question. It would have been interesting to look at what responses would have been received if a list of collection development tools had not been provided in the survey.

Question seven looked at the factors which motivated Media Specialists to establish a graphic novel collection. Respondents were able to select as many choices as applicable, and as the data shows, there is overlap, with some respondents multiple choices.

Figure 6   Motivation for establishment of graphic novel collection
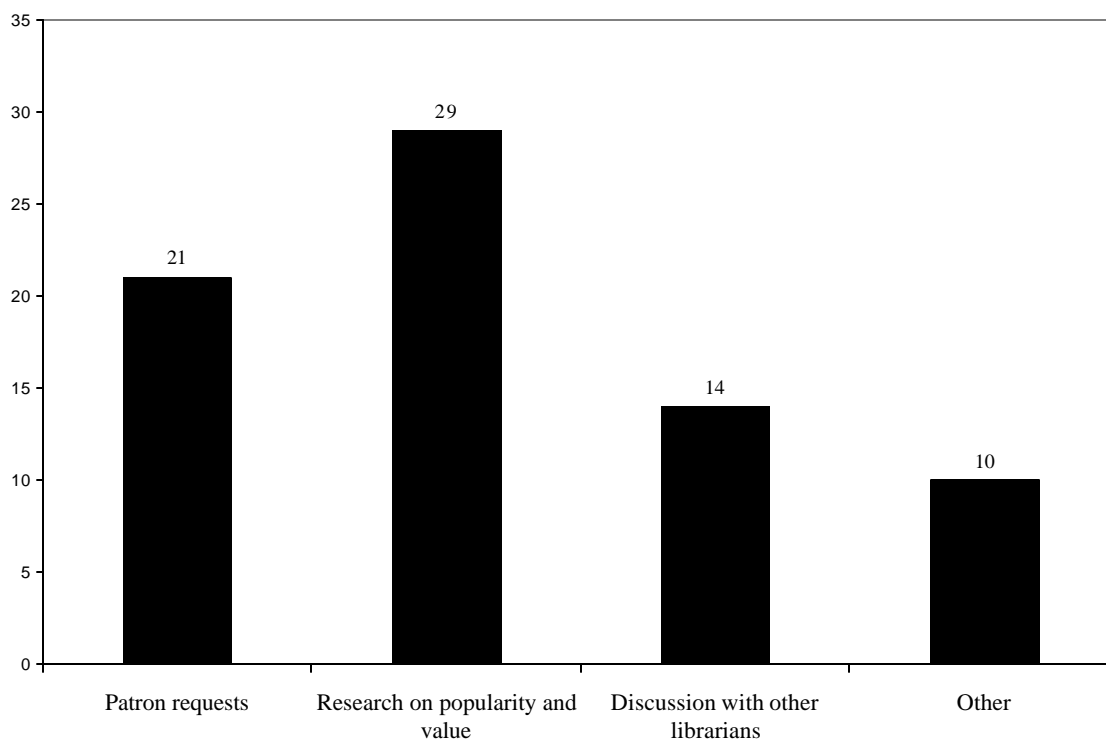
The most popular reason for establishing a graphic novel collection was research,
followed by patron requests (see Figure 6). Clearly the research on the value of graphic
novels in elementary school collections is persuasive, and is being read and given value
by librarians. Patron requests also hold value for the Media Specialists, with 21
respondents selecting this as a motivation, and was interesting to look at in relation to the
number of respondents, 11, who selected students as a collection development tool when
purchasing graphic novels. The "other" category responses included the mention of
support for alternative learning styles, professional conferences, knowledge of their
popularity, lectures in graduate school classes, and reading book reviews.

The final question sought to learn the reservations Media Specialists had about establishing a graphic novel collection. Again, as with the previous question, there was some overlap in the data, with a number of respondents selecting multiple choices.

Figure 7   Reservations about establishing a graphic novel collection
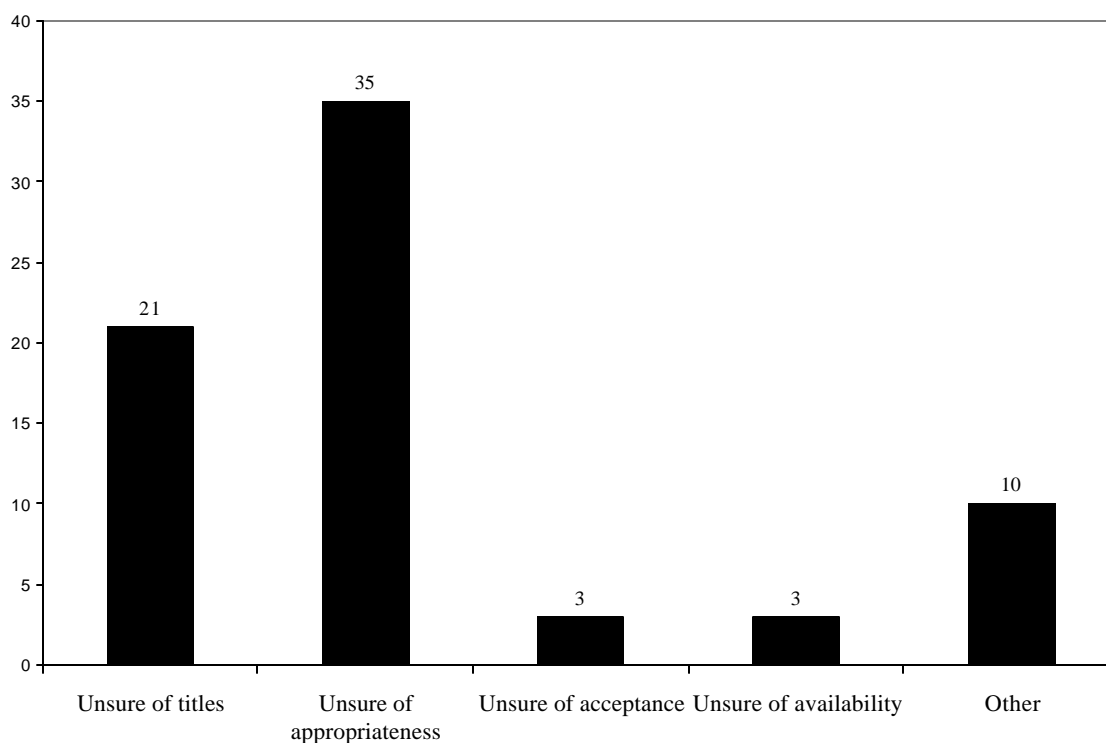
As Figure 7 shows, the concern most often cited was appropriateness of graphic novels for the elementary school audience, with one respondent writing in about concerns over violence, another commenting on the perception on the part of teachers as to graphic novels being appropriate. This response was followed by a lack of knowledge about which titles to purchase. Of much less concern were issues of acceptance and availability. Of the three respondents who selected acceptance as a reason, two wrote in that their concern was the acceptance of this format by teachers, rather than students, administrators or parents. Many of the "other" responses were focused on the poor

quality of graphic novels, specifically their durability and the fact that they easily fall

apart due to frequent use by students, with the majority of graphic novels being

paperback. Interestingly, 13 out of the 47 respondents who had graphic novel collections

did not express any reservations.

Two surveys expressed serious concerns over graphic novels in the elementary

school Media Center. One respondant stated:

> "I do not think that the age group that I serve is ready to productively select and
> use graphic novels."

This media specialist indicated that there were no graphic novels in the collection.

However, the other respondent indicated that there was a separate graphic novel

collection containing between 10 – 25 graphic novels, the majority of which had been

added to the collection in the 205 – 2006 school year by the survey respondent. At the

conclusion of her survey, the respondent wrote:

> "I want to add that I am not continuing to purchase graphic novels and regret my
> choice to include them in the collection in the first place (*Tin Tin* excepted)."

Interestingly, the respondent selected research and articles as the motivation for

establishing a collection initially, and concerns about the appropriateness of graphic

novels as a reservation. Neither individual was contacted for a follow-up interview due

to the purpose of the research; however, further research into problems with graphic

novels, as well as the opinions of Media Specialists regarding the inclusion of this format

into their collection would certainly be a beneficial study.

The follow-up interviews focused on gathering more in-depth information about

which collection development resources were most useful, those that proved to be less

helpful, those that are no longer used, and those which continue to be used. I began each

interview by asking for further information regarding the motivation for establishing a graphic novel collection. Overwhelmingly, the responses focused on how appealing reluctant readers find these books, and the ways in which they attract previously uninterested students, particularly boys, to the library. Several of the respondents had previously worked as public librarians, and knew how popular this format was with younger readers. Approximately half of the respondents remarked about their knowledge of the research on graphic novels as a motivator for reluctant readers, and their desire to provide books that appeal to all types of patrons.

I then continued the interview by asking for further details regarding their reservations about adding graphic novels to the elementary school collection. Many commented that a reservation they had was the appropriateness of the novels, particularly for such a young age group. Ways this concern was addressed was through previewing the books – at book fairs, the public library, and other media center, as well as talking with colleagues about graphic novels which they had placed in their collections. Particular emphasis was placed on using the support of other librarians in order to determine which graphic novels were appropriate for the collection. The interview continued on with a question on how the individual became aware of collection development tools that are useful for graphic novel collection development.   Many mentioned reading through professional journals and articles, including *School Library Journal*, as well as learning about them from graduate school classes, professional learning communities and continuing education courses. LM-NET, a listserv dedicated to school librarians, was also mentioned several times, as was fellow Media Specialists.

The next set of questions focused in on the evaluation of collection development tools that have been used by elementary school Media Specialists. The fourth question in the interview asked the respondents to reflect on which collection development tools were least helpful, and the aspects of the tools that made them unhelpful. The majority of the respondents commented that they continue to use the collection development tools they utilized initially, because they still find them to be helpful. One individual stated that she does not value reviews as highly as other resources, because it is difficult to trust the reviewers, and that she instead previews the books whenever possible in order to determine their appropriateness for her specific collection. Another commented that the free publication by the North Carolina Department of Education, *EvaluTech*, was unhelpful. There was little information provided as to why these were unhelpful, rather the respondent commented that several other collection development tools were easier to use and "better designed". Another interviewee responded that while LM-NET was helpful initially to gather ideas, it tends to be "opinionated and difficult to read through", and yet another stated that "Direct vendor catalogs are the least helpful as they are sales oriented and do not always provide complete information on the books."

Question five asked about which collection development tools were most helpful, and the aspects of the tools that made them helpful. Overwhelmingly, *Titlewave*, an online database, was the most popular, because of it's ease of use, as well as the comprehensive nature of the site. Several respondants mentioned the fact that reviews from a number of sources were compiled in one place, which made reading through reviews and determining if a graphic novel would be worth considering much quicker

than looking through several professional review journals. Recommendations from Media Specialists was also metioned in four separate interviews.

Question six asked the respondants to state which collection development tool they would recommend to another Media Specialist just starting to establish a graphic novel collection, and the reason why they would recommend this above all other resources. Nine out of twelve individuals responded that they would recommend *School Library Journal*, with comments such as:

"It comes out monthly, and covers the most."
"It's very elementary-focused."
"Professionals in the field agree with this source the most."
"It's research-based, and factual."

Other responses included vendor representatives, specifically Capstone Press/Stone Arch Books, as well as other Media Specialists. What was interesting in reviewing these responses was the fact that they failed to match up to the resources which were mentioned as the most helpful, *Titlewave*. Although recommendations from other Media Specialists was mentioned as a response to both questions, the difference between the answers to the questions communicated that several resources – *Titlewave*, *School Library Journal*, and other Media Specialists were all valuable and useful above all other resources.

Question seven sought to have the individuals being interviewed reflect on the availability and number of graphic novel collection development tools currently in comparison to when they began establishing their collection. All individuals interviewed began collecting graphic novels two to three years ago, and all agreed that there were more collection development tools available now than when they first began. Question

eight asked individuals to think about what collection development tool they would like

to see that is not currently available. Responses included:

> "A comprehensive, current review source that provides appropriate ages."
> "A blog dedicated just to elementary school graphic novels."
> "More professional books on elementary graphic novels."
> "An online preview source."
> "A blog or website by someone who actually knows what is appropriate for
>   elementary school Media Centers."
> "More professional books."
> "An online, comprehensive database that's unbiased."
> "A professional review journal that's dedicated to graphic novels."
> "Online source with reviews by kids."

Clearly, the most desired collection development resources are professional books and

review journals that are dedicated to graphic novels at the elementary level, as well as

blogs and websites which are specific to elementary school graphic novels. The

emphasis was placed on having the resourced be specific for the elementary level, rather

than general graphic novel collection development tools.

The final question provided the individuals being interviewed to state any

concluding information or comments in regards to graphic novel collection development.

Most individuals took this time to discuss further the motivations they had for including

graphic novels in their collections, which most commonly was because of discussions

with other librarians, and reading about the value of their inclusion in the collection.

Several of the individuals took this opportunity to comment on how successful their

graphic novel collections are, and the enthusiasm that each individual had for this aspect

of their collection was persuasive and convincing as to the value of the collection within

their Media Center.

Conclusions and Recommendations

With increasing numbers of elementary schools adding graphic novel collections or graphic novels to their existing collections each year, the results of this study highlight the currently used approaches to graphic novel collection development. This study provides a clear picture of the collection development tools most frequently utilized by elementary school media specialists for graphic novels. Professional review journals, recommendations from media specialists and recommended title lists are the most often used tools, while recommendations from comic book stores, library science professors, and public librarians are the least popular. Motivation for establishing a graphic novel collection was overwhelmingly due to research on the popularity and value of this format, as well as patron requests. The reservation most commonly cited was uncertainty of the appropriateness of graphic novels in general for the intended audience, as well as uncertainty about the appropriateness of a specific title. Follow-up interviews provided more specific information about several collection development tools most frequently utilized, *Titlewave* and *School Library Journal*, as well as additional collection development tools which would be useful for this format.

As a result of the responses to both the survey and the follow-up interview, a wide range of additional questions, as well as topics for further research, came to light. The unanimous response to the "other" category on question 3 of the survey, that Lead Media Specialists had placed graphic novels in the opening day collections of elementary schools provides the possibility of further research which would look at the opinions, knowledge and experience school media specialist leaders in district-level positions have with this format. Furthermore, as the inclusion of graphic novels into collections sends

the message that this is a format that should be included in an elementary school collection, what ways, if any, is this area of collection development being fostered at the district level? While a large percentage of respondents to the survey had established graphic novel collections, or had collections which contained graphic novels, there are also a large number of individuals who select not to add this format to their collection. The responses by two individuals to the survey which made clear their decisions not to include graphic novels peaks the interest regarding why individuals would decide not to include graphic novels in their collection. Along the same line of questioning, additional research could be done which would look at the characteristics of media specialists who add graphic novels to their collections, as well as the characteristics of media specialists who elect not to. The limitations of this research did not afford the opportunity to investigate this, however, based upon the responses provided regarding the motivations for adding graphic novels, which include reading research on this format, and talking to other media specialists, questions could be posed about if there were any commonalities regarding individuals who select to purchase graphic novels.

Further investigations into several frequently utilized collection development tools, specifically recommended title lists, and websites, is needed. While recommended title lists was an option on the survey, there was no specification as to the source of the list, nor the author, and while many respondents indicated utilizing this tool, none provided further information about the value, ease of use, or reliability of these lists. Nor did they provide an indication of how they judged the reliability of theses lists, or if they only relied on lists created by other librarians. Likewise, while an example website was

provided on the survey, no additional sites were listed as being sources of information for collection development, nor was there any information regarding the value and reliability.

A broader study is needed which would look at how reservations were overcome, particularly in regards to uncertainty about titles, as well as appropriateness. The limitations of the study did not provide the opportunity to investigate the approaches taken by media specialists in overcoming their reservations. Concerns over quality were frequently cited as a reservation, and a look into the quality of graphic novels, specifically if quality has improved in recent years, and if publishers are aware of this concern is an additional topic in need of further research.

Follow-up interviews provided several additional topics that merit further research. A discrepancy existed between the recommendation of *School Library Journal,* which would be given to media specialists new to graphic novel collecting as the best collection development tool, and the most frequently utilized tool by experience graphic novel collectors, *Titlewave.* While interviews provided a number of reasons as to why each is a valuable tool, a look at why there was a difference in the two responses by a number of respondents, as well as if these responses would be given if additional media specialists were interviewed, would be interesting. The interviews also provided a number of ideas for collection development tools that would be useful to elementary media specialists. Blogs, websites and professional books specific only to an elementary level are all desired. Research done on collection development tools in five to ten years may well indicate a prevalence of these, and in fact, may show them to be the most frequently utilized tools. As demand for this format continues to increase, no doubt the

prevalence and availability of a wide range of graphic novel collection development tools will continue to expand.

Perhaps the most enlightening study regarding the approaches taken by elementary school media specialists when establishing a graphic novel collection would be a qualitative study that followed a small group of individuals over a set period of time. This would provide an opportunity to gather feedback and evaluations on a number of resources as they were being utilized, as well as how the selection policies of the libraries address graphic novels. Results would provide further information regarding how this aspect of collection development is done, as well as being used to provide information for those who are interested in beginning to establish a graphic novel collection and would benefit from more specific information and examples. In addition, a qualitative study that followed the students who use the newly established collections, specifically how well the collection meets their needs, as well as if they are happy with the selection provided would provide useful data.

While there are a number of topics for further research, the data gained from this study also provides many ideas regarding graphic novel collection development that can be used at the district and state levels. Recommendations from other media specialists was a frequently used tool, indicating that opportunities for specific conversations on graphic novels to take place between media specialists would be beneficial, and perhaps increase the number of collections containing graphic novels. Professional learning communities, staff development, workshops at the district level, as well as at conferences would all afford this dialog, and have begun to take place. Likewise, a network of individuals with experience and knowledge regarding graphic novel collecting would be

an excellent resource which would most certainly be utilized in light of the responses to survey questions. Concerns over the acceptance of graphic novels brings up the opportunity for education by the media specialist – providing information about the value of graphic novels to teachers, administrators, parents, and the community.

As graphic novels continue to grow in popularity, and the prevalence in public libraries, bookstores and school media centers increases, the number of elementary school media specialists searching for information regarding best practices in collecting this format will continue to increase. This study has made clear those collection development tools which are most frequently utilized, as well as the collection development tools that are most useful. Further research into a number of topics specific to graphic novel collection development is needed in order to provide information which can be utilized in thoughtful, knowledgeable collection development.

NOTES:

[1] The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction provides access to the North Carolina Report Card for each school year. Information obtained from the 2006 – 2007 report card stated that the state average number of volumes in 22.01 per student.

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Appendix A

Establishing an elementary school graphic novel collection:
A survey of the approaches taken by Elementary School Media Specialists

While confidentiality will be maintained, you may opt to leave the identifying

information below blank:

Name _____

School _____

For the purpose of this survey, the term "graphic novel" is used to refer to books which
are in comic book format, manga format and graphic novel format.

1. Does your school library collection contain a graphic novel collection?

___ Yes   ___ No

2. Approximately how many graphic novels are currently in the collection?

___ 0 – 10   ___ 10 – 25   ___ 25 – 50

___ 50 – 100   ___ > 100

3. When were graphic novels first added to the collection?

___ 2007 – 2008 school year   ___ 2004 – 2005 school year

___ 2006 – 2007 school year   ___ prior to the 2004 – 2005 school year

___ 2005 – 2006 school year   ___ unknown

4. Who was the individual that began purchasing graphic novels?

___ Myself

___ Another media specialist currently employed at school

___ Another media specialist not employed at school

___ Another individual (central office, principal - please specify) _____

If you are the individual who began purchasing graphic novels for the school library collection, please answer the remaining four questions.

5. Check the collection development tools you utilized in determining which

   graphic novels to select:

   __ websites (ex. "No Flying No Tights")

   __ professional books (ex. <u>Graphic Novels in your Media Center</u> - Allyson Lyga)

   __ professional review journals (*School Library Journal, Booklist, Kirkus Review*)

   __ recommended title lists (ex. "Best Graphic novels for elementary schools")

   __ recommendations from other professionals (check all that apply):

      __ Media Specialists

      __ Public librarians

      __ Library Science professors

      __ Comic bookstore owners

      __ Students

      __ Teachers

      __ Other _____

6. What collection development tools would you have utilized if available?

   _____

7. What motivated you to establish a graphic novel collection?

    ___ Patron requests

    ___ Research and/or articles on their popularity and value

    ___ Discussion and/or encouragement from other librarians

    ___ Other _____

8. What reservations did you have in regards to establishing a graphic novel collection?

    ___ Unsure of what titles to purchase

    ___ Unsure of their appropriateness

    ___ Unsure of their acceptance by library patrons

    ___ Unsure of availability

    ___ Other _____

9. If needed, would you be willing to participate in a short (approximately 20 minute)
follow-up interview at a time of your convenience? A graphic novel will be provided in
appreciation of your participation.

       ___ Yes   ___ No

    If yes, please provide the best way to contact you (phone, email):

    _____

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. Your participation in this
survey will help inform school library media professionals of specific selection
development tools elementary school library media specialists use to develop graphic
novel collections.

Appendix B

Establishing an elementary school graphic novel collection:
A follow-up interview of the approaches taken by Elementary School Media Specialists

1. You mentioned _____ as the reason(s) why you were motivated to begin a graphic novel collection. Could you give more detail on this?

2. You mentioned _____ as reservation(s) to beginning a graphic novel collection. How did you overcome these reservation(s)?

3. You checked several collection development tools you utilized in determining which graphic novels to select. How did you become aware of these resources?

4. Of all the resources you utilized initially, which were least helpful? What was unhelpful about them?

5. Of all the resources you utilized initially, which were the most helpful? What was so helpful about them?

6. If you had to select just one resource to recommend to another elementary school Media Specialist who is just beginning to establish a graphic novel collection, which one would you recommend? Why would you recommend this resource over all others?

7. Are there more collection development resources available now for collection development than when you first began establishing your collection?

8. Is there another collection development resource which you would like to see available?

9. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about how you approached establishing your graphic novel collection?

Thank you very much for your participation in this interview. In appreciation of your time, you will receive a complementary graphic novel to add to your collection. Which of the following would you like?

     _____ Owly #4: A time to be brave

     _____ Babymouse #7: Skater Girl

     _____ Sardine in Outer Space

     _____ To dance: A ballerina's graphic novel

You can expect to receive the book within 6 weeks at your Media Center. If you have any questions, you may feel free to contact me at any time. Thank you again for your participation.

Appendix C

Title of Study: Establishing an elementary graphic novel collection: An analysis of the most frequently utilized collection development resources
IRB Study # 07-1518
Investigator: Jessica Gill
Date: September 26, 2007

Dear Elementary School Media Specialist,

I am inviting you to participate in a research project I am conducting at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill that examines which collection development tools are most useful in establishing a graphic novel collection in the elementary school Media Center. In order to identify Media Specialists who would be able to provide information on this topic, I am distributing a brief questionnaire which should take no more than 5 minutes to complete. If you are willing, please complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to me in the addressed, stamped envelope by October 10th, 2007. I estimate this will require only 5 minutes of your time.

Participation is voluntary. You may choose not to respond to the questionnaire, or to answer only some of the questions. Your participation in this survey will help inform the discussion of collection development in the area of graphic novels and comics.

This research has been approved by the Human Subjects Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. My advisor for this research is Dr. Sandra Hughes-Hassell, Associate Professor in the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. All responses will remain confidential, and all documents pertaining to this research will be stored in a secured location. The information gathered from the survey will be used only for the purpose of academic research.

If you have any questions concerning this survey, you may contact me via e-mail at jhgill@email.unc.edu or at (919) 604-2482, or my advisor at smhughes@email.unc.edu or at (919) 843-5276. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or at IRB_subjects@unc.edu. Thank you for your cooperation and the valuable information you are providing.

Sincerely,

Jessica Gill
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Media Specialist, Powell GT Magnet Elementary School
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