

PUBLIC LIBRARY – NURSERY  
RELATIONSHIPS: AN INVESTIGATION  
INTO THEIR VALUE AND IMPACT

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## **ABSTRACT**

The last twenty years have seen a significant increase in the level of importance placed on early years literacy and general development. Nurseries and other forms of preschool education have clearly had a vital role to play in this. Public libraries have also recognised their role in helping the development of young children.

The current emphasis on partnership working therefore suggests that public library – nursery relationships may be beneficial for the under five age group. However, the literature suggests that this has not been investigated, and the possible impact of these relationships is unknown. This research attempts to correct this.

The study uses a mainly qualitative approach, in order to gain a broad view of the position throughout the U.K. The methods used to collect the necessary data are questionnaires sent to library authorities and parents of preschool children, and interviews with library and nursery staff in Sheffield.

The ways in which preschool children access books is first investigated, finding that bought books are most popular. The library is the next most common, with approximately two thirds of children accessing books there. The public library – nursery relationships that exist are then examined, discovering that most branch libraries have some links with nurseries, involving a range of activities. The management issues involved are then discussed, particularly considering the need for a policy on the subject, and for evaluation to be carried out.

The study then looks at how books are used and valued within the nursery environment, to ensure maximum benefit can be gained from both those that the nursery own, and any borrowed from the public library. The opinions of library and nursery staff are then considered in detail. Both these groups feel that public library – nursery relationships are important, and of benefit to the children. However, they believe that they could be improved to increase their impact on children's development.

The study concludes by stating that public library – nursery relationships have a positive impact on preschool children, but the extent of them varies greatly across the country. A set of guidelines for good practice is therefore suggested to ensure greater consistency and a positive effect on a greater number of children.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Over the last fifteen years, there has been an increased awareness of the importance of books for preschool children, for both their general and educational development. This has been shown by the success of the Bookstart scheme, which involved giving parents packs of books and advice on sharing books with their young children (Moore & Wade, 2003). These children performed significantly better during their early primary years, and its success has led to the setting up of Bookstart 2 for slightly older children. Indeed, as Naomi Eisenstadt, the Head of Sure Start, believes,

“learning to read is probably the single most important factor in school success, and nothing contributes to success in early literacy as much as early exposure to books.”

(Library Association, 2001:online)

Preschool children can access books in several different ways, although they are always dependent on adults for providing them with this access (Blanshard, 1997). Often one of the most important places for literacy development is the home (Hannon, 1995). Early book usage with parents can help children learn about the world, language and improve their later reading skills (Butler, 1995). However, this will clearly be affected by family income and circumstances. For example, parents who have lower literacy levels themselves will not have the same ability to help their child as more educated parents. These differences can be reduced by the public library, with its role of providing access to books for everybody. The public library system in the U.K. has over 25 million children's books in stock, equating to, on average, 2.2 per child (Creaser & Maynard, 2002). This is clearly an invaluable resource for preschool children.

A child's nursery can also provide access to books (Campbell, 1996), again hopefully giving a more equal level of provision than is available in the home environment. All four year olds in the U.K. are now guaranteed a free part time place at a nursery, and this will be extended to three year olds by September 2004 (Childcare Link, 2003). This is clearly the only access to books for the child which is not dependent on their parents. The nursery is therefore a vital place for the

development of those children whose parents are unwilling or unable to support their literacy development.

Therefore both libraries and nurseries have an important role to play in helping literacy development through facilitating access to books for preschool children. The introduction of OFSTED inspections for nurseries has led to an increase in awareness of the nursery's role in developing literacy. However, "despite substantial qualitative evidence, there is a need for more systematic monitoring and evaluation of the impact of libraries on the development of literacy among both preschool and schoolchildren."

(Coalter, 2001:6)

The value of partnerships in improving public services has recently been realised and developed. Lison-Ziessow (1997:73) believes that "every public institution has to look for potential partners in order to keep or improve its service," and Proctor & Bartle (2002: foreword) suggest that "partnerships with education providers are valuable [for public libraries]." This support for partnerships has led to the formation of Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs), which Love (2001:166) describes as "a local partnership of providers of early education and childcare." Public libraries are keen to be a partner in these (Library Association, 2001). A key relationship that could therefore form a part of any EYDCP would be between public libraries and nurseries, in order to help develop literacy and increase educational attainment. However, no research has been carried out to investigate the extent of these partnerships, and the actual or potential impact of them.

There is also a lack of research into the value placed on books in nurseries, with the OFSTED emphasis appearing to be on product rather than process, for example, considering the number of books, rather than how they are used. This is a key area to be considered if nurseries are to provide as great a level of access to books as possible.

This dissertation therefore hopes to examine these questions, and to provide a set of principles of good practice for use by both public libraries and nurseries to improve access to books and literacy for preschool children.

### 1.1 Aims and objectives

The aim of this research is to investigate the impact of public library – nursery relationships on preschool literacy development.

#### Objectives

- To assess the ways in which books are made available to preschool children.
- To identify the public library - nursery relationships that exist.
- To investigate the management issues involved in public library – nursery relationships.
- To assess the use made of books and value placed on them in nurseries.
- To investigate the opinions and attitudes of children's library staff on the value and impact of these relationships.
- To investigate the opinions and attitudes of nursery staff on the value and impact of these relationships.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 What is literacy?

“Literacy is conventionally understood as the ability to decode and understand the graphic symbols we use to represent spoken language.”

(McGarry, 1991:29)

“Literacy is the ability to use written language to derive and convey meaning.”

(Hannon, 1995:2)

As can be seen above, there are two aspects common to definitions of literacy – written language and meaningful communication. As Hannon (1995:2) suggests, literacy is not about “exercising specific perceptual and motor skills,” but rather about interpreting the meaning behind the symbols created using those motor skills.

It is clear that literacy is vital in today’s society, for tasks varying from writing shopping lists to finding and retaining a job. Without literacy, it is impossible for an individual to be independent. Also, on a broader level, organisations and even nations need a literate workforce to successfully compete both economically and politically.

There has been much debate as to the most appropriate ways of developing literacy. The traditional approach was not to attempt to start teaching literacy until a child started primary school, as it was felt that they would not be ‘ready’ before then, meaning that any attempts would fail (Hall, 1987). However, the importance of preschool literacy has been recognised in the last twenty years (Hannon, 1996), with the development of the emergent literacy approach. This suggests that young children are aware of print in their environment, and literacy will begin to emerge well before primary school, with children not waiting to be taught literacy (Hall, 1987). Hannon (1995) believes that this emergent literacy should be valued and encouraged when it appears, and should be developed through play.

## 2.2 Importance of early literacy

With the development of the emergent literacy approach, the value of early literacy has been recognised, and, indeed, has encouraged an increasingly pro-active approach to early literacy, as Butler (1995) states in the title of her book, *Babies Need Books*. There are several reasons why this is so important.

There has been much support for the idea that literacy can help a child's personal and social development. Morris (1998) found that the Denver Public Library Read Aloud Program, an outreach scheme in poor neighbourhoods, helped children to improve their listening skills and attention span. Wade (1984) believed that extensive reading could help to shape a child's attitudes and beliefs, as well as developing their self-esteem. This was supported by McGarry (1991:74), who suggested that "reading plays a fundamental role in promoting children's critical and imaginative thinking together with their intellectual and emotional development."

Early literacy development is also crucial for a child's educational development. As Hannon (1996:64) states, "simple measures of literacy development at school entry...are powerful predictors of later attainment." This has been supported by many others (Meyers & Henderson, 2002; Wells, in Stone, 1999). Hannon (1995:5) also makes the point that "literacy is the key to the rest of the curriculum," with literacy being assumed in all subjects after the first year or two, meaning that children who begin with poor literacy levels will be disadvantaged across the entire school curriculum.

The educational value of early literacy has clearly been shown by the Bookstart project. This is a national scheme, aiming to provide free books for babies and guidance for their parents on the value of books (Booktrust, 2003). Several evaluations of this scheme have been carried out. It was found that the scheme encouraged parents to provide more books for their children and helped them develop a positive attitude to books (Wade & Moore, 1993). The same children were also studied soon after beginning school (Wade & Moore, 1998). This found that the Bookstart children had a higher level of literacy when entering school than a control group, and also scored higher on mathematics assessments, suggesting the benefit

may be across the whole curriculum. The children were also studied at age seven to see if this benefit continued throughout primary education (Wade & Moore, 2000). It was found that the Bookstart children did continue to be more successful, again in a range of subjects, and Wade & Moore (2000:39) concluded that

“book-gifting and advice to parents, when babies are about nine months of age, is a cost effective way of raising standards.”

This has also been supported by a recent qualitative study on the benefits of Bookstart (Wade & Moore, 2003), and also by the setting up of a Bookstart 2 scheme, aimed at toddlers.

## 2.3 Preschool education

### 2.3.1 *Importance of preschool education*

“For the under-fives good quality and accessible early education and childcare to support learning in the early years is critical to giving children a good start in life.”

(DfES, 2002:online)

The importance of preschool education is well recognised for many reasons. OFSTED (2001) states that it gives a good start to children entering the formal education system, and this is believed to be particularly the case for disadvantaged children (Ball, 1994). As the Early Years Curriculum Group (1989:iv) point out, “the ladder of education can never be secure unless the first rung is firmly in place.” Ball (1994) believes that it also has a national benefit by teaching children about social welfare. He believes that “if you give children a good start, there is much less risk of things going wrong later” (Ball, 1994:6), suggesting that prevention is better (and cheaper) than cure. Indeed, he states that a preschool programme returns \$7.16 for every dollar invested.

The U.K. government has realised the value of preschool education by providing free part time early education places for all four year olds for the three terms before they start school (Childcare Link, 2003). All three year olds will also be entitled to similar places by September 2004 (DfES, 2002), with the government aiming to have 1.6 million new childcare places by 2004. Early Years Development

and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) have also been set up to develop partnership working to improve early years provision.

### 2.3.2 Types of preschool education

Preschool education can be provided in a variety of settings:

- State nursery schools – accept children from the age of three.
- Nursery classes in state primary schools – accept children from the age of three.
- Reception classes in state primary schools – accept children from the age of four.
- Private nursery schools – accept children from the age of two.
- Playgroups – accept children from the age of two and a half.
- Day nurseries – accept children of any age under five.

(DfES, 2002)

This research will use the broad term ‘nurseries’ to cover all these forms of preschool education. It will not consider childminders, as these may or may not be registered to provide early education (DfES, 2002).

### 2.3.3 Quality of preschool education

It is clearly crucial that preschool education must be of a high standard. Ball (1994) believes that the advantages discussed in section 2.3.1 will not hold if the provision is poor. OFSTED therefore inspects nurseries to judge the quality of their service. Their 2000-01 inspection found that 86% of providers were making good overall provision, although there was still a need for improvement. 14.8% of settings failed to receive a rating of ‘good’ with regard to communication, language and literacy, although this varied between the different types of provider (OFSTED, 2001).

This quality has become more important with the introduction of the Foundation Stage in September 2000 (DfES, 2002). This is a stage of education preceding Key Stage 1, for children aged three to five. It includes Early Learning Goals which children are expected to have reached when they start year 1. This will inevitably lead to assumptions being made by primary school teachers about children’s preschool knowledge, making it vital that children receive high quality preschool education.

The increase in examinations throughout school also make it important that children receive high quality education from the start, to help prevent feelings of disillusionment caused by early failure. Stone (1999) also suggests that this focus on examinations can lead to less time for reading for pleasure, which may discourage children from developing a love of books. However, she believes that this is much less likely if the 'reading journey' has already begun before school.

#### 2.4 Who helps develop preschool literacy?

##### 2.4.1 Parents

Traditionally, parents were seen as the wrong people to help their child develop literacy as children had to be taught the skills once they were of school age (Hall, 1987). However, this view has been disproved, and it is now realised that children achieve more if their parents are actively involved in their learning (Wade & Moore, 1998). Hannon (1996:64) suggests that "much of the variation in children's abilities at school entry must be due to what parents do, or do not do, in the preschool years." This was supported by the National Child Development Study, which found that children whose parents had poor literacy levels were much more likely to also score poorly on reading tests (Hannon, 1995). Moore and Wade (2003:4) state that "it is possible that, in homes where books and story reading are not part of the family repertoire, where access to books is difficult or attitudes to reading are not positive or where reading with very young children is not considered important, children may experience difficulties in beginning reading because they lack the ability to view a text as a focus of interest." If, alternatively, parents can show a positive attitude to reading, and become good role models for their children, this can help the child's literacy development (Stone, 1999).

##### 2.4.2 Public Libraries

The Library Association Guidelines for Public Library Services to Children and Young People state that "the library has a key role in fostering literacy" (Blanshard, 1997:21). As the Department of National Heritage (DNH, 1995:19) states, "it is the only statutory library service that is available to pre-school children,

the ‘under-five’ age group, where introduction to books and the pleasure of reading is crucial.” Libraries have the advantage of being able to provide a wider range of books than parents can afford, giving the potential for more reading, which increases literacy development (Krashen, 1998). As stated before, U.K. public libraries have over 25 million children’s books in stock, which is, on average, 2.2 per child (Creaser & Maynard, 2002), clearly showing the wealth of material available.

Libraries can also provide services such as Bookstart or story times for children and parents which provide vital learning opportunities (Library Association, 2001), as well as promoting the importance of literacy. Blanshard (1998:144) describes story time as “a fundamental building block of the children’s library service,” helping to develop literacy, listening, visual and social skills. This is supported by Ray (1979:87), who suggested that “they provide valuable experience, assist in language development and whet a child’s appetite for learning to read.”

Public libraries also have an important role in preventing social exclusion. As Elkin & Lonsdale (1996:xi) suggest,

“the role of libraries is paramount in supporting the child’s reading and access to information and ensuring equitable access to all, regardless of age, gender, race, wealth, physical or intellectual ability or geographical location.”

This is crucial as 600,000 children in the U.K. live in poverty (Library Association, 2001) and research has shown that these children are more likely to have low literacy levels (Hannon, 1995). McGarry (1991:143) states that

“not every human being on earth has the same level of opportunity to have the imagination enhanced by listening to stories or have their first contacts with the world of print guided step by step in comfort and affection.”

The public library can help provide this opportunity to children who would otherwise miss out. One scheme attempting to counteract this is the Sure Start initiative, a programme aimed specifically at children living in disadvantaged areas. It aims to provide support in areas such as early education, childcare and health (Sure Start, 2002). Public libraries can clearly be an important partner in this scheme, improving children’s ability to learn (Love, 2001). Love suggests that services the library can

provide include bulk loans to nurseries, more story times and advice to parents or carers on sharing books.

#### 2.4.3 Nurseries

The nursery is the other clear supporter of preschool literacy development. All children now have access to part time nursery education, and many spend a significant proportion of their time there. Campbell (1996:64) suggests that “opportunities for literacy learning should be as readily available for children in the nursery classroom as they were earlier in the home.” This includes through play and the existence of a writing area and library corner.

Nurseries have the advantage of being able to provide a wider range of books than the home environment, although to a lesser extent than the public library. They are also invaluable in providing environmental print as a way of developing literacy (Campbell, 1996). Nursery classrooms provide regular story reading for the children, helping them to learn not only about language, but also important aspects of literacy such as reading books from front to back, and text from left to right.

#### 2.5 Partnerships

Partnerships and ‘joined-up working’ have become widely recognised as being beneficial over recent years. Through working together, organisations can share good practice and ideas (Proctor & Bartle, 2002). DfEE (2002: 1.3) states that “working in this way will enable organisations and individuals to make the most of their skills and experience, combine their resources and thus enhance each other’s work.”

Lison-Ziessow (1997:73) believes that, as well as partnerships being desirable, they are also necessary for the future, as “the public is becoming used to all-in-one services although one single institution cannot provide them.”

In the area of under-fives provision, crucial partnerships that have been established are EYDCPs. These were set up following the government Green Paper, *Meeting the Childcare Challenge*, which recognised the vital links between childcare and early education (Library Association, 2001). Although the government did not

specify the agencies which should form part of an EYDCP, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) recognises the value of libraries in being a part of early years partnerships and helping to develop literacy. They state that

“every EYDCP should have a representative of the local library service as a key member. This is because:

- Libraries are the key player in early literacy development and can occupy a key role in delivering training.
- It is one of the main roles of libraries to disseminate information to local communities on the variety of child care opportunities.
- Through Bookstart, under 5s story times and other services for children and parents, the library delivers key early learning opportunities.”

(Library Association, 2001:2.4)

## 2.6 Public library – nursery partnerships

### 2.6.1 The need for partnerships

As stated above, libraries are an important part of children’s early literacy development. However, under fives rely on adults to give them access to library services (Blanshard, 1998). Therefore, if their parents do not take them to the library, their only access is through their nursery. This is particularly important for disadvantaged children, as parents with poorer literacy levels are less likely to either support their children’s literacy development at home, or take them to the library. Blanshard (1997:14) believes that “every child is a potential user, and all children should be reached in some way.” Targetting nurseries can be a way to reach the library’s non-users, and give them access to facilities they would not otherwise receive.

This type of link also has the potential to be of benefit to the nurseries, through improving their communication, language and literacy provision. OFSTED (2001:11) stated that “21% of providers need to make better use of learning resources and support in order to improve the quality of learning,” and using libraries is

perhaps a way in which this could be done. There is a lack of consistency in the provision made for nurseries throughout the country by Schools Library Services (Creaser & Maynard, 2002). Their aim is to supply books to all schools that pay for the service, but their position with regard to under fives education is less clear. This balance may therefore be redressed by the development of public library – nursery partnerships.

The government recognised the need for partnerships in the report *Investing in Children* (DNH, 1995). This suggested that “an integrated strategy should be devised and owned by the local authority and its components and agencies to meet the needs of its local community of children” (DNH, 1995:59). However, the potential role of the library is less well recognised, with the EYDCP document entitled *Working with local agencies and other partnerships and networks* not discussing the role of public libraries in any detail (DfEE, 2002).

McGarry (1991) states that storytelling in public libraries is less common now than in the past. This is despite its importance for children and their literacy development. This suggests another reason for developing public library – nursery partnerships, as they would provide valuable library story time opportunities that children may not otherwise receive.

### 2.6.2 *The current position*

Library Association guidelines (Blanshard, 1997) suggest that liaison between public libraries and preschool groups is important, both in the library and in the community. In a nursery, the library has a captive audience, including non-traditional users, to whom they can promote both the library and reading. However, Blanshard (1998) suggests that links in the community, such as providing bulk loans to nurseries, can be problematic if they remove a large portion of the stock from the library. She suggests that visits to the library, giving the children the opportunity to join independently, may be more appropriate.

There are problems involved in establishing partnerships between the public library and nurseries. Denham (2000:47) believes that libraries need to fight to develop partnerships, stating that

“in a number of authorities it was acknowledged that the relationship between the education department and the library service was rather fragile, fraught with tensions. Often the library service was the key instigator of contact but was rebuffed by the education department and its interest was not reciprocated.”

Also, there appears to be a lack of realisation of the potential role that the library could play. For example, *Start Right: the importance of early learning* (Ball, 1994) contains seventeen recommendations for providing high quality early learning opportunities, none of which mention the role of the library service.

Despite this, the literature does mention an example of good practice in outreach work with nurseries. Denham (2000) discusses the case of Northamptonshire, which she considers to be proactive, making contact with preschool groups, visiting them and encouraging them to visit the library. They state that “we encourage schools to come and visit the library, although success often depends on the attitude of the school’s head” (Denham, 2000:38).

However, as is clear from the above discussion, the literature focuses on practical features of these partnerships, simply as examples of outreach work, without considering their extent and possible impact. In the same way, most library research to date has focussed either on the ‘book – child’ or the ‘library – individual child – parent’ relationships, without considering the link that nurseries could have in these relationships. It is this, therefore, that this research will investigate.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Methods

It was decided to use an inductive approach for this study due to the lack of previous research in this field. This lack of knowledge made it impossible to determine a hypothesis beforehand which could then be tested deductively, but instead suggested that the results themselves should be used to develop theories.

This also suggested that a qualitative approach would be more appropriate. As Olaisen (1991) believes, qualitative research is particularly useful when a study is “mapping the terrain.” This would provide a broad view of the issues involved, which could then be studied quantitatively in future research to give more detail.

A qualitative methodology was also chosen due to the complexity of the subject matter. There are many partners involved in public library – nursery relationships, including the libraries, nurseries and parents, who all have different perspectives and opinions. Also, there are many influences on children’s literacy development except for the public library. All these factors are interlinked, and make it difficult to measure objectively the impact of partnerships between public libraries and nurseries. This therefore suggests a quantitative approach would not be suitable (Gorman & Clayton, 1997), with the study requiring a broader perspective on all these factors, and the opinions of the people concerned.

Despite this emphasis on qualitative methods, it was decided to collect a small amount of quantitative data, in order to gain an overview of what the situation is like throughout the country with regard to partnerships. The reasons for this could then be considered in more depth through the use of qualitative methods.

#### 3.2 Literature Search

The literature search was started by looking for literature specifically on partnerships between public libraries and nurseries. While a few schemes were

mentioned in the context of general outreach work, in general this provided very little information, and showed that there was a clear need for research in this field.

The search was then broadened to include, firstly, relationships that libraries may have with schools. This was more helpful with some of the information being considered to be applicable also to nurseries. The research then looked at different types of preschool education available, and the importance of high quality preschool education. The literature on the value of the public library for children was also studied.

Considerable time was spent investigating the literature on literacy, and the importance of early literacy. This included information on the Bookstart scheme, and also on the importance of parents in developing early literacy. However, there was little information on what support is available for children if parents do not help with this development, again supporting the need for a dissertation in this area.

The National Literacy Strategy was examined, as were the Early Learning Goals which make up a preschool curriculum. OFSTED reports and requirements for attending nursery were studied. Together, these enabled discussion of the expectations for preschool children.

Finally, the literature search considered the value of partnerships. This was both generally, and also specifically relating to preschool children, with schemes such as Sure Start, and also the setting up of Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs).

The literature search provided useful information for the further development of the study. It also showed a clear gap in the existing literature, which would combine the subjects discussed above. It therefore clearly supported the need for research in this area.

### 3.3 Preliminary Interviews

A preliminary interview was carried out with Kay Burkinshaw, the Senior Librarian, Learning and Young People's Team, from Sheffield Library Service. The purpose of this was to gain knowledge about the situation with regard to public library – nursery partnerships in Sheffield. Other possible relationships not currently taking place in Sheffield were also discussed. Together this provided a basis for the questionnaire which was distributed to library authorities throughout the country. Kay Burkinshaw also provided information about branch libraries in Sheffield which would be good choices to study in greater detail.

### 3.4 Samples

Four groups of people were surveyed during the course of this study: library authorities throughout England and Wales, branch libraries in Sheffield, nurseries in Sheffield, and parents of the children at those nurseries. It was decided not to name any respondents in this report, in order to ensure confidentiality (Gorman & Clayton, 1997). The branch libraries were therefore referred to as A, B, C and D, and the nurseries were numbered from 1 – 8.

#### 3.4.1 Library Authorities

A questionnaire was sent by electronic mail to all the library authorities in England and Wales for which it was possible to obtain an electronic mail address. This form of opportunity sampling was used due to the costs involved in sending questionnaires by post. It was decided to email all possible authorities rather than a sample, as it would take no longer, and would increase the number of respondents. In all, 135 questionnaires were successfully sent out, with a reminder to those who had not replied after two weeks.

#### 3.4.2 Branch Libraries

Following the discussion with Kay Burkinshaw, it became clear that relationships with nurseries were organised, at least in Sheffield, at branch library level, and therefore a range of partnerships and opinions could be obtained whilst remaining in Sheffield. Kay Burkinshaw recommended Library A as an example of

good practice, and personal contacts at Libraries B and C made them convenient choices. Library D was then chosen to provide a library in a third management group. Libraries A and C were in Sheffield Libraries' East management group, B was in the North group, and D was in the South management group. This covered all three management groups within Sheffield. It was recognised that this choice of libraries was not random, and that they may not be typical of Sheffield. This was particularly the case with Library A, as it had been mentioned as a case of good practice. However, it was felt that by studying four branch libraries, the likelihood was that a range of practice would be examined.

This choice of libraries also had the benefit of a range of socio-economic areas. This was considered important as it may affect the amount children are taken to the library by their parents, the number of books the child has access to at home, and also parental enthusiasm for literacy and libraries. Libraries B and D were considered to be in quite affluent areas, with unemployment at 2.0% and 2.6% respectively. However, Libraries A and C were in areas with unemployment higher than the Sheffield average of 4.2%, at 7.8% and 5.5% respectively. Also, areas A and C were culturally more diverse, with 58.5% and 69.0% of the population white, as opposed to 89.6% and 96.7% in areas B and D (ONS, 2003).

The children's library assistants at each library were telephoned, and the study explained to them. They all agreed to take part.

### *3.4.3 Nurseries*

Two nurseries from the catchment area of each library being studied were chosen to take part. This would provide a similar range of socio-economic groups as were being studied in the libraries. During the initial telephone conversation with each children's library assistant, they were asked for the names of a few nurseries with whom they had links. One of each of these was telephoned and asked if they would participate after having had the study explained to them. A second nursery was then chosen from each area using the telephone directory, with the intention that these had fewer links with their local library. This would give a range of partnerships to study. However, a lack of nurseries within the Library A area meant that both were chosen from the list given by the library. Nurseries 1 and 2 were in

Library A's area, 3 and 4 in Library B's, 5 and 6 in Library C's and 7 and 8 in Library D's catchment area.

Most nurseries agreed to take part, although a few declined, meaning that ones slightly further from the library had to be selected. It was acknowledged that the nurseries who did decline may have done so because of a lack of partnership with the library which they were not keen to publicise, and that the sample of nurseries surveyed was possibly therefore biased towards those with links with the public library.

#### *3.4.4 Parents*

Questionnaires were sent to parents of preschool children through the nurseries which agreed to participate. 25 questionnaires were given to each nursery, and were distributed by the staff to the parents of their choice, simply with a requirement that the children were of a range of ages. Although this was an opportunity sample with little control over the participants, it was felt that this was the most efficient way to access the parents. It would also be simple and convenient for the nursery staff, who were already giving up time for this study. It was hoped that by surveying parents at all the nurseries in different areas, a range of families would be reached.

#### *3.5 Questionnaires*

Questionnaires were sent by electronic mail to the library authorities in England and Wales (see Appendix A), and via nurseries to parents of preschool children (see Appendix B). Questionnaires were chosen as the most appropriate method of surveying both these groups, as it was considered necessary to obtain fairly basic information from a large group of people. In the case of the library authorities, the information required was simply an outline of the services available in each place. The parents' questionnaire aimed to find out opinions on the value of books and libraries. Using a questionnaire had the advantage of being able to be distributed to a large number of people cheaply and quickly. It was also easy for the respondent, as they could fill it in at their convenience (Busha & Harter, 1980).

Both questionnaires used a semi-structured approach. Several closed or option questions were used, in order to provide basic quantitative information, and also to make the questionnaire quick and simple for the respondents, in order to maximise the number of replies. However, there were also opportunities for respondents to expand on answers given, and for them to give their opinions. This was considered important to obtain qualitative data, to understand the reasons behind responses, and to judge the value which respondents place on the particular subjects. Space was provided for 'any other comments' to enable respondents to discuss related topics not mentioned on the questionnaire. However, it was recognised that many people would not complete this section, and those who did would be those who were particularly interested in the subject, rather than those who were necessarily representative of the population. It was also decided to ask respondents for contact details, so that telephone interviews could be carried out if any information needed clarifying, or was of particular interest.

A small pilot study was carried out for the parents' questionnaire in order to check that it was simple to answer and provided the expected data. Time constraints meant that it was not possible to carry out a pilot study of the questionnaire for library authorities. However, this was not considered as vital as the pilot study for the parents, as the topics involved had been discussed in detail previously with Kay Burkinshaw.

### 3.6 Interviews

It was decided to carry out interviews with the children's library staff and the nursery staff. In most cases, it was the nursery manager who was interviewed, as it was felt that they would have the most knowledge about the relationships that they had with the public library. However, at Nurseries 2 and 3, conflicting schedules meant that their deputy managers were interviewed. This meant different perspectives on the subject would be likely to be obtained from these nurseries, but this was considered to be beneficial to the study. At Library C, the Sure Start Family Reading Worker was interviewed alongside the children's library assistant, as it was felt that she would also be knowledgeable on the subject.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out, using an interview schedule (see Appendices C and D). This allowed for an open discussion, whilst still ensuring all relevant points were covered. The interview schedule also ensured that all nurseries were asked the same questions, and indeed that all libraries were asked the same questions.

It was decided to carry out a face to face interview, rather than a telephone interview, in order to obtain the benefits of any non verbal cues. This also had the advantage, particularly with the nurseries, of giving the opportunity to visit them and see the use made of language and books within the setting. It was also felt that a face to face interview would be less formal than a telephone interview and would therefore encourage the interviewees to be more open.

Again to reduce the formality of the situation, it was decided not to record the interviews. Whilst this meant taking notes during the conversation, which sometimes slowed down or interrupted the flow of the discussion, it was felt that this would be less intrusive than the use of a tape recorder. Instead, the participants were asked if they would mind being telephoned at a later date if any point needed clarification.

### 3.7 Limitations

This research was carried out using mainly qualitative methods. While this has advantages, it is also subjective, and is dependent on the opinions of a few people in Sheffield, which may not be representative of the country as a whole. Sending questionnaires to all library authorities helped to judge how typical an example Sheffield is. However, it raises the issue that this study may not be immediately generalisable.

Opportunity sampling was used throughout this study. This means that it may not be representative of the wider population. Some nurseries turned down the opportunity to participate in the research, possibly because they had no relationship with the library. This would suggest that the nurseries surveyed were those with a particular interest in the field.

Similarly, poor response rates to questionnaires may be due to a lack of interest in the topic, or, in the case of the library authorities, a lack of partnership. Therefore, the sample may be biased towards authorities and nurseries with relationships.

Nurseries were chosen to be in the catchment area of the libraries in order to try and reach nurseries and parents of similar socio-economic backgrounds. However, some nurseries, in particular the private ones, took children from across the city, meaning that this may not have been the case.

## **4 ASSESSING THE WAYS IN WHICH BOOKS ARE MADE AVAILABLE TO PRESCHOOL CHILDREN**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The importance of early literacy development means it is vital that preschool children have easy access to books. This may be in several different ways, including at nursery, from the public library, or bought books. However, the literature review for this study showed a lack of research into the methods used by children and their parents to obtain books, and also the impact of these different methods.

This was believed to be an important consideration, as this study was looking at what could possibly be a new way for children to access books. It was therefore necessary to know the methods currently being used. This was investigated through the questionnaire distributed to parents (Appendix B), which asked where they obtained books for their children, and the impact of this. 200 of these questionnaires were sent out, of which 58 were returned, a response rate of 29%. This was considered sufficient to enable a reasonably clear picture of how children access books to be obtained.

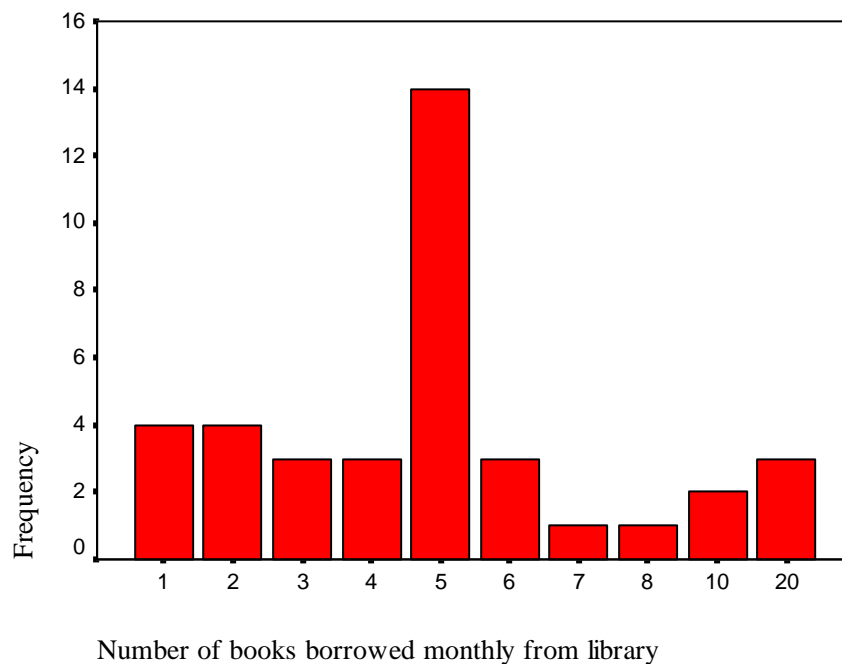
### **4.2 Results**

Question 5 of the parents' questionnaire asked 'Do you have books for your child at home?' All parents stated that they did have books at home. This had been expected, as those without books would have been unlikely to have returned the questionnaire.

When asked where these books came from, a variety of answers were received. 100% of parents said that they bought books for their children. The numbers bought varied between 1 and 5 per month, with a mean of 2.09. Gifts were also an important source of books, with five parents mentioning receiving between 1 and 3 per month.

Almost two thirds of parents also obtained books for their children from the public library. The numbers borrowed varied considerably, as can be seen in Figure 1, with three parents borrowing approximately 20 books every month. These appeared to be particularly keen respondents, with each rating their child’s enjoyment of books on a scale of 1 to 6 as a 6. Indeed, one of these parents stated that “books are my child’s favourite [activity] above any toys.” However, over a third of parents did not borrow any books from the library.

Figure 1: Number of books borrowed from public library



Only 10% of parents said that they borrowed books from their child’s nursery to read at home. This was supported by the interviews with the nursery staff. Only two of the eight nurseries had an official lending scheme, and most of the others seemed surprised by the idea of loaning books to the children. Nursery 8 was quite typical, commenting that “no-one’s ever asked if they can take a book home before. I suppose they could if they asked.”

The parents were then asked which of the methods of accessing books had the most impact on their child. This appeared to be a difficult question to answer, with fifteen respondents either leaving it blank, or writing something that did not answer the question. Four parents said that all methods were of equal impact, despite this not being an option given. One of these parents stated that it is a “combination of all [methods]. How often spent reading with my son has most impact rather than where

book came from.” It is possible that, had this option been given, many more parents would have selected it.

Despite this, many respondents did choose one or two ways of accessing books that they believed had the most impact on their child. 54% of people believed that bought books had the most impact, 28% library books and 19% believed that books from or at nursery had the most impact. There were many reasons for these choices.

The importance of choice was a topic regularly referred to. Many parents believed it was important for a wide choice of books to be available, and particularly material at a wide range of age levels. Some parents thought that this meant bought books were best.

“The books at home because the selection (100+) and the age range is extensive.”  
“Bought – because we are able to choose books which suit his current needs.”  
“Choice – library lacks current themes such as Bob the Builder.”  
“Having books in the house from an early age and having lots to choose from.”  
“I used to buy lots of books from a brilliant children’s bookshop – the owner of the shop has developed a good knowledge of my son’s interests which are appropriate to his age – when I can afford it, this is a special treat for my son.”

However, to others it meant that library books were preferable.

“Library – just because there is more of them.”  
“More variety when borrowing from the library.”  
“Library books offer the variety.”  
“Library – there are lots of different books.”  
“The library ones as they are specialised for his age level.”

Allowing the child to choose books was also an important consideration. Several parents believed that this was a good thing. However, a few parents felt that this may lead to them choosing inappropriate books, and it was more important for the parents themselves to have the control over the choice of book. One parent said

“She sometimes picks her own at story time, without supervision and they are not always appropriate,” and this was supported by another, who stated that bought books are best for her son “because we are able to choose books which suit his current needs.” These parents usually felt that buying books was better for their child, whereas parents who felt it was important for the child to choose themselves were split between bought books and library books.

“She loves picking her own books from the library.”

“I like to go to the library mainly because it’s the child’s choice of books which helps to encourage them to look at books.”

“Library as he gets to choose and read in a different environment.”

“Library books, because my son enjoys choosing the book, and likes reading it, to be able to finish it and borrow another one.”

“Buying books from bookshops. My daughter sees it as a special, exciting treat. She has time to look at the selection and then choose the one which most interests her.”

“The ones I buy, as she often chooses with me. She sometimes picks her own at story time, without supervision and they are not always appropriate.”

“Bought – I get to select the books.”

Many parents felt that bought books had the most impact on their child as they could keep the books for longer, and that their child could develop a favourite

“Bought books because my son develops favourites and reads every day.”

“Probably the bought books since she hears them over a longer period of time.”

“Being able to keep the book, so that he can keep picking it up to look at and have it read to him, especially at bedtime.”

“Bought – because they are available for her to look at every day.”

“Have favourite books from the ones at home, learn to tell the story from repeated reading.”

“Bought books [offer] the familiarity (e.g. ‘I know this bit’)”

“Bought books become old familiar favourites which [you] can go back to time and time again.”

book. Linked to this, one parent commented that “the books I buy have the most impact as he seems to have a sense of belonging to them.”

Being able to keep the book was also a big advantage for many parents as it meant that they did not need to remember to return it, or worry if it was damaged. Despite all the library staff who were interviewed stating that there were no fines for under fives for late returns, or damaged books, this appeared not to be known to parents, and was a concern, one parent saying

“the bought ones [have the most impact], because you can have the books for a long period of time and the child can rip it if it’s theirs, whereas if you’ve borrowed it, you have to pay for it.”

Another parent agreed with this advantage of bought books, believing that “the book is disposable so can be destroyed in use, i.e. coloured in, written on, broken apart, cut up.”

As stated above, books from nursery were rarely considered to have the most impact on a child’s reading development. Of the four respondents who gave a reason for suggesting this has the most impact on their child’s reading, three appeared to have interpreted the question as investigating the extent to which reading whilst at nursery affects reading development, for example, saying “nursery has the most impact on my son because at nursery he will sit and listen properly.” However, one respondent whose child attended both Nursery 8 and another not studied, stated that they borrowed four Story Sacks a month from nursery. They considered these to have a big impact on their child, saying “Story Sacks are a great idea as children can play or act along to the stories.”

The questionnaire also investigated how much time children spent looking at books at home, as there is little purpose to having lots of books in the home environment if they are not used. The child looking at books both by themselves and with an adult was considered. The results are shown in Figures 2a and 2b.

**Figure 2a: How long child looks at books at home with an adult each week**

	No. of respondents	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Less than one hour	3	5.7	5.7
1 - 2 hours	15	28.3	34.0
3 - 4 hours	19	35.8	69.8
Over 4 hours	16	30.2	100.0
Total	53	100.0	

**Figure 2b: How long child looks at books at home by themselves each week**

	No. of respondents	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Less than one hour	16	28.1	28.1
1 - 2 hours	22	38.6	66.7
3 - 4 hours	13	22.8	89.5
Over 4 hours	6	10.5	100.0
Total	57	100.0	

These results show a large amount of time being spent with books by the children in this study. This is particularly the case when looking at books with an adult, with almost two thirds of the children spend three hours or more doing this every week. However, it may be that the majority of respondents are people who are interested in literacy, and keen and able to help their children. There also appears to be a positive correlation between the time children spend with books by themselves and with an adult, although the time spent with an adult is generally greater.

Much of the discussion so far about accessing books at the library has concerned the loan of books. However, it is possible for children to also access books within the library building, for example, at events such as a story time. Therefore, the questionnaire asked how often children attend story time at their local library. 70% of respondents stated that their child never went to a story time, with

only 14% (eight children) going three to four times a month. It is interesting to note that of those eight, seven attended Nursery 8, and would therefore have all gone to Library D. Indeed, the staff at Nursery 8 stated that their local library had a weekly library club for preschool children that was very popular. However, this appears to be exceptional, and in general, few children in this study attended story times. This may be due to a lack of story times in the Sheffield libraries studied.

#### 4.3 Summary

- All parents stated that their children had access to books that had been bought for them. Approximately two thirds also said they used the library to access books. Very few borrowed books from the child's nursery to provide more books at home, and this was supported by the nurseries who, in general, did not tend to lend books to the children.
- The parents had varying opinions on which source of books had the most impact on their child's reading development. Bought books were the most popular, followed by library books, with very few believing that nursery books were most important – probably because few nursery books were borrowed. There were several reasons for the importance of library and bought books. These included:
  - Wide range of choice
  - Allowing the child to choose the books
  - Keeping the book for a long period of time

Some parents stated that all ways of accessing books were equally important.

- The children in this study tended to spend a lot of time looking at books at home, both by themselves and with adults.
- Very few children attended story time in their local library, except in Library D's catchment area, where there is a library club.

## **5 IDENTIFYING THE PUBLIC LIBRARY – NURSERY RELATIONSHIPS THAT EXIST**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In order to investigate the impact of public library – nursery relationships, it is necessary to first identify the relationships that currently exist. As discussed in chapter 2, there is very little research on this topic. This study therefore aimed to discover what relationships exist, and what they involved.

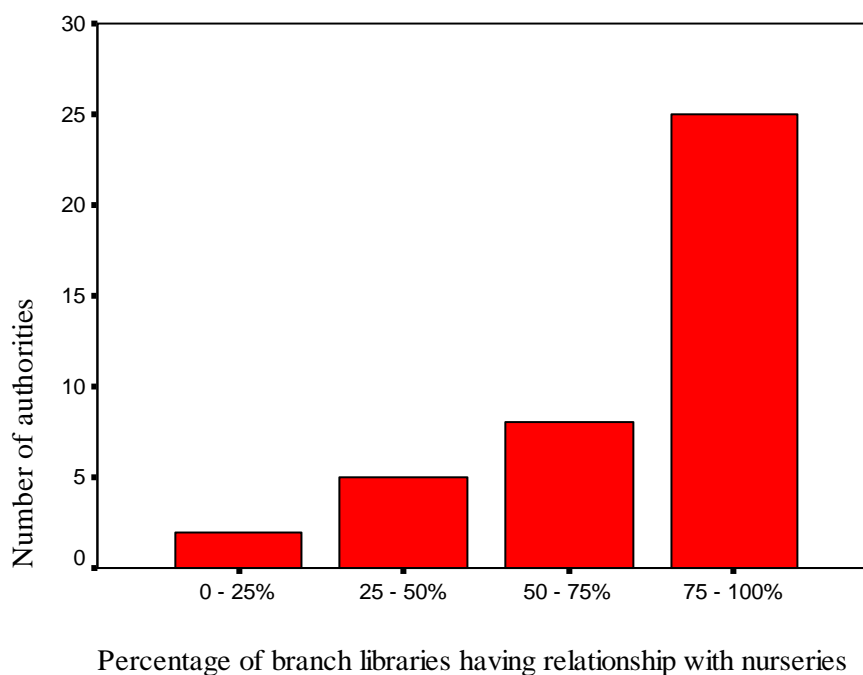
This was investigated firstly through the questionnaires sent out to library authorities (Appendix A). These asked how many libraries, and how many nurseries in their authority had some form of relationship, and also what these involved. They were also asked what the most widely used activity was. 135 of these questionnaires were successfully sent out, of which 45 were returned, a response rate of 33%. The library staff and nursery staff interviewed were then asked about the relationships they have, in order to obtain a more detailed picture of the situation in Sheffield.

### **5.2 Results**

The questionnaire to library authorities asked what percentage of branch libraries had a relationship with some nurseries in their area. Most branch libraries had some sort of relationship. Almost two thirds of authorities stated that 75 – 100% of their branch libraries had links with nurseries, and only two authorities believed that less than a quarter of their branches did (see Figure 3).

When asked about the number of nurseries having a link with the public library, almost half the authorities described it as ‘some.’ This may have been due to them being unsure and therefore choosing the middle option. Only 16% of respondents stated that ‘almost all’ the nurseries within their area had a relationship with the public library. However, no library authorities said that there were not any nurseries with relationships in their area.

Figure 3: Branch libraries having relationships with nurseries



In general, there appeared to be a correlation between the number of public libraries having links, and the number of nurseries, as would have been expected. However, one library authority stated that, while almost all their nurseries had links, only 50 – 75% of their branch libraries had relationships. This appears an odd result, unless nurseries in this area do not visit their local library, perhaps instead going to the central library, or a branch library which is further away but is known to nursery staff.

The relationships throughout the country involved many different activities (see Figure 4). The most widely used activity appeared to be library staff reading stories to the children, especially in the library, but also in the nursery setting. This was followed by craft activities in the library, and bulk loans from the public library. There was much lower use of bulk loans from the Schools Library Service.

The library authorities were also asked which of the activities that these relationships involved were the most used throughout their authority. Several authorities chose more than one option for this question, perhaps if they were unsure of the answer, or if services were equally used. Over half the authorities believed that bulk loans were used most, although many did not state whether this was from

Figure 4: Activities done in library authorities across England and Wales

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Number of authorities</b>	<b>Percentage of authorities</b>
Library staff telling stories in library	44	97.8
Craft or activity sessions in the library	32	71.1
Children taking out books on their own ticket	29	64.4
Nursery teachers borrowing books individually	27	61.4
Bulk loans from the public library	32	72.7
Bulk loans from the Schools Library Service	21	47.7
Library staff giving advice to nursery staff	26	59.1
Library staff giving advice to parents	26	59.1
Library staff telling stories in nursery	36	81.8
Library staff monitoring services	7	15.9
Mobile libraries visiting nurseries	20	45.5
Publicising library in nurseries	25	56.8

the public library or Schools Library Service. This was then followed by library staff reading stories to preschool children in the library, with 35% of authorities saying this. A quarter of authorities believed that library staff reading to children in the nursery was a widely used service.

The popularity of visiting the library for stories or activities was supported by the interviews with the nurseries throughout Sheffield. Seven out of the eight nurseries said that they had some form of relationship with their local public library (all except Nursery 4). These seven all said that they visited the library. These visits were mainly for story times and for the exchange of books. However, the staff commented on the difficulties of taking the children to the library, mainly due to the requirement for a staff to child ratio of 1:2 for young children. Indeed, Nursery 4 said that the reason that they did not have any links with the public library was because “I’m assuming it’s us going there, and we don’t have enough staff for it.”

“Sometimes we take smaller groups of children down to the library – we can’t take everyone because of the staff ratios needed. We can’t go as often as we’d like – again, it’s down to staffing levels.”

“It depends on how busy we are, when we go down to the library, because of the staff ratio needed. But it’s not normally a problem – we are used to going out into the community with the kids, like to the shops. It’s more difficult with the babies, because we need a 1:1 ratio for them.”

“We don’t take more kids than we can manage – we go on a fairly quiet day.”

“It can be difficult going because the numbers are restricted. We can meet at the library as it’s so near, which is a help, but generally transport is a big problem.”

“It’s not too bad, if we’ve got student helpers in. But it’s a problem if the bus is full.”

Most of the visits by the nurseries were on an irregular basis, often dependent on the nursery being quiet, so the necessary staff to child ratios are reached. Nurseries 5 and 8 both said that they might go if they felt they needed more ‘topic books’ on the subject they were looking at. Nursery 2’s decision was made even more informally, with the deputy manager saying “We may just decide ‘today is a nice day, let’s go to the library’.” This type of approach was mentioned as being a problem by Library B. The library assistant there said

“a lot of libraries will just come in “on spec” – I want to try and stop this happening so much - it’s a bit difficult if they turn up when there are other events on here. It’s usually because the nurseries aren’t organised enough to know when they might come in. If they could let me know in advance, I could do a story time or something with the children.”

Most nurseries said that they attempted to alternate the day on which they visited the library, to ensure all children would be able to go. However, Nursery 1 said that Wednesday was always their busy day, so they could never go to the library then. The nursery manager said “I know some children will miss out, but there’s nothing we can do about it – we have to weigh up all the options.”

Bulk loans were a popular reason for visiting the library in Sheffield, as it was across the country. Six of the nurseries said that one reason for visiting the library with the children was so that the children could choose the books themselves. Sheffield Library Service has recently set up a 'Take 10' scheme, allowing nurseries to borrow 10 books at a time. The loan period is, in theory, six weeks, although, as the staff at Nursery 1 point out, "we keep them for as long as we want them, because there are no fines on children's books. Sometimes it might just be for a week, but sometimes it's a lot longer." The take up of 'Take 10' is currently being investigated to determine its popularity.

The loans available in Library A may be extended soon to include allowing nurseries to borrow Story Sacks. These are bags, which, as well as containing a book, have toys and costumes allowing the children to be more interactive. Nursery 1 believes this will be very beneficial for the children as Story Sacks are too expensive for the nursery to be able to provide many themselves.

The Sure Start worker at Library C noted the importance of the libraries being user friendly for the nurseries. In another area of Sheffield where she used to work, boxes in the shape of frogs were left in the reception areas of local schools and nurseries for children and parents to return books. The library staff would then visit the schools, collecting books from the 'frog boxes.' This makes it easier for nurseries and schools to borrow books, even if they cannot visit the library regularly enough to return them.

82% of library authorities stated that their staff went out to the nurseries to read stories to the children. However, the interviews in Sheffield suggested that this was an occasional event, rather than a regular one. All four children's library assistants said that they would like to be able to go out into the community more, but staffing levels prevented it. Nursery 5 did say that the mobile library visited them once every two to three weeks, but this appeared to be the only case of the library service going out to the nurseries.

Nurseries 1, 5 and 6 said that they also tried to get involved in any special library events that were taking place. For example, Nursery 1 was involved in Library A's Bedtime Reading Week. This involved different activities and giving away books at the end of the week. The library also provided the nursery with advice to give to parents, and also leaflets for joining the library, which the nursery distributed. Nurseries 5 and 6 have become involved in their local libraries' Books for Babies schemes.

### 5.3 Summary

- Most branch libraries in authorities throughout England and Wales have some relationships with nurseries in their area. The number of nurseries having a relationship is lower, with approximately half the library authorities describing it as 'some.'
- Many different activities are involved in these relationships. Story telling, either in the library or the nursery, appears to be popular across the country, although in Sheffield's case, it tends to only take place in the library. Visits to the library in Sheffield tend to be irregular, and based on a shortage of books on a particular topic, or it being a quiet day in the nursery so that there are enough staff to take the children.
- Bulk loans are also popular from the public library. Sheffield has a 'Take 10' scheme, allowing nurseries to borrow 10 books for up to six weeks. Less than half the authorities loan books to nurseries from their Schools Library Services.
- Other less common activities include nurseries being involved in special events that the library is running, library staff giving advice to nurseries or parents and the use of the nursery for publicising the library service.

## **6 INVESTIGATING THE MANAGEMENT ISSUES INVOLVED IN PUBLIC LIBRARY – NURSERY RELATIONSHIPS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

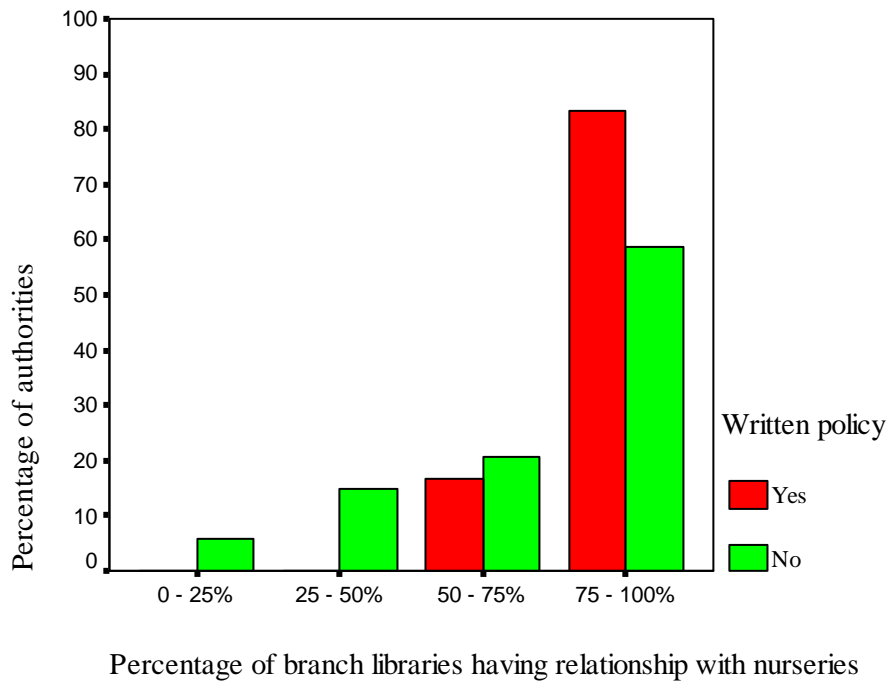
Many management issues will undoubtedly arise when considering any form of partnership. It is necessary that management discuss topics such as how the relationship is set up and put into practice, as well as how to evaluate and improve the services available. The study therefore investigated this area in order to judge how important the development of these relationships was perceived to be by managers within library authorities. This part of the research was mainly carried out through the questionnaires sent to library authorities (Appendix A), although a few issues raised at the interviews with library and nursery staff are also considered relevant.

### **6.2 Results**

One of the first questions the library authorities were asked was whether they had an authority wide written policy on relationships between public libraries and nurseries. Only seven authorities (15.6%) said that they did. It is interesting to note that, of the seven with a policy, 83.3% stated that 75 – 100% of their branch libraries had relationships with nurseries, compared to only 58.8% of the library authorities without policies (see Figure 5). Similarly, 42.9% of the library authorities with policies said that ‘almost all’ the nurseries in their area had links, compared to 11.1% of those without an authority wide policy.

Authorities were also asked if any government or CILIP guidelines were used when setting up partnerships with nurseries. Only 35.6% of authorities said that they were, but within these, there was a wide range of guidelines mentioned. The most widely used was ‘Start with the Child,’ quoted by six authorities, followed by CILIP’s Public Library Guidelines on Services to Children, used by three authorities. The latest government document on library services, ‘Framework for the Future,’ was used in two authorities. The others used mainly consisted of early education guidelines and health and safety documents.

Figure 5: Level of relationships with and without a policy



The study investigated the initiation of relationships, and who was responsible for this (see Figure 6). Most authorities suggested more than one place was responsible, although the individual libraries had a large role to play, with

Figure 6: Who is responsible for setting up relationships

Category	Number of responses	% of cases
Individual libraries	35	79.5
Nurseries themselves	22	50.0
School library service	11	25.0
Public library service	14	31.8
EYDCP	3	6.8
Bookstart coordinator	4	9.1
Sure Start coordinator	2	4.5
	-----	
Total responses	91	

almost 80% of authorities stating they were involved in the setting up of relationships. A higher level of the public library service also were responsible for making contact with nurseries in almost a third of the authorities surveyed, for example, through an authority wide children's team. The nurseries initiated the relationships in half the library authorities.

Funding is clearly an important issue which needs to be constantly addressed. The majority of money for the funding of public library – nursery relationships comes from the library authority's mainstream funding, with less than 10% of authorities saying that more than half the budget came from other sources. These other sources included Sure Start, Bookstart and EYDCPs. Approximately two thirds of the library authorities stated that they had some Sure Start funding for developing partnerships with nurseries, although in most cases, this formed less than a quarter of the necessary funds.

The children's library assistant at Library B said that the funding had an effect on the services that she can provide. She tries to go out into the community to playgroups, but said that many of the nurseries in the library's catchment area are private, and so she does not visit them, as "we're not supposed to give them a free service." In Sheffield, the private nurseries are expected to buy into the Schools Library Service in order to receive library facilities.

Library authorities were asked if they evaluated this type of partnership. 55.8% said that some form of evaluation did take place, although this figure rose to 71.4% when only considering those authorities with a written policy on public library – nursery relationships. The types of evaluation carried out varied, as can be seen in Figure 7. Sure Start and Bookstart monitoring were the most common, followed by the recording of number of visits by the nurseries. One authority stated that they have "an annual competition (collage presentation) between nursery groups and a prize giving ceremony where views are exchanged." Much of the monitoring by Sure Start or Bookstart appears to be carried out separately from the library service's own evaluation. Responses from some authorities suggest that the Sure Start or Bookstart monitoring is the only form of evaluation, meaning partnerships in areas

Figure 7: How are the relationships evaluated?

Category	Number of responses	% of cases
Through Sure Start	9	37.5
Through Bookstart	6	25.0
Number of visits	6	25.0
Library membership	3	12.5
Competitions	1	4.2
Feedback from nurseries	5	20.8
Performance indicators	4	16.7
Regular reports	3	12.5
Book issues	2	8.3
	-----	
Total responses	39	

not covered by Sure Start or Bookstart are not monitored. Only seven authorities said that services were monitored by library staff visiting nurseries.

“There is formal monitoring only for Nurseries within the Sure Start area.”

“Evaluation of services in Sure Start schemes by the individual scheme.”

“Separate monitoring takes place for Sure Start.”

“Monitoring is a requirement of Early Years Partnership and Sure Start funding.”

“Bookstart have to monitor and evaluate very closely the success of their projects to fit in with National Assembly/Basic Skills Agency Guidelines, and to fit in the aims and objectives of Sure Start.”

“Sure Start require monitoring, name, ethnicity and ages of children, if the parent is a member of Sure Start. This is required on every visit, which is time consuming.”

“Bookstart / Sure Start record visits – information goes to funding bodies.”

“Monitoring sheets are completed after each visit. Sure Start librarians complete their own forms.”

Library authorities were asked how they felt relationships with nurseries could be improved within their area. Unsurprisingly, the most common response was a need for more resources, either in terms of staff or time.

“With more staff hours in branches there would be better liaison via staff visits to settings and more time for joint events.”

“More time, more money (of course).”

“A lot of boroughs now have an Early Years Librarian and I think that this helps to focus and co-ordinate all Early Years work across the libraries service.”

“More staff time to develop regular visits and services generally. Early Years librarians funded through Sure Start make a big difference in those areas.”

“More outreach time would enable all nurseries to be covered.”

“Time to do more outreach in the community.”

“Increased and permanent funding for stock and activities.”

“More library staff to work in this area.”

“The obvious solution is more staff.”

“More staff! There is a great demand for us to work more closely with these settings but we haven’t the staff available in the public library service. The Sure Start Librarian is able to work closely with community settings in the Sure Start area.”

“Improve levels of staffing to allow for visits to the library / playgroup. Extra funding for materials etc.”

“Employing a dedicated Early Years Specialist.”

“More resources (i.e. staff time) to visit.”

“Relationships could be improved if we had more staff time and budget to devote to nurseries.”

“We could improve by involving more library staff to visit and work with playgroups and nurseries – when staffing levels allow. Sheffield libraries restructuring plan is to appoint an Early Years Librarian.”

Linked to this was a comment made by the library assistant at Library D that “opening hours sometimes make it difficult. The library is closed on a Thursday, and

we have other activities on a Tuesday – if the nurseries aren't open all the time, sometimes we can't arrange times that suit us both.”

The other main requirement for improvement was improved communication and marketing of the library's services. This was discussed by over a third of the authorities who replied. As one authority suggested, “I think [we need] simply better ‘banging of the drum’ about the things we do.” Others suggested that increased staff would give the time to be able to make contact with all nurseries, or mentioned that they wanted to be able to bring in less keen nurseries.

The lack of communication in some authorities was highlighted by the return of two questionnaires from different people within one authority. Each provided different information, for example, one believed that the authority evaluated their relationships, whereas the other thought that they did not.

The need for improved communication was also discussed in the interviews carried out. The manager of Nursery 5 suggested that “publicising is a problem in Sheffield.” However, she believed that it was improving, since the libraries have now got a representative on the EYDCP board. It was also noted throughout the interviews with nurseries that several of them were not sure how many books they were allowed to borrow, or how long for, despite the introduction of the ‘Take 10’ scheme.

Several other means for improvement were also discussed. One suggested a need for more “consistency and coordination across the authority,” and another took this further, recommending the putting together of a policy statement in order to focus their objectives and priorities. This could also be achieved through employing an Early Years Librarian. As one authority, quoted above, stated, “a lot of boroughs now have an Early Years Librarian and I think that this helps to focus and co-ordinate all Early Years work across the libraries service.”

In order to gain an idea of each authority's perception of the importance of relationships between libraries and nurseries, they were asked the question given in Figure 8. While this was a very simplified question, it gave an idea of the

Figure 8: Question 13 of library authorities' questionnaire

Which of the following statements do you agree with most?

- a) It is an important part of the public library's role to develop links between themselves and nurseries.
- b) Public libraries should concentrate purely on services to individual children.

respondents' point of view. 85.7% of respondents agreed with statement (a), recognising the importance of partnerships, although this may partly have been influenced by respondents knowing the subject of the research. A typical reason was given by the following quote:

“libraries are an important part of early years education and we cannot limit ourselves to those children whose parents are already proactive library users. By developing our relationship with nurseries etc. we can reach members of the community who may not be natural library users.”

With respect to statement (b), one authority made the comment that “I would think few, if any, librarians would now hold to the second opinion rather than the first.” Indeed, only one respondent chose statement (b), saying that

“we have moved away from serving groups to promoting to parents and to children, particularly focussing on areas where external funding is available to employ staff. We thought that young children could not identify librarians with libraries. We encouraged visits to library buildings from nurseries but this did not create membership of individual children. We thought it more important to focus on the parent and to promote libraries as welcoming and friendly places.”

Five authorities said that both statements were equally important and could not decide between them. An option on the questionnaire for this may have increased this opinion significantly, as many commented that both statements are important.

### 6.3 Summary

- Only seven of the 45 library authorities who responded had a written policy on relationships between libraries and nurseries. These library authorities tended to have more relationships, and were more likely to evaluate them.
- Branch libraries were the most common initiator of relationships with nurseries, although nurseries often contacted the library themselves as well.
- Most funding for relationships with nurseries comes from mainstream budgets, although Sure Start provide a small amount in Sure Start areas. Private nurseries are expected to pay into the Schools Library Service if they require library facilities.
- Just over half the library authorities said that their partnerships with nurseries were evaluated in some way. However, often this was done by Sure Start or Bookstart in areas where the schemes were running, rather than an authority wide evaluation programme.
- The main way to improve these relationships would be to have increased resources, according to almost half of the authorities. Communication and marketing is also important, and the need for improved communication is supported by the interviews carried out in Sheffield.
- Nearly all library authorities consider it an important part of the public library's role to develop partnerships with local nurseries, with only one authority saying that they should concentrate on services to individual children.

## **7 ASSESSING THE USE MADE OF BOOKS AND VALUE PLACED ON THEM IN NURSERIES**

### **7.1 Introduction**

Whilst considering public library – nursery relationships that may exist, it was decided that it was important also to consider the use made of books in the nurseries, both in terms of their own books, and also any library books that may be on loan to them. This would allow library authorities to judge how it could be possible for them to improve their links, perhaps by providing support for nursery staff to allow them to make maximum use of the books.

This area was investigated mainly through the interviews with nursery staff, by asking them about their literacy activities. However, the parents’ questionnaires also provided useful information about the use of nursery books at home.

### **7.2 Results**

Story time is a vital part of literacy development in nurseries. Seven of the eight nurseries studied mentioned having a daily story time, when the staff read books to the children, and some nurseries have this more often. Nursery 8 had a chart for the staff to record which book they had read to the children every day. This ensures variety, by preventing books being repeatedly read to the children. All the nurseries stated that books were available at any time for the children to look at independently, with one member of staff saying “Story time is anytime.”

“Every room has a book corner. All the groups, even the babies, have books anytime, and will spend some time every day looking at books.”

“The book area is always open.”

“Books are always out for whenever the kids want to look at them.”

“We have lots of free reading here.”

“We have a writing table and a book corner, which are always out. It’s not structured at all– they can look at books whenever they want to read.”

“We’ve got a ‘book box’ that they can get a book from anytime and go and sit on the carpet and read it.”

“There’s free access to books all the time.”

“We have group story times in all the areas after 18 months. But it’s very flexible - books are available all the time, so the children can always get a book and go and ask a member of staff to read to them.”

A clear indication of how nurseries value books is given by their storage within the nursery. Several nurseries said that not all their books were out all the time, but were exchanged regularly. This allowed the children to have access to more books than they would otherwise get. One member of staff believed that this was important, as the children get to know the books quite quickly. Nursery 3 said that they have “loads of books - boxes full. The boxes get swapped round every two weeks.” Similarly, the manager of Nursery 6 showed a storeroom with many books, which could be exchanged with books in each group’s room. Nursery 7 stated that their spare books were kept in a shed. This raises concerns about the condition of the books, with them perhaps being susceptible to damp, although the shed was not seen, and may have been acceptable.

Nurseries 2 and 8 both commented that they had a separate storage area for “best books,” with the children not having access to this. These books were used only by staff at story time. Nursery 8 said

“we’ve got a book box, which gets changed regularly. That’s always out. Often these are books that have been donated by parents. Then we’ve got the topic books, which are the nicer, fancy ones. We only look at them all together – we tell the children they have to be careful with these. They can be so expensive, the interactive books. They’re all in the storeroom, in our little library – they are all classified by colour, according to topic, then the relevant topic books come out for half a term.”

The topic books that were being currently used were stored on a high shelf, out of reach of the children. Similarly, the “best books” in Nursery 2 were stored in the office, and were brought out only for story time.

Several nurseries commented on how they teach children to respect books. Nursery 8, as shown in the above quote, told children they had to be careful with the topic books, but allowed them to learn to use books with the other, cheaper books. Nursery 5 use the mobile library, and their manager explained that

“when the children choose the books, they bring them into the nursery and show them to the other children. Then they help to make a list of the books, and they go into the ‘library book box.’ Then before the bus comes back, they check against the list that the books are all there, and that they aren’t damaged or anything. The children do have respect for the books - they take care of them.”

Nursery 4 also had an interesting way of teaching the children to take care of books.

“Some books we’ve got are old and damaged and have been sellotaped together. It was a conscious decision to keep these books – if a book has been damaged, the children look at it in story time with an adult, and see what damage has been done, and look at how it makes it more difficult to read and enjoy the story. Then the children mend them. It teaches them to respect the books.”

As discussed in chapter 4, few children take books home from nursery. Most nurseries stated that children could if they wanted to, but very few asked. The manager at Nursery 4 said “they don’t regularly take books home, but if they’re particularly attached to one, they can do as long as they bring it back. Sometimes, if they don’t want to go home, they might take it as a pacifier – I’d rather they take a book than we have a screaming child!” Nursery 6 used to have a small library, and the children would stamp the books, but this was abandoned as books were not being returned. Nursery 5, however, does have a small library, which loans books and Story Sacks.

Several nurseries said that children would sometimes bring in their own favourite book from home. Nursery 7 said that if a child did this, they would all read it together at story time. However, the manager of Nursery 4 suggested that there could be a need for caution, as occasionally parents brought in religious books which may not be sensitive to other children's needs.

The opinions of the nursery staff about books may have an impact on the value placed on them within the nursery. While there are many staff within each nursery who will have different opinions, two comments stood out. One member of staff, when asked about the importance of the library, said "I don't like reading, myself." However, the manager of another nursery said "I really love books – all the children get books for Christmas presents."

### 7.3 Summary

- Most nurseries in this study have story times, and books are available for the children to read at any time of the day.
- Several nurseries have more books than are on display at any one time. These get regularly exchanged to give the children variety. Books not on display are stored in a range of places, including staffrooms and a shed.
- Two nurseries have "best books" which the children cannot look at by themselves. These are only used during story time with nursery staff.
- Different methods are used to teach children to respect books. This is considered an important part of literacy development.
- Very few children take books home from their nursery. However, some do bring in books from home to look at in the nursery environment, perhaps with the other children.

## **8 THE OPINIONS AND ATTITUDES OF CHILDREN'S LIBRARY STAFF ON THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF THESE RELATIONSHIPS**

### **8.1 Introduction**

In order to gauge the impact of public library – nursery relationships, it was considered important to gain the opinions of the people who see them in practice, and would therefore be best placed to judge their effectiveness. One of these groups of people are the children's library assistants who carry out most of the work involved from the library's perspective. The assistants from the four libraries were therefore interviewed, along with a Sure Start family reading worker who was also knowledgeable about the subject. The library authorities were asked on their questionnaire about the success of relationships, giving further information about how much impact the library staff feel that public library – nursery relationships have.

### **8.2 Results**

All the children's library assistants interviewed felt that partnerships with nurseries were beneficial, both for the library service and for the children. There were many reasons for this. One significant point mentioned by all libraries was that it introduces the children to the library at an early age, and shows it to be a friendly, fun place. Library B suggested that

“it's nice for the children to know someone at the library - to have a familiar face. If they know you, and associate you with having fun then it helps to break down barriers - because there are still barriers. So I try to talk to the children whenever they come in, even if it's just for a few minutes.”

This was supported by Library A, who believed it prevented the children viewing the library as an intimidating place, and it became “somewhere they've been used to coming.” Similarly, Library D said these relationships were important, “just so that they've been to the library, and know that it exists, and where it is.”

The libraries also made the point that, if children start going to the library at an early age, it encourages them to continue to do so. The assistant at Library B stated that “although there’s a bit of a problem at the teenage years, if they come in when they’re young, they’re more likely to come in all their lives.” Library C pointed out the importance of bringing in new people to the library, saying

“children are our future customers, and it has been proved that they will continue to use the library in the future if they start early. To put it bluntly, if we don’t have these new customers coming in, the old ones will gradually die and the service will end.”

The assistant at Library D believed that the relationships are needed, as she commented that “even if only two or three come back, it makes it worthwhile.”

Library B suggested that, particularly in some areas, partnerships with nurseries are very important, as children may be unlikely to come to the library with their parents. The assistant commented that

“here, a lot of children are brought in by their parents anyway - there’s only a small proportion that wouldn’t come in if they didn’t come in with their nursery. This is probably very different in somewhere like Library C’s area, where I’d imagine a high proportion wouldn’t come to the library if they didn’t come with their nursery.”

This was supported by the staff at Library C, who commented that, as they were in a very multicultural area, there were many parents with limited English, who were isolated and less confident and therefore less likely to bring their children to the library.

The libraries disagreed about the extent to which relationships with nurseries have an impact on encouraging parents to come to the public library. Libraries A and C believed that there was a positive impact on this, but Libraries B and D were less sure, with Library B’s assistant commenting that “I don’t know at that age how much parents would take notice. It probably depends more on their own social background. And also whether the nursery staff tell the parents that they’ve been to the library and had a nice time.”

However, the staff at Nursery C suggested that the parents would know the children had been, due to the need to sign consent forms. They suggested that “often the library is used as a “family space.” It’s a social place to spend time where the children can look at books or play on the computer, and the parents can chat or Dad can read the newspaper! It’s a free place to go, which is good, because there aren’t many free places you can go anymore – especially as there isn’t a lot of green space like parks near here.”

They also commented that parents sometimes come to the library by themselves to ask if they can use the computers, which their children have told them are in the library. This may occur more with slightly older children, although the Sure Start worker commented that when she worked elsewhere in Sheffield, part of nursery visits to the library had included some time using the computers.

Library staff discussed the more practical advantages of having these relationships for the library service. Library A pointed out that it increases their issue figures. This was taken a step further by Library B, who commented that “for us, we get the issues and we get the people through the door. We count the bodies into the library! With the issues and the people in, then we get the funding we need so that we can provide a good service. Without that people wouldn’t want to come back.”

Libraries A and B also felt that relationships with nurseries helped to develop the library’s role as a vital part of the local community.

Libraries also viewed partnerships with nurseries as good publicity for the library, and a way to advertise their services. Library C believed that partnerships meant that

“you can go to the nurseries and publicise library events. And you can advertise events for them as well. The more partnerships you have, the better off everyone is. If you’ve got a reciprocal agreement with others, then there is always someone to help. You can’t work in isolation – you need help to spread the word.”

They also suggested that teachers can help to promote the library to other teachers, saying, for example, “I took my group to the library yesterday, and they had a really good time – you should take yours.”

There was also discussion about the benefits of public library – nursery partnerships for the children. Firstly, the library staff felt that it helped their literacy development. As the assistant at Library B said, “They can’t have books too young; they should have books right from day one.” Partnerships are a way in which this can be achieved. She also felt that the books that the library has are good for the children. Bookstart has allowed the libraries to buy more new, interactive books which the children particularly enjoy.

There are also more general developmental benefits for children coming into the library with their nursery. The Sure Start worker suggested that “it’s about educating children, so that when they grow up and have children, they educate their own children.” Although the individual libraries did not have quantitative evidence of the benefits, the library assistants said that they could see differences in the children.

For example, Library B told the story of a girl who, 18 months ago, would come into the library very quietly and lacking in confidence. However, now she comes in singing, says ‘hello’ to the library staff, and goes straight to her favourite books. The library assistant said “she’s full of confidence, comfortable with the library and with us. It’s an amazing difference in 18 months.” She also noted that many of the boys benefit from using the library regularly, as they are often intimidated by it at first. The library assistant at Library A also commented on the enjoyment the children gain from the library. Children would sit and ‘read’ books to their dolls, and would cry when they had to leave.

However, the library staff believed that these relationships were not always ideal, and could be improved. As discussed in chapter 5, often this was due to a lack of staff time. The assistants at Libraries A and B stated that they were general library assistants, as well as children’s library assistants, meaning that they had to do general

duties. The children's staff also have to cover the range of ages from birth to teenage, giving little time for each age group.

This was supported by many of the comments from library authorities on the success of their relationships. Often, the need for prioritising limited staff and budgets mean that schemes are not as extensive as they could be. Other authorities suggested that the existence of partnerships was patchy, as it was down to individual staff in branch libraries and their attitudes to links with nurseries. One authority stated that their relationships were "on the whole quite successful but very low key and undervalued."

"Successful within the limits of current staff levels."

"It's a question of time, there are so many really good initiatives and possibilities for partnership working, we need to prioritise and use our staff to their best potential without over stretching resources."

"Where they happen they can be very successful. However, they do not happen as frequently as they could do. We are a small authority with limited staff, time and resources and have to prioritise very strictly."

"Good relationships restricted by lack of staffing on both sides."

"We have reasonable relationships with pre-school groups but contact is patchy because of staff problems on the library side."

The respondents to the questionnaires also believed that the benefits could be greater if libraries could provide training for nursery staff. One commented that "I would like to see training sessions with nurseries and libraries in the book selection and how libraries can assist in the child's learning." This was being carried out in one authority, which stated that "following meetings with the pre-school advisor, we are planning training sessions around "use of libraries", "sharing books and literacy" and "storytelling". These will be for pre-school and nursery staff."

Library authorities also believed that relationships with nurseries had the potential to benefit the library by providing access to parents as well as children. One suggested "nurseries have been very useful in sending out invitations to parents for book or library events."

Twelve authorities commented on the success of Sure Start in giving public library – nursery relationships more prominence and a greater impact. One authority, in stating that “the best and most consistent relationships from the public library are those within the three Sure Start areas, where staff time is entirely devoted to under 4s (we have 1.8 FTE [full time equivalent] staff working in Sure Start)”, is a typical example. Another stated that within their Sure Start areas, they were providing “a first class service.”

This was supported by the Sure Start worker within Sheffield. She believed that the funding of her post by Sure Start allowed her to go out into different settings within the community to develop links, which would not otherwise be possible. She also commented that the stopping of this type of funding showed very clearly the impact it can have. She explained that she used to work elsewhere in Sheffield as a Bookstart worker, again with emphasis on doing outreach work in the community. During this time, she was getting 600 new library members per year, but this stopped as soon as funding for her post was terminated.

### 8.3 Summary

- Library staff interviewed for this study believed that public library – nursery relationships are beneficial for many reasons. They felt that they encouraged children to visit the library, and taught them that the library was a fun place to go, and was not intimidating.
- This was also important as the children of today are the library’s future customers, and if they go to the library as children, they are more likely to go as adults. Going with their nursery may be the only access to the library that many children have. Also, some library staff felt it might encourage their parents to visit the library as well, either with their children, or by themselves.
- There are many benefits for the library of having these relationships with nurseries. These include increasing issue figures and statistics of library usage, as well as giving an easy way for libraries to publicise their services.

- The library staff felt that there were also benefits for the children. Visiting the library gives them access to new, interesting books and helps their literacy development. It also helps their general development through going to new places and building their confidence.
- However, there are difficulties which prevent a greater impact of these relationships. Often they are curtailed by a lack of staff, or insufficient budgets. Authorities have to prioritise all their services, and links with nurseries often seem to be patchy, dependent on attitudes of individual staff.
- Sure Start schemes have helped to reduce this problem, by providing staff to concentrate purely on work with under fives. This means that Sure Start areas often have successful partnerships between libraries and nurseries.

## **9 THE OPINIONS AND ATTITUDES OF NURSERY STAFF ON THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF THESE RELATIONSHIPS**

### **9.1 Introduction**

It was also considered vital to judge the opinions and attitudes of nursery staff on the value and impact of public library – nursery relationships, as they are the people who are in daily contact with the children, and would be best placed to see any impact that the relationships may have. The staff were asked about how important they view the public library generally for children’s development. This was considered useful information, as, although it is not specifically about the relationships, it shows their importance for children who do not visit the library with their parents. Young children are also likely to develop their own opinions from those of the adults around them, suggesting that the attitudes of nursery staff may affect children’s perceptions of the library. The nursery staff were asked specifically about the benefits of relationships between libraries and their nursery, and ways in which they could be improved.

### **9.2 Results**

The nursery staff felt that there were many benefits of having a relationship with their local public library. The manager of Nursery 5 made an important general point about why nurseries and libraries were ideal organisations to have links. She said

“I feel that we’re all out for the same aim. We want the children to gain a love of books. It’s a very special moment to share a book with a child, very personal. Also we can share practices, good ideas and find new ways to make things interesting for the kids.”

Several nurseries also suggested that relationships with the library were necessary because many parents did not take their children to the public library. Going with the nursery was therefore the only access to the benefits of the library that the children would gain.

“Parents have more commitments these days and may have less time to take their child to the library, so it’s something that the nursery can do – it can be part of the nursery’s role.”

“Most of the children here don’t go to the library with their parents.”

“Parents often don’t have time to go to the library. This way, children can go and see the books and the bright colours. They have toys there for the children too.”

“Busy lives don’t give the opportunity to read or go to the library as much as you’d like. Many of our parents are students or are working lots, so are very busy, and reading might only happen at bedtime. And students don’t want to go to the library when they’re not working – they spend enough time there!”

The nursery staff discussed many of these benefits. They suggested that the public library was good for the child’s general and literacy development, and also their long term education. The deputy manager of Nursery 2 believed that “the library helps the children to develop a lot quicker, because they are read to, and have the chance to look at pictures and ask why?” Nursery 5’s manager also believed libraries were beneficial because “the children have a better education and you get a better workforce.” With regard to literacy development, Nursery 6’s manager pointed out that “it can’t hinder it, can it? It must help.”

However, the manager of Nursery 4, which does not have any links with their local public library, believed that “libraries are not the be all and end all.” She suggested that “children’s development isn’t really affected by being taken to the library, because the parents who do take their children to the library are educated and aware - they realise the importance of the library and education.” This point of view, however, does not consider the potential value of the library to its current non-users.

Libraries were also considered beneficial for the children’s development, as, as Nursery 1 says “there are only books there, so they will definitely get the experience of sharing books. At nursery, there are lots of other activities going on all the time as well, so they can be distracted by those.” This was supported by Nursery

7, who said “you can spend more time with the children books wise. They will look at the books – maybe they don’t get this so much at home with their parents.” They suggested that this helped the children’s concentration.

The benefits of the library are also due to the large number of books available. Nursery 8 described the library as “a source of information,” and Nursery 5 supported this, saying “the library is a resource. We’ve got loads of books, but the library has got ten times as many. It’s also a good resource for the staff - we can get books out too, on issues like child health.” Nursery 7 also stated that the library gives the children different books to look at. “We’ve got lots here, but they’ve got even more there – even though we alternate the books we have out, the children do still get to know them.”

Many of the nursery staff believed that they could tell a difference between the children who regularly go to the library, or who read a lot. This again suggests that links with the library are important for those children who do not go with their parents, and therefore have less access to books.

“They are a lot more imaginative - it’s amazing, their imagination. They also have a lot more concentration.”

“They look at books the right way up, turn pages, point and ask questions.”

“I suppose it’s their attitude to books – you can tell they’ve spent time with books – some of the others don’t want to know.”

“Their language is better, they handle books better – they put books back on the shelves! They’ll bring a book to us if it’s been ripped and ask us to fix it.”

“They tend to take better care of books. They know that some books you have to take back to the library.”

Several nurseries commented on how much the children enjoy going to the library with their nursery, suggesting that it is a positive experience for them. This is partly due to them going on a trip, and also partly because they are going to the library.

“They see the library as a fun place to go. They think it’s fun to go to the library, look at books and do craft activities there.”

“The children like to pick their own books and bring them back to the nursery to read. It’s exciting for them to go somewhere.”

“They enjoy going - they should go.”

“Library events are another fun thing for the children to be involved with.”

“It’s lovely just to sit in a library.”

“The children all fight over who gets to go.”

They also suggested that the experience of having story time in a different place, with a different person, is positive for the children. Nursery 1 believed that “the children tend to focus more when they’re read to by the librarian, just because it’s someone new.” This was supported by Nursery 7, who pointed out that someone else reading to the children gives them a different perspective on the books. She also suggested that “going to the library and someone else reading to them helps their concentration, where some children might get silly when they’re in the nursery.”

Nurseries commented on the financial and practical benefits of the public library. Nursery 4 stated that “they are good for financial reasons – they are a great opportunity for children to access more than their parents would be able to afford.” Nursery 1 agreed, suggesting that it can be expensive for parents to buy books and difficult to store them, whereas “at the library, at least they’re there, and they’re free.” Therefore, there can be a value in relationships between nurseries and libraries for the children who do not otherwise go to the library.

Some nurseries commented on the helpfulness of library staff when dealing with the nurseries. Nursery 6 stated that

“if we asked, we’d get lots of help from the library staff – they’re brilliant. For example, if we phoned up and asked for books on a particular topic, they’ll find us lots of stuff. Also, they’ll phone us if they have any events on, so we can try and get down to those.”

However, Nursery 7 was less positive, saying

“as nursery staff, we don’t get much advice or support and so on from the library – although maybe we would if we booked in advance – usually we just turn up. Sometimes they [the library staff] are a bit stroppy, but I don’t mind because the kids are happy.”

Ways in which the relationships between libraries and nurseries could be improved were discussed. Nursery 5 said “I would like to look into ways of overcoming the barriers that we have.” This was both in terms of the children being able to go to the library more often, and the library staff visiting the nurseries, although she acknowledged that there are a lot of nursery settings for them to visit. Nurseries 2, 3 and 7 also said that they would like to be able to take the children to the library more often, with Nursery 2 saying that “if they [the library] had a minibus, we’d be up there nearly every day.” Nursery 7 did point out that “once every six weeks is better than nothing.” Nurseries 4 and 6 stated that they would like the library staff to visit the nurseries.

Nursery 7 suggested that further value could be gained from the relationships if the library could provide feedback for the nurseries. She said “it would be good if we could get information on new books that the library has got in, or advice on recommended books; things like that.”

### 9.3 Summary

- Nursery staff believed that there was value in having relationships with their local public library. Often this was particularly for the benefit of the children who did not visit the library with their parents.
- Many, although not all, nurseries felt that libraries were important for children’s general and educational development. One also felt that they could help the economy by providing a better educated workforce.
- The large number of books in the library helped make relationships beneficial for nurseries. This gives the children a greater variety. The lack of other distractions from reading and books in a library are also considered good for the children.

- The children appear to enjoy visiting the library, and view it as a positive experience. They also benefit from being in a new environment, and having stories read to them by different people.
- There were differing opinions on the helpfulness of the library staff in supporting these relationships, with some nurseries believing they were very good, but one believing that they could do more.
- Other improvements could be made to increase the value of these relationships, by increasing the number of visits, both to the library by children and to the nursery by library staff, and also by the provision of more information to the nurseries.

## 10 CONCLUSIONS

### 10.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to investigate the impact of public library – nursery relationships on preschool literacy development. In order to achieve this aim, it was first considered necessary to look at how books are made available to preschool children for their literacy development. The relationships that exist were then studied, as it was vital to know to what extent they took place across the U.K., and what they involved. Once this was established, it was possible to gauge the impact of these relationships. Throughout the course of this study, it was realised that the impact of public library – nursery relationships was wider than just preschool literacy, and also affected children’s general development. The relationships also had an effect on the library service.

### 10.2 Discussion

This research shows that children have access to books from a wide range of sources. All children in this study had books bought for them, although this may not necessarily be the case for all children, particularly if their parents have limited literacy. There is also a wide range in the number of books bought for them. Many children have access to books from the public library, and also at nursery. However, few children appear to borrow books from their nursery.

Therefore the library is an important source of books for children whose parents either cannot or do not buy books for them. If their parents do not take them to the library, this source is unavailable to them unless they visit with the nursery. Relationships between the public library and nurseries therefore have the potential to be of great value to these children.

The study shows there are varying degrees of relationships throughout the U.K. All library authorities who returned the questionnaire stated that they had some form of relationship with nurseries, and it would be expected that most others would

also have some links. However, one reply showed an exception to this, stating that they had not returned the questionnaire as they had no relationships.

The relationships existing, and their impact, are therefore clearly dependent on the different authorities. The majority of relationships are initiated by branch libraries, although nurseries and the library service as a whole sometimes have a role to play. This suggests that individuals in a service are often responsible for setting up and maintaining the relationships.

This is supported by very few authorities having a written policy on relationships with nurseries. This suggests that the importance of these relationships is not always sufficiently recognised at a higher management level. As one County Children's Librarian commented, "it's really part of our core service – so we haven't really evaluated the impact or possible development of relationships." Another respondent described the relationships in their authority as "very low key and undervalued."

Therefore, relationships with nurseries are often dependent on the attitude of individual staff in branch libraries, and their particular interests. The staff interviewed as part of this study tend to see the value of these partnerships, but are often restricted by time or money. Relationships may therefore be patchy within individual library authorities as well as across the country.

However, relationships appear to be dramatically improved by the existence of a Sure Start programme. Sure Start can provide the funding, and often extra staff, to allow more links to be formed, and also for them to be developed further. Often Sure Start programmes carry out evaluation of relationships, giving the opportunity for further improvements. However, this does raise the issue of the effect on public library – nursery relationships when fixed length Sure Start schemes end.

This research has shown the wide ranging positive impact that public library – nursery relationships can have. They clearly help the literacy development of preschool children, through providing access to a greater number of books than they may otherwise see. Many of these books are new and may be interactive and

especially interesting to the children, helping them to develop a love of books and reading. Links with the public library from nursery can also help the children to view libraries as fun and welcoming, encouraging them to continue to visit the library and develop their literacy as they become older.

Relationships with a library can also help the children's general development. Visiting the library allows them to experience a new place and meet new people, which they may otherwise miss out on. The library service itself also benefits by reaching out to new customers, both for now and into the future. Issue figures and user statistics are also increased, essential for funding with the current emphasis on performance targets.

However, as discussed above, relationships are not consistent throughout the U.K., and the potential impact is not always achieved. Improvements could be made which would allow more children across the country to benefit from public library – nursery relationships. An improved level of communication, within library authorities and between different authorities would allow for greater sharing of good practice. Increased communication between libraries and nurseries, for example booking visits in advance, would give children the opportunity to gain more from individual visits.

One way in which the communication of information could be improved would be through an increase in the number of library authorities having a written policy on their relationships with nurseries. This would also have the benefit of giving links with nurseries a greater prominence throughout the authority, particularly at management level. This may in turn lead to an increased recognition of the staff time needed to achieve successful outreach work with nurseries. While costs mean that this recognition may not immediately lead to changes, it can provide a longer term aim for the authority to provide staff specifically for this vital work.

### 10.3 Summary of main conclusions

- Preschool children get books from a range of sources, all of which are important for their literacy development. One of these sources is the public library. However, not all parents take their children to the library. Public library – nursery relationships therefore have an important role in ensuring that these children do not miss out on this vital resource.
- The extent of public library – nursery relationships varies greatly, both between and within library authorities. This is affected by whether the authority has a written policy on the topic, which few do. Often the extent of the relationships is determined by the attitude and interests of individual members of library staff.
- Public library – nursery relationships can have a very positive impact on preschool children, in terms of both their literacy and general development. They can also be of benefit to the library service.
- The impact of public library – nursery relationships could be improved in many authorities through greater communication, and the development of a written policy on the subject. This would provide more consistency, and the potential for an increased focus on the outreach work that can be carried out with under fives.

### 10.4 Principles of good practice

This study has led to the recognition of many aspects of good practice with regard to public library – nursery relationships. It therefore recommends that the following points are considered by library authorities and nurseries.

- Library authorities should create a written policy on public library – nursery relationships to ensure all staff understand the need for these relationships and how they can be most effectively implemented.
- Library authorities should evaluate public library – nursery relationships independently of Sure Start or Bookstart, so that they will continue to be evaluated after the end of these or other fixed term initiatives.
- Public libraries should ensure that they have a representative on all EYDCP (Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships) committees.

- Communication between public libraries and nurseries should be improved by the following methods:
  - Libraries should ensure that nurseries know how many books they can borrow, and how long the loan period is.
  - Nurseries should arrange visits to the library in advance.
  - There should be regular opportunities for feedback from both sides about what they expect or would like from the relationship, and how successful they feel that they are.
- Increased levels of visits by library staff to the nurseries should be considered, due to the difficulties in transporting children to the library. The potential role of mobile libraries should be investigated.
- A greater consistency of relationships should be achieved with both state and private nurseries by clarifying the respective roles of the public and schools library services.
- Wherever possible, Early Years Librarians should be appointed to develop provision for under fives and the outreach work that this will involve.
- Librarians should use relationships with nurseries, not only to contact children, but also parents who are non-users, perhaps through specific events or initiatives.
- The library service should consider whether they could have a role to play in providing training opportunities for nursery staff in areas such as book sharing, or library use.

#### 10.5 Suggestions for further research

The implementation of this study has led to several topics presenting themselves as areas suitable for further research.

- This study looked at nurseries chosen by opportunity sampling. Nurseries chosen for particular reasons, for example studying the high achieving Montessori Nurseries, may produce different results.
- The library assistant at Library B suggested that public library – nursery relationships could be particularly beneficial to boys, who were often intimidated

by libraries. It would be interesting to explore this point further, investigating the reasons behind this, and any differences between boys and girls.

- A longitudinal study could be carried out to investigate any long term effects on children's literacy of being involved in public library – nursery relationships.
- The Sure Start worker interviewed for this study stated that “if you start something, you've got to continue. Starting then stopping is worse than not starting at all in my opinion.” The effect of fixed term initiatives, such as Sure Start programmes, could therefore be investigated further.

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## 12 APPENDICES

### 12.1 Appendix A: Library Authorities' Questionnaire

Hello,

My name is Jenny McGill and I am currently doing an MA in Librarianship at the University of Sheffield. For my dissertation, I am investigating the relationships between public libraries and nurseries. Please note that, for simplicity, I am using the single term 'nurseries' to refer to all forms of pre-school education, including playgroups. I would be very grateful if you could help me by filling in this short questionnaire about the relationships existing in your authority. If there are any questions you are unsure about, please leave them blank and move on to the next question.

**Please could you return this questionnaire to me by Friday 27th June**, either by email to: lip02jm@sheffield.ac.uk Or by post to: Miss Jenny McGill, Hob Lane Farm, Stanbury, Keighley, West Yorkshire, BD22 0HW

Results of this survey will be available on the Web (<http://panizzi.shef.ac.uk/cplis/publications.htm>) towards the end of the year.

Thank you very much for your help

Jenny McGill

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Where necessary, please put an X by the appropriate answer.

**1. What is your job title?**

**2. Is there an authority wide written policy on relationships between public libraries and nurseries?**

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

**3. Who is responsible for initiating relationships between public libraries and nurseries?**

Individual libraries [ ]

Nurseries themselves [ ]

School Library Service [ ]

Other (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Are any government or CILIP guidelines considered when setting up these relationships?**

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

**If so, which?** \_\_\_\_\_

**5. What do these relationships involve?** Please put an X by all that apply.

Bringing groups of nursery children to the library for the following:

Library staff telling stories [ ]

Craft or activity sessions in the library [ ]

Children taking out books on their own ticket [ ]

Other (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

Nursery teachers borrowing books for use in the nursery:

- From the public library on an individual basis [ ]
- Bulk loans from the public library [ ]
- Bulk loans from the Schools Library Service [ ]

Library staff visiting nurseries to:

- Give advice to nursery staff [ ]
- Give advice to parents [ ]
- Read stories [ ]
- Monitor services [ ]
- Mobile libraries visiting nurseries [ ]
- Publicising library groups or events in nurseries [ ]
- Other (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

**Please comment on the most widely used of these activities.**

**6. Approximately what percentage of branch libraries in your authority has a relationship with at least one nursery?**

- 0 – 25% [ ]
- 25 – 50% [ ]
- 50 – 75% [ ]
- 75 – 100% [ ]

**7. Which of the following statements most accurately reflects the true picture of public library – nursery relationships in your authority?**

- Almost all nurseries have a relationship with their local public library. [ ]
- Most nurseries have a relationship with their local public library. [ ]
- Some nurseries have a relationship with their local public library. [ ]
- A few nurseries have a relationship with their local public library. [ ]
- No nurseries have a relationship with their local public library. [ ]

**8. Thinking about how relationships between public libraries and nurseries are funded, please estimate what proportion of the money comes from the following sources. (For example, mainstream funding, 75%; Surestart, 15%; other initiatives, 10%).**

- Mainstream funding %
- Surestart %
- Other initiatives (please state) \_\_\_\_\_ %

**9. Is there any formal monitoring or evaluation of these relationships?**

Yes [ ] Please go to question 10.

No [ ] Please go to question 11.

**10. If yes, please comment on what this includes.**

**11. Please comment on how successful relationships between public libraries and nurseries appear to be in your authority.**

**12. Please comment on how you believe these relationships could be improved in your authority.**

**13. Which of the following statements do you agree with most?**

a) It is an important part of the public library's role to develop links between themselves and nurseries. [ ]

b) Public libraries should concentrate purely on services to individual children. [ ]

**Please comment.**

**14. If you have any other comments to make about relationships between public libraries and nurseries, please do so here.**

I would be interested to find out more about the relationships that exist in a sample of authorities. If you would be happy for me to contact you again to conduct a telephone interview, please supply your name and e-mail address or phone number below. Thank you very much for your help.

Name:

Email:

Phone:

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**10. On average, how long does your child spend each week looking at books at home with an adult?**

- Less than 1 hour
- 1 – 2 hours
- 3 – 4 hours
- Over 4 hours


**11. On average, how long does your child spend each week looking at books at home by themselves?**

- Less than 1 hour
- 1 – 2 hours
- 3 – 4 hours
- Over 4 hours


**12. How would you rate your child's enjoyment of books, on a scale of 1 – 6?**

(1 = not at all, 6 = a great deal)

1     2     3     4     5     6

**Please comment**

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**13. When reading, which of the following does your child do? Please tick all that apply.**

- Join in with repeated sections in songs and stories
- Describe main events in a story
- Recognise rhymes in songs and stories
- Know which letters represent some sounds, e.g. the first letter of their name
- Look at pictures and print in books
- Have a favourite book
- Hold books the right way up and turn the pages
- Know to read from left to right, and from top to bottom of a page
- Talk about the beginning and end of stories
- Give meanings to marks that he / she "writes"
- Write their own name


**14. If you have any other comments to make, please do so here.**

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I would be very interested in finding out more about some parents' opinions on your child's book use and literacy development. If you would be willing to talk to me about this, please leave your name, telephone number and the most convenient time for me to call you. Thank you.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone no. \_\_\_\_\_  
Best times to ring \_\_\_\_\_

### 12.3 Appendix C: Library Staff's Interview Schedule

- Tell me about the relationships that you do have with nurseries within your area.
  - How many nurseries (out of total in area)?
  - What do the links involve?
  - How regular are they?
  - Nurseries with no links – do you keep trying?
  
- Tell me what you think are the benefits of having these relationships.
  - For the library
  - For the child (general development & literacy in particular)
  - Does it encourage child to come into library with parents?
  - Do you have evidence of this?
  
- Tell me about the difficulties involved in having these relationships.
  - Staff time
  - Cost
  - Wear & tear of materials
  - Bulk loans – material not available for other users?
  
- What do you think is the overall impact of having these relationships?
  - Good / bad?
  - Are they worthwhile?
  - Is this the library's role?
  - Do you have evidence of this?
  
- Could you tell me something about how the library promotes itself to nurseries and to under-fives generally?
  
- Is there anything else you would like to say?

#### 12.4 Appendix D: Nursery Staff's Interview Schedule

- How many part-time / full-time children do you have?
  
- Tell me about what you do to develop the children's literacy.
  - What activities?
  - How long spent doing literacy?
  - How structured / flexible is it? Can child look at books anytime?
  - Parental involvement? Can child take books home?
  - How many books does nursery own?
  
- Tell me about any relationships you may have with the public library.
  - How formal / informal?
  - Loans – how many? How long for? Books & other items e.g. videos
  - Visiting library – including practicalities, what about part time kids
  - If no links, why not?
  
- Have links ⇒ obviously believe there are benefits.  
No links ⇒ could there be benefits?  
What are the benefits?
  - For child's general development
  - For literacy development
  - For nursery (e.g. Advice, support, publicity)
  - Would there be potential for more links?
  
- How important do you believe the library is generally for children's development?
  - Can you tell a difference between children who go to the library and those who don't?
  - What do you think has the most impact?
  
- Is there anything else you would like to say?