

A Proposal for the ALISE School Librarians SIG Session at the 2015 ALISE Annual Conference

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Youth-Created Graphic Novels as Mirrors and Windows for Social Justice Issues

Informative and age-appropriate resources are needed to provide youth with engaging information about social justice issues. Although numerous social justice resources for young people are available, they are often not in a format that appeals to today's youth. Studies have shown that the visuals in graphic novels can motivate students to read, and can aid in their understanding of text (Carter, 2007; Gavigan, 2011; Krashen, 2004; Monnin, 2008). The guidelines and standards of several national educational associations further support the use of graphic novels in schools. For example, the American Association of School Librarians' *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* (AASL, 2007), recommend using a variety of formats, like graphic novels, with students. In addition, The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) recommend using informational texts in a range of formats, such as graphic novels, to help students meet grade level standards (CCSS, 2010).

The purpose of this study was to examine the role that graphic novels can play as a resource for increasing HIV/AIDS awareness among young adults. Capitalizing on the influence of visual culture on today's youth, the graphic novel, *AIDS in the End Zone* (Young Palmetto Books, 2014)

was written to help young adults acquire the knowledge and resources they need to make informed decisions regarding HIV/AIDS. The topic of HIV/AIDS was selected because South Carolina is ranked eighth in the nation for new HIV/AIDS cases , and Columbia, the capital, is ranked sixth in the nation in AIDS cases per capita (Carolina Teen Health, 2012).

The researchers, for this study, worked with incarcerated youth in a high school at the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice School District (SCDJJSD) in summer 2012. In collaboration with a graphic illustrator, the students developed an age-appropriate, culturally diverse graphic novel for HIV/AIDS prevention. In order to better understand the effectiveness of the graphic novel, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How does reading a graphic novel about HIV/ AIDS affect adolescents' understanding of HIV / AIDS issues?
2. What are the ways in which adolescents respond to a graphic novel about HIV / AIDS?

The graphic novel, *AIDS in the End Zone* is currently being used with high school students in two different states. To date, over 100 young adults have participated in book club interventions to assess the effectiveness of the graphic novel. During each session, participants are given a pre-test of their HIV/AIDS knowledge before reading the novel, and a post-test to measure knowledge gains. Findings from the interventions will be presented in the ALISE School Library SIG session. The findings provide insight into the effectiveness of graphic novels as a social justice resource for young adults, specifically in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention.

A model for creating graphic novels with young adults will be included as part of this session. School librarians can use this model to help their students create graphic novels address diversity, equity, and social justice issues. The process of creating the graphic novel could easily be replicated across the curriculum for other social issue topics such as bullying, addiction issues, adolescent pregnancy, etc.

This study has significant implications in the field of school librarianship because it addresses important issues regarding visual literacy, adolescent literacy, and social justice issues. In order to provide effective social justice resources for young adults, librarians and educators must examine the texts that young adults value, such as graphic novels. This is the first study of its kind to provide scientifically-based research that examines whether or not graphic novels can be an effective way to address social justice issues, such as HIV/ AIDS, as a prevention tool for young adults.

The information that will be presented in this session addresses the following standards from the American Association of School Librarians Standards for the 21st-Century Learner:

1.1.6

Read, view, and listen for information presented in any format (e.g., textual, visual, media, digital) in order to make inferences and gather meaning

2.1.6

Use the writing process, media and visual literacy, and technology skills to create products that express new understandings

3.3.4

Create products that apply to authentic, real-world contexts.

3.3.5

Contribute to the exchange of ideas within and beyond the learning community.

3.3.6

Use information and knowledge in the service of democratic values

Selected References:

Carter, J. (2007). *Building Literacy Connections with Graphic Novels: Page by Page, Panel by Panel*. National Council of Teachers of English.

Gavigan, Karen (2012). "Sequentially SmART: Using Graphic Novels across the K-12 Curriculum." *Teacher Librarian* 39, no. 5: 20-25.

Krashen, S. (2004). *The power of reading: Insights from the research*. Second Edition. Portsmouth, NH: Libraries Unlimited.

Monnin, K. (2008). *Perceptions of New Literacies with the Graphic Novel "Bone"*. Ph.D. Dissertation. Kent State University.