Children's library design: does the location of the children's department in relation to the main adult library affect the interaction between the child and the library?

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Abstract

This work contains the results and analysis of a research project conducted into the effects of the location of the children's department of public libraries on children's use of library resources.

The aim of the project was to discover whether any of the claims made for separate and open plan children's libraries had any basis in fact and to see the library primarily from the perspective of the user - the child.

Research was undertaken in four branch libraries in Sheffield through two different methods; observation of children's use of the library, and interviews with staff, children, parents and teachers. Additionally, data from other library authorities was obtained through a questionnaire survey to obtain general perceptions of the problem, to investigate whether local authorities have policies on the design of their libraries, and to locate Sheffield's situation in context.

Although neither type of library design was considered generally to be the best, as both children and parents advocated the qualities of the library they attended most, significant discoveries were made in other areas, namely that it is not necessarily the case that open plan libraries facilitate a child's transition from the children's library to the adult department, and that the open plan library is not as liberating for the child as is generally thought, due to the need many parents feel to supervise their children more closely and control their noise levels. Also discussed are additional factors in library design that came to light during the study, such as staffing levels, forward planning in libraries and the effects that noise and atmosphere can have on young library users.

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

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Chapter 1. Introduction to the Study

The Department of National Heritage, in *Investing in Children* (1995) notes that there has been very little user-based research into public library services to children and young people in general, and recommends that more is undertaken. The results should then made available through a national network, allowing the pooling of resources and exchange of ideas. The report emphasises the importance of library services to children and that these should be a priority; to deliver a quality service it is necessary to be as certain as possible of the needs and wants of children and to balance them effectively. In order to do this, the library service must carry out extensive user research.

It has long been accepted that children should have their own space within library buildings; however, *"controversy exists as to whether the children's library should be a separate room or an area in the main library."* (Esson and Tyerman, 1991:7) It is possible to detect a gradual change in favour of the open plan arrangement over the last fifty years through the literature on children's libraries, although opinions remain divided on the issue as each situation possesses its own advantages and disadvantages. The criteria governing the choice of the location of the children's department are unclear, and the emphasis would appear to be from the adult point of view rather than that of the child. Sever (1986) states:

"Conventional library design and librarians' approaches to the child in the library setting seems sometimes to be the outcome of adult expectations, adult theories, and adult implementation of what children should be experiencing in a library." (p74)

The aim of the study is therefore threefold; firstly to discover what criteria are used when designing a library, secondly to investigate the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the different library arrangements and to discover if they have a basis in fact, and thirdly to attempt to see the problem from the point of view of the child, and to determine which arrangement best suits his/her needs.

Chapter 2. Background and review of literature

To carry out an effective study on the effects of location on the users of the children's library, it is necessary and important to establish the background. This includes the history of library provision for children and the design and location of library buildings, and a review of the user group and its primary needs.

2.1 History of the children's library

Library provision specifically intended for children has existed since the end of the nineteenth century and was widely accepted to be common practice by 1914. According to histories of the library movement, the first children's libraries were adapted from the reading rooms of the existing adult libraries; suggestions that one reading room should serve all users, adults and children, were dismissed by Ballinger (1903):

> *"An ordinary reading-room, even if large enough to meet the reading wants of adults and children, does not present the same opportunities of control, and the children would interfere with the comfort of the elders, and ultimately drive them away...the peace of the adults' reading-room must not be disturbed. The children must be provided for by a* separate *and* special *effort if the work is to be done well..."* (p553; emphases included)

These libraries for children resembled the adult library in miniature and according to Dewe (1995) *"...provision for children was often thought of in terms of social welfare and given the atmosphere of the schoolroom."* (p21) By 1924, when Rees published her work *Libraries for Children,* provision for children appeared to be universal. She wrote

> *"...to-day there is no library of any size that does not provide for its juvenile readers, even if it is only by the inclusion of books - often set apart - in the adult lending library."* (p19)

The general theme throughout Rees' work is that juvenile collections in public libraries tended to be 'upgraded' to a separate department when funding became available and the demand recognised. It would therefore appear that the integrated library at the time was somehow inferior and would have been used only when the ideal of the separate department could not be achieved.

During the 1930s when more new libraries were constructed it became the norm to have brighter decorations and child sized furniture for the children's department (e.g. see Jackson, 1936), following the trends of American and Scandinavian libraries. It is possible to detect a controversy over children's library design in this period as separate provision was expensive; L.M. Harrod's article (1933) is a reaction to a 1930 Library Association report which stated that the children's room should be regarded as a luxury in branch libraries. Harrod responds:

> *"Children's books are provided in every library and this makes the provision of the separate room to shelve them a necessity if satisfactory work with children is to be done."* (p158)

Dedman echoed this view almost twenty years later:

> *"The placing of book stacks for children's use in the main Public Lending Department...often becomes a source of irritation to both adults and children and is uncomfortable...for...staff."* (Dedman, 1950:103)

The focus of the children's library, in design, stock and attitude, became far more child-centred in the post-war period, when libraries began to organise more activities for children and include facilities for play within the library, although Heeks (1967) warned against making the children's library *" a little tots' playroom."* (p25) The 1970s saw the beginnings of outreach activities and community librarianship, although this was tempered by a decline in the amount of funding available for library services, which has been a feature of modern librarianship until the present day, meaning that relatively few new building or design projects have been possible.

2.2 Children's library design

2.2.1 UK libraries

Although there is a shortage of UK journal articles on children's library design, many books on children's librarianship contain small sections on the design of the children's department. On studying these it is possible to perceive a trend towards the decline in popularity over the last forty years of the separate children's department in favour of the open plan, shared children's and adult departments.

It was in the post-war period that the idea of the open plan library began to attract support; Gillett (1958) states:

"It surprises me how so many librarians still cling to the old idea of separate self contained lending, reading and children's departments...In 1957, I advocated the abolition of separate children's libraries...because I can see no point at all in the arbitrary division by age that such a special department necessarily implies." (p85)

Heeks' 1967 Library Association pamphlet states that the Bourdillon Report for the Ministry of Education in 1962 was in favour of

"separate areas rather than separate rooms for individual departments...Many of the problems of book selection, satisfaction of requests, discipline and falling off of interest at adolescence would be reduced if children could pass easily from one section of the library to another." (p23)

She does point out that this view was far from being unanimous, citing Thompson (1963) who believed that separate buildings were best and that in small libraries where this was not feasible, departments should be divided by glass screens. L.M. Harrod (1969) also advocated the use of separate departments in order that children could take *"proprietorship and pride"* (p155) in a room created for them.

Fleet (1973) advocates the open plan arrangement, its advantages being the absence of barriers between stock, the fact that young people will know the library, its layout and staff, and that staff will be serving the entire community and not

becoming specialised in one job. The only disadvantages of this arrangement that she cites are that accommodating entire classes of schoolchildren or organising story times can be difficult in terms of space, unless there is an activities room available. Orr (1975) states that the open plan arrangement can be an advantage in smaller libraries, as long as there is a distinct children's area that can be closed off for activities.

Like Fleet, Ray (1979) notes that separate children's rooms are tending to decline in popularity. She states that

"An open plan library facilitates supervision at all times and, more importantly, may ease the transfer from the children's library to the adult library." (p12),

although she notes that with this arrangement, noise may be a problem, and a separate room for children may be justified where a large community is served.

A report by the Office of Arts and Libraries (1990) summarises a statistical survey of public library services to children in England, followed by case studies of six authorities. Amongst other data the case studies include a brief description of the library buildings, location and design of the children's departments. The report concluded that the majority of the libraries visited were integrated, although the data presented suggests a wide variation between authorities and also a division between urban areas and county library services, the latter tending to be open plan and the former separate. It is also suggested that the older buildings house the separate departments while the newly designed buildings tend to be open plan. Few qualitative conclusions are drawn from this study.

The Library Association Guidelines (1991) state the advantages of both types of provision; separate provision has the advantages of allowing children their own space and privacy, and as has been mentioned previously, are better when planning activities and for noise restrictions. Shared adult and child provision, on the other hand, shows a recognition of the family unit, eases transition, and aids access to stock. It allows more staff to experience working with children, and is cost-effective. Although the guidelines are not prescriptive it is apparent that more advantages can be found for the provision of integrated services.

Many of the same advantages are noted by Esson and Tyerman (1991); in addition they note that staff who work in a separate children's library have a better knowledge of stock and children find them far more approachable and responsive. Disadvantages of the separate library, however, are that staff may feel isolated, and the pressure to maintain a constant physical presence may mean a reduction in opening hours. They also suggest that parents

> *"...may be tempted to leave their child in the children's library while they select their own library materials, thus placing the burden of supervision on library staff and occasionally causing distress to the child."* (p2)

and that housing children's services in a separate room may lead to the marginalisation of the service. On the other hand, integrating children's areas with adults raises the profile of the service by increasing its visibility; opening hours are not restricted and parents can supervise their children whilst choosing their own materials. However, as in the Library Association Guidelines they state that children's use of such an area can be inhibited by space and noise restrictions. They conclude that neither type of library is ideal and that the positive features of each can be maximised to outweigh the disadvantages.

Dewe (1995) writes specifically about the planning and design of libraries for children and young people. The main focus of the book is on the planning of a new library and as an aid for the librarian when assisting with drawing the plans and specifying requirements. His emphasis is on space management; he gives numerous examples of children's libraries throughout the UK as an explanation to the librarian as to what types of accommodation for children's stock and services are available. However, he does not engage in critical discussion of these; the book is primarily directed towards making the library appeal to new users rather than studying the effects it has on the present users. He introduces the issues involved in space management, but does not show the effects of these; they include library size, layout, design and decoration. His study of library floor plans raises questions of access, staffing, supervision and noise. His concepts of the open plan and separate layouts of the children's library build further on previous studies as they take into consideration that even the placing of furniture especially the issue desk will have an effect on how the library is run.

2.2.2 Children's libraries outside the UK

Although developments abroad do not have a direct bearing on this particular study, it is important to mention trends particularly in America and Scandinavia by means of comparison. As well as the different design issues, these countries show an increased amount of user research and the involvement of children in the design of their libraries. Sandlian (1990 and 1993) describes the involvement of children in the design of the Denver public library; Toth (1992) traces the involvement of a focus group of children with the planning of their library services. Dixon's 1991 article describes the architectural processes used in building a new children's library in Las Vegas. Although no article addresses the issue of separate or integrated libraries, the assumption throughout both is that children should have their own room. Sandlian's final comment,

> *"We expect children to view the library as a place to explore, a room of adventure and intrigue, a place to return to time and again, a place where they will always be welcome. This is a room of their own."* (p26)

illustrates clearly this assumption. Reasons for this differing attitude are unclear, although it must be noted that in the USA and Scandinavia there is less pressure on space than there is in the UK, meaning that space permits there to be a separate room for children.

2.3 User Group Profile

To assess the effects that the design of the library has on the child it is necessary to determine as far as possible the value of the library to the child; in other words how various age groups use the library and what purpose the library serves in the personal development of the child.

2.3.1 User needs

Recent literature concerning children and libraries is centred mainly around the development of literacy and the promotion of the enjoyment of reading, as a major role of the children's library.

The study that marked the transition from library-centred to child-oriented discussions was Janet Hill's *Children are People* (1973). Although by this time the concept of the children's library was well established, the 1970s in general were the age of the user centred approach and community outreach; Janet Hill's book reflects this trend in relation to children. She criticises libraries and librarians for their methodical, regimented approach and notes that many librarians as characters in children's fiction are not given a particularly appealing image. She encourages the view that children are people in their own right and deserve the same quality of service, enthusiasm and commitment as adults, and criticises the employment of children's specialists, saying that librarians should treat all users equally, whether adult or child, staff being the key to a better service.

Whereas Hill focuses on the interaction between the librarian and the child, more recent studies such as Elkin and Lonsdale (1996) incorporate a wider range of factors influencing the child in his/her use of the public library service. They particularly focus on the development of the child and the role that the library needs to play in this, namely intellectual and emotional development, social and language development and support for education, as well as recreation. It is argued that this kind of support can only effectively be offered by specialist children's librarians, who have a substantial knowledge of child development and the stock and services available to children, as well as being able to relate to children as a user group.

The DNH study *Investing in Children* (1995) emphasises the importance of children to the library service, so much so that children's services should be made a priority. It distinguishes between the reading needs and the library needs of children and young people, noting that the need to acquire literacy varies greatly amongst children, and that other needs of school age children are dictated by the education system, namely the National Curriculum. Library needs are identified through surveys of current use which identify trends and highlight areas of demand and result in changes to services and action plans and targets. The report also notes the wants of children, namely a desire for informal self-education and a

search for enjoyment. ASLIB's Public Library Review (1995) notes that young people see libraries as *"dull and old fashioned"* (p192) and that little is being done to introduce IT to children's departments; both these factors are recommended for investment and will have an impact on future spatial provision in libraries.

2.3.2. Age groups

It is now widely accepted that library services should be provided to pre-school children and their parents and carers, through activity and story groups for the under-fives and reading promotion schemes. However, at the other end of childhood, the opinions of library authorities vary on the subject of when a child should begin to use the adult section of the library and whether any transition period is required. Some authorities do not regard teenage readers as 'adult' until they reach the age of sixteen. The average age of transition is fourteen, although some authorities expect children to be using adult material at the age of eleven. Marshall (1982) notes that girls tend to read romantic fiction from the adult shelves from the age of about 12, whereas boys of the same age read adult adventure fiction. In addition we must note that the transition age is not the same for every child; some prolific readers will be ready to use the adult department at an early age whereas some teenagers will prefer to use the children's library, especially if there is a teenage collection located within the children's section or if they are accompanying younger siblings on library visits. Use of the adult library may also be affected by the quality of the children's non-fiction collection; a teenage student may decide to use the adult library for purposes of study and the children's library for recreational reading.

Even if the teenage and transitional readers are removed from the clientele of the children's library, the remaining user group is far from being homogeneous. The children's department of the public library serves multiple functions; it is the only library service available to the under 5's, whilst also being a support for education to school age children and a recreational centre. The DNH report *Investing in Children* (1995) states that children's needs are

> *"...conditioned by age, developmental stage, ability, the special needs of disadvantaged and minority groups, and by conditioning factors such as home circumstances or distance from a library."* (p5)

It is therefore apparent that the users of a children's library will be difficult to survey effectively; different criteria will need to be considered during observation and different questions will need to be asked during interviews according to the age and developmental stage of the child.

Chapter 3. Methodology

This chapter will explain the methodology designed for this study; this will include how and why it will be used, what results are expected and a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of each method in order that this can be brought to mind when conducting the study to achieve the most accurate results possible. More than one method of acquiring data will be employed as firstly different situations are best investigated using different research methods, and secondly, the principle of triangulation, looking at the same situation via different methods, gives a more accurate picture and leaves the final conclusion less open to a critique of its validity. However, in doing this one must exercise an element of caution, as Fielding and Fielding (1986) note, we should not assume that *"...the inaccuracy of one approach to the data complements the inaccuracies of another."* (p35)

4.1 Purpose of the study

a. to investigate the information-seeking behaviour of children in different types of library

b. to try and ascertain the advantages and disadvantages of each type of layout as perceived by children, parents and library staff, and compare the children's perspective with those of adults

c. to discover the wider implications of the design of the library, for example the effects on staffing, finance and the arrangement of stock

d. to locate the research within its context; this includes the historical and sociological background, a comparison with other authorities to discover whether Sheffield's situation is typical, and a consideration of the other factors which influence a child in his/her use of the library.

4.2 Observation

It was decided to use observation as the primary method of research for this study; the reason being that more information can be obtained about a child's use of the library by watching his/her activities and recording them. This approach

can be more revealing than either an interview or a questionnaire, especially if the observer can conduct the study unnoticed, as the user acts under normal circumstances and does not stop to consider what to do or what reply to give in order to give a good impression, or in Busha and Harter's words (1980),

> *"...controlled conditions are not used to initiate the occurrence of a desired event. The direct observation of library phenomena...offers excellent opportunities for investigators to acquire new data."* (p149)

Sever's research (1987) used observation as the primary method of research; the unit the research team used was specially constructed for this purpose using a one-way mirror so that research could take place inconspicuously. This method works particularly well for very young children who may not be able to take part in an interview due to an inability to answer the questions put to them. The observation approach also avoids the problem presented by the need for parental supervision when interviewing children, and means that a wider sample can be taken.

The main body of data for this study will come from observation studies of children as they use different types of library. Four Sheffield branch libraries will be used as case studies, and , to preserve anonymity they will not be identified by name. Libraries A and B are open plan libraries and Libraries C and D both have separate departments. The libraries will be observed on one school day (including class visits) and one non-school day. From detailed observations it will be possible to track a child's progress around the library, whether he goes automatically to the materials he wants, whether he has access to the desired materials, or asks a member of staff for help, and whether he browses through the materials available to him. To a certain extent it will also be possible to record body language and facial expressions, denoting pleasure, displeasure, interest or boredom. The time a child takes to find something to read can also be significant; does he find a book to read then leave, preferring to read at home, or does he like to read several books in the library environment first? It must also be considered whether the design and layout of the library encourages a child to play rather than to read, or to retreat to a corner with a book, or to interact with other children. A wide range of behaviour is possible, and it depends to a certain extent on the age and development of the child, which obviously will not be clear from direct

observation, as well as the particular purpose he is using the library for at that particular time.

A problem with observation which must be considered is that it is possible, consciously or sub-consciously, to bias the results obtained. It is important to describe all that is observed and not just the parts of the exercise which support the hypothesis under test or any personal preconceptions, otherwise the results of the study will be inaccurate. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990) some researchers believe that the aim of such research is not to analyse data, but to *"...gather the data and present them in such a manner that 'the informants speak for themselves'"*(p21), the aim of this being to reflect the truth as objectively as possible. Others, including Busha and Harter (1980), believe that to have any value to the study, the acquired data must be analysed afterwards and generalisations made, although the extent of these generalisations should not distort the data in any way. For the purposes of this particular study, although the primary discoveries should come from observation and description, the question under investigation will remain unanswered if no generalisation is made or analysis undertaken.

4.3 Interviews

Interviews with children, parents and staff will yield the kind of information that may not be found through observation, such as opinions and beliefs. Interviews have an advantage over questionnaires in that it is possible to deviate from the script and follow up any interesting comments, which is a particular advantage when investigating the responses of children, who are so often unpredictable; it is also possible within an interview situation to clarify a response that has not been understood or appears to be ambiguous. Interviews can be time-consuming and difficult to arrange; for this reason it has been decided to interview informally, for example interviewing parents whilst they are in the library with their children; this will produce a random sample of present library users, and will assist in eliciting the anecdotal response which is less likely to be given in a formal setting. It has also been decided to use interview sheets, so the interviews will be more in the form of a supervised questionnaire. Busha and Harter (1980) note that

however the interview is conducted, it should be well prepared with a list of questions planned in advance, and the interviewer should listen to respondents' replies and not react or argue with their statements. Although this situation is unlikely during the course of this project, as the topic is investigative rather than an attempt to prove or disprove a hypothesis, it is important to bear in mind the possibility of biasing the interview by guiding a respondent's replies; similarly it is necessary to record responses objectively and neutrally in order to achieve the most accurate study.

4.3.1. Interviewing children

Because of the problems of interviewing young children, the body of this research will remain observation and description. The DNH, in *Investing in Children* (1995) notes that the necessity of obtaining parental permission to interview children is a major barrier to the progress of research in this field. It is one of the objectives of this study, as well as to investigate the topic fully, to demonstrate that a useful and informative research project can be undertaken using observation and description as the primary method of research.

Children will be interviewed whilst they are in the library to obtain supplementary data such as their opinions and beliefs. The interviews will be informal, in order that children will not feel intimidated by the situation, and will take place ideally in the children's library. As these interviews are providing supplementary data it is not necessary to interview large numbers of children; it was decided to interview ten children of various ages in each library, but it is accepted that the amount of interviews conducted will depend on the number of children using the various libraries on the days allocated for interviews. Questions asked will include the children's views on ease of use of the library and what they like and dislike about the children's library, where it is situated, how it is decorated, and whether or not they use the adult department.

4.3.2. Interviewing parents

Parents and carers are an important part of this study as they are in most cases the people who introduce a child to the library. The Comedia report, *Borrowed Time* (1993) states that recent research by Mori found that parents of children aged 9-14 were 20% more likely to use the public library service than other adults. Again, this part of the research is supplementary to the main study

and therefore ten parents will be interviewed in each library also. It is hoped that parents who allow their children to be interviewed will also submit to be interviewed themselves, thus it will be possible to compare the comments of parents and their children to investigate similarities and differences in opinion according to perspective. Questions directed at parents will include opinions on location, access, noise, staffing and supervision. Supervision is likely to be the most important issue for parents; do they feel happier with the open plan library so that they can watch their children, or would they rather deposit them in the separate children's library in order to give themselves quality time to choose their own materials?

4.3.3 Interviewing library staff

For reasons of time, these interviews will be restricted to those members of staff who deal directly with children and their services. The format will again be informal; it is hoped that the interview can be conducted during, for example, a quiet period on the issue desk; if this is impossible then this part of the research can easily be substituted for a questionnaire which the respondent can complete at their leisure. Questions directed at staff will include whether they believe the location of the children's department has an impact on a child's use of the library, and also opinions on staffing, access and other practical issues.

4.4. Questionnaires

The purpose of the questionnaire in this situation is to obtain information from other library authorities about their spatial provision for children, in order that the investigated situation in Sheffield can be put into context. The questionnaire is designed to find out whether library authorities have a policy concerning the arrangement of the children's library and whether or not the children's librarian is in favour of this policy. The questionnaire approach was considered appropriate for this study on a practical level as it is less expensive than telephone interviews and also less time consuming, as well as convenient for surveying a geographically dispersed group. On an ideological level the questionnaire ensures that the questions are standardised and that the respondent has the opportunity to consider their replies before answering.

The design of the questionnaire itself was carefully considered; it was decided that since the information required took the form of views and opinions that the questionnaire should mainly comprise open-ended questions. Also, as Bailey (1994) states,

"Open-ended questions are especially helpful in preliminary investigations in which the researcher has not yet decided which characteristics of the phenomenon are relevant to his or her study and needs to describe all potentially relevant characteristics in detail." (p122)

The main problem with questionnaires is the poor response rate; measures can be taken to maximise this as much as possible. Firstly a conscious effort was made to ensure that the questionnaire was as short, relevant and unambiguous as possible, and that the accompanying cover letter clearly defined the research topic and the purpose of the questionnaire. Secondly, each letter included a pre-paid reply envelope, so that the only request to the respondent was five minutes of their time. Unfortunately this doubled the cost of the survey so it was necessary to limit the number of authorities that were sent questionnaires. The survey was sent out to thirty authorities; following the precedent of the 1990 OAL report ten metropolitan borough councils, ten county authorities and ten London boroughs were selected, mainly at random, but making full use of any contacts made or given, and ensuring as broad a geographical spread as possible.

4.5 Analysis

To gain a comprehensive picture of the results of this study it is necessary to apply a quantitative analysis to the qualitative data acquired. This will involve counting the frequency of phenomena throughout the observation studies in the different types of library, and quantifying the responses from interviews and questionnaires. The statistical results will provided the basis of the following chapters, which will be analysed with reference to the literature on the subject, and illustrated with individual comments and occurrences.

Chapter 4. Limitations of Methodology

The methodology designed for this study was for the most part successful; however, no study is without its limitations and problems, and these have been considered when interpreting the results.

4.1 General problems

The timescale involved was the largest limiting factor and the study would have benefited from a longer period in which to carry out further observations and interview a greater number of library users. It would also have been beneficial to the study to extend the number of case studies of local libraries in order to build up a more complete picture of the different types of provision available and the effects that these have on the use of the service by children.

Similarly, the period of time allotted for research was not ideal; the beginning of the research period coincided with the last weeks of the academic year and the end of the research period coincided with the beginning of the summer holidays. This meant that at the beginning of the research period, observation studies needed to be carried out on Saturdays and after school hours, and at the end of the study it was possible to observe library use during the week but the numbers of people using library services had declined as many were on holiday. This also affected the interviews as it took far longer than expected to obtain enough information from library users in order to carry out the study.

As well as these general difficulties, the research methods used presented their own individual problems.

4.2. Observations

On a practical level, it is important for the researcher to choose the correct vantage point from which to observe; however the design and structure of the libraries in this study were not conducive to providing a comprehensive overview

of all the factors that were important to this study. It was impossible at Libraries C and D to observe children using the adult department, as the departments are completely separate with no common vantage point. The design of Library B was such that any vantage point chosen would mean that the view of at least half the children's library was obscured at any one time, and it was also impossible to observe what was happening at the counter. At Libraries C and D, the data required was gathered from interviews with the users rather than observation; at Library B more data was collected during the observation period by listening to conversations and reactions, and supplementing this data with that obtained from user interviews.

Another practical difficulty with observations is remaining inconspicuous. This problem was less marked in the open plan libraries, as adults frequently sit at the tables in Library A's children's department as it provides a place to wait for the bus, which stops directly outside; similarly at Library B adults and children alike use the table situated near the children's books. As a lone adult in a separate children's department, however, observing these aroused more suspicion amongst the children and could have influenced their actions to a certain extent, although this was not felt to be significant; in retrospect this problem could have been remedied by reading children's books, posing as a new member of staff, or even by accompanying a child to the library.

There were also found to be difficulties in recording what was observed; as it was not known what factors were going to be significant in the study it was necessary to record as much as possible of the occurrences within the different libraries. This did not prove to be a problem in the quieter establishments, where there was also time for reflection, but in a busy library some details were omitted from the recordings owing to lack of time.

Observation studies also involve a certain amount of guesswork; in this study it was necessary to estimate the ages of the children using the various libraries. Although impossible to be exact about the age of a child it was felt that what was important was the age group of the child; this divides approximately into those aged five and under, those aged between six and ten, those aged between eleven and thirteen, and those aged fourteen and over. These groups have differing library and information needs as has been shown in the literature review,

and although the observer's estimate of a child's age may be wrong they would at least be placed within the correct age category.

It was also felt throughout the study that the mood of the observer affected the quantity and interpretation of the observations; this is difficult to overcome as many of these factors are beyond an observer's control.

4.3. Interviews

To achieve a useful and productive interview, it was necessary to choose prospective interviewees with care and at the right moment; for example it would not have been productive to attempt to interview parents who were evidently in a hurry or engaged in supervising very young children. As a result the interview process took a much greater length of time than was expected.

It was decided that, due to limited time at the disposal of the researcher, a day would be set aside for each library and as many interviews would be carried out as possible, arranging another date if the desired number of interviews were not completed. This meant that an organised sample, for example a wide age range of children, could not be achieved. However, in most cases the random sample of people interviewed did represent the views of all user groups of the libraries concerned.

It was fortunate that in this particular study, most parents and children were willing to be interviewed; very few refused. To a certain extent refusals were minimised due to the children's librarians in various libraries introducing potential respondents to the interviewer and explaining a little about the study. However, it was thought that with hindsight it may have been better to interview people from behind the counter as this lends credibility to the study and people, especially children, would feel more comfortable about answering questions if they were assured that the children's librarian had sanctioned them.

The main problem with the interviews was that the study was being undertaken at a time when the academic year was drawing to a close and many

parents and children were on holiday; the end of the academic year also meant that children would come to the library steadily throughout the week rather than in concentrated times on Saturdays and after school. This lengthened the interviewing process considerably. At Library C there was an additional problem in that many children use the library on their own, meaning that there was a shortage of parents to interview. This problem was overcome to a certain extent by interviewing parents who had brought their children to a storytime for the under-fives; this proved to be an especially useful exercise as the parents knew each other well and what was originally scheduled to be individual interviews became an impromptu focus group - the parents discussed the problem amongst themselves giving rise to new ideas.

An additional line of enquiry was discovered when observing a class visit to a library from a local school. It was found that teachers regularly bring classes of children to Sheffield's libraries to increase the availability of literature to the children beyond the collection available to them in school. Teachers have a unique perspective in that they are directly responsible for the welfare and discipline of a large class group in the library, and as such made interesting contributions to the study. They were interviewed on an informal basis when they were not in direct supervision of their class group, either when the class was choosing library materials or the children's librarian was reading a story to the group.

4.4. Questionnaires

Twenty-four of the thirty questionnaires were returned; the response rate for each group can be summarised as follows:-

Type of authority	% of respondents
Metropolitan Borough Councils	80
London Boroughs	70
County Authorities	80
Overall	**80**

No follow-up letter was sent to attempt to retrieve the remaining copies as time was limited and the response rate and quality of the responses was adequate. Five of the responses were incomplete; however, useful information was still gained from these and they have been included in the final analysis. It was concluded that the questionnaire design was productive and on the whole elicited the information required.

4.5 Analysis

Although the methods used to analyse the data obtained proved useful, it was found that the different methods had accumulated far too much data to be discussed fully within a study of this length. An attempt has been made, therefore, to analyse and discuss the most important and significant results of the research, some of the remaining raw data can be found in the Appendices, although it has not been possible to include all the results within these pages.

Chapter 5. Policy

In order to put Sheffield' situation into context it was decided to review the national and local policies and guidelines relating to the design of children's libraries.

5.1. National policy

There is no national policy governing the location and design of the children's section of the library. The closest document in existence to a national policy is the Library Association's *Guidelines for Services to Children and Young People* (1991 and 1997); however these guidelines are advisory, not prescriptive, and do little more than list the advantages and disadvantages of each type of design. Furthermore, it only distinguishes between the basic concepts of the separate and the open plan library, and does not consider, for example, the location of the issue desk in terms of supervision and service provision. *Investing in Children*, the 1995 document from the Department of National Heritage, makes no reference to the location of the children's library, and concentrates solely on the various intellectual and social needs of children and how the service should meet those needs.

Since these are the only bodies with sufficient authority to produce national policies for public library services to children, it is reasonable to conclude that no national research has been undertaken on this subject, which renders the possibility of a national policy for the arrangement of children's libraries impractical. It is the purpose of this study to determine whether the location of the library has an effect on the child's use of library facilities, and if it is shown to have an effect, it is a factor which deserves much greater consideration by national bodies.

5.2. Local authority policies

At local authority level, it was found that a significant number of authorities did have a policy on the design of their children's libraries. From twenty-four respondents to the questionnaire (see Appendix A), thirteen had the design of their libraries dictated by policy, eleven of whom were in favour of the open plan arrangement. This left two authorities, both London Boroughs, whose policy was in favour of the separate children's room.

Reasons for these policy decisions were mainly practical; most of the authorities in favour of an open plan policy state that staffing levels were their primary concern, closely followed by space and budget restrictions. Only five mentioned any possible benefit to the child as a reason for establishing this policy, and of these only one cited it as the primary justification. Interestingly, the two authorities whose policy was in favour of the separate children's room both justified this on theoretical grounds, that a child needs a 'child-centred' environment away from adults in which he can develop his confidence and independence in using the library.

The open plan arrangement is the most cost-effective form of service provision and this would appear to be the main reason for the decision of these authorities to follow this avenue. This is not to say that these authorities have not considered the needs of the child, as many cite what are considered to be advantages to the child as justification for their policies, and the majority of children's librarians who responded to the questionnaire agreed with their authority policy and stated further reasons for their views, including ease of transition and supervision, whilst in some cases accepting that the separate library did offer some advantages, namely facilitating class visits and activities. A small number of authorities mentioned that they would prefer to have separate provision but this was financially impossible:

"All the areas and branches have open plan arrangements. I would prefer to have separate provision but this is unlikely to happen due to the pressure of staffing/supervision." (Bradford)

"Ideally we would want separate rooms with own service desk, however due to constraints such as budget, size, layout and staffing this wouldn't be possible." (Wiltshire)

This would suggest that the needs of the child are not being ignored but are necessarily being viewed differently from the perspective of staffing cuts and declining resources, as these are the overriding concern.

Of the remaining authorities who adhered to no policy guidelines on the design of their libraries, five had varied provision throughout their service, three chose mainly open plan arrangements and three favoured separate departments. Most indicated that they did not have a written policy in order that each case could be considered individually, according to the size and shape of the site and the size of the population to be served:

"...decisions need to be taken in relation to size of library and space available - no hard and fast policy should apply." (Croydon)

"I cannot see how an authority can have a policy across all its buildings/types of service delivery - individual circumstances and size of building will be the determining factor in all but the largest of libraries." (East Yorkshire)

As well as the size of the individual site and the budgetary restrictions, one metropolitan authority stated that they needed to respond to staff and users' feedback when planning new buildings rather than adhering to policy.

Sheffield's library service has a definite tendency towards the open plan arrangement; all recent buildings and renovations have been open plan and there have been investigations into introducing this arrangement into libraries which presently comprise separate departments. According to the manager of the Learning and Young People's Unit for Sheffield's libraries, there is no written policy dictating that this should be the case, but it is the generally accepted view that the open plan arrangement is the most acceptable option as it is beneficial to all parties.

5.3. Conclusion

The lack of national guidelines on this issue has meant that local authorities are free to define their own policies should they so wish; just over half of those who responded to the study have done so. Nearly all the local authorities cite budgetary or staffing restrictions as factors in determining the layouts of their libraries, but all also cite advantages to the child of the kind of provision their libraries make; the decision therefore seems to be a compromise between the funding available and the consideration of the needs and welfare of the child.

Chapter 6. Staffing and Supervision

6.1 Staffing levels

The general reduction in funding across the UK library service has meant that staffing levels have declined and library staff have to work to an optimum level to ensure that the best services possible are available to the library user. The effects of these budget restrictions and staffing cuts are all too evident through responses to questionnaires; the open plan arrangement requires fewer full time staff and many authorities cite this as their justification for adopting the open plan arrangement in their libraries:

"I would prefer separate provision but this is unlikely to happen due to pressure of staffing/supervision. This is unlikely to change." (Bradford)

"Our levels of staffing would not support separate service desk operations." (Rotherham)

"...few authorities have staffing levels that would allow for a separate room and service desk." (Nottinghamshire)

Open plan is a result of *"The need to run a library with the minimum number of staff."* (Kent)

This economy of staffing is also a major factor in Sheffield's library design, and was the reason for the changes to an open plan layout at Southey and Upperthorpe libraries in recent years. The children's librarian at Library A agreed with this policy; Library A can be very quiet at times and at such moments needs only one person at the counter, leaving other staff free to do other tasks, whereas separate adults and children's departments would require two members of staff on duty at all times.

6.2 Staff attitudes to children's work

The adoption of open plan arrangements is not a subject of general agreement amongst librarians. With an open plan arrangement, all staff are required to serve both adults and children, and as Sheffield's Manager of the Learning and Young People's Unit stated *"Staff don't feel its their role to work with children."* He went on to say that staff often question why they should be doing children's work when there is a children's specialist in the library. This was also a point made by one of the librarians, who thought that all staff should serve all users, but some are reluctant to work with children. This 'departmental mentality' was also mentioned by one library authority, who stated that one of their justifications for the use of the open plan arrangement was to tackle this reluctance. The attitude of some staff towards the children's department can make working in a separate library an isolating experience, however, as the children's librarian at Library C remarked, it can also be a refuge. Much of the reluctance to work with children stems from the common perception of the children's department of being somehow inferior to the adult department as far as staff are concerned; this apparent inferiority has been evident since the 1950s, when Milner (1958) argued that the status of the children's librarian was *"...not at all clear...In many cases the status of the Children's Librarian ranks at the bottom of the list of senior assistants."* (p88) The recent report from the Department of National Heritage, *Investing in Children*, (1995) states that children should be a priority in library services, and it is hoped that this will restore the importance of the children's department in the eyes of library staff.

6.3 Staff/Child Relationships

The study aimed to discover whether relationships between children and staff were better in a separate library than in an open plan one. The focus group of parents at Library C believed that their children found it far less intimidating to ask for help finding library materials in the separate library as they were acquainted with the librarian, and it was generally thought to be the case that children would be more likely to ask for help if they knew the person to ask and did not have to compete for attention at the counter with adult borrowers. It was therefore a surprise to discover that the proportion of children who said they would not a

librarian for help was the same in each type of library, and that the majority said that they did.

Fig.1 Graph depicting the percentage of children asking for help from the librarian in each kind of library
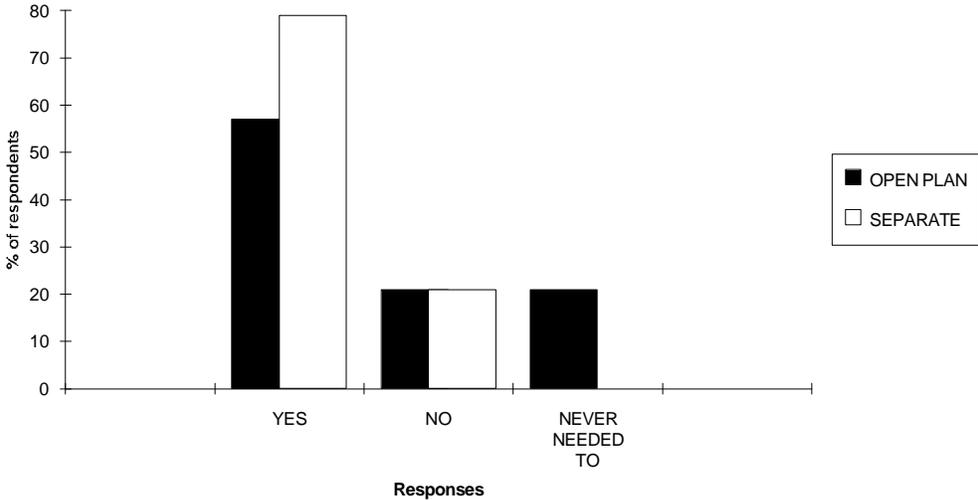
Those who stated that they had never needed to ask for help before were happy to go to the librarian should they consider this necessary. The observation study yielded similar results, although no data was available from Library B due to the counter being out of sight from the vantage point of the observer. At Library A there were normally two or three librarians on duty in addition to the children's librarian; children were observed mainly asking questions of the children's specialist, but felt able to ask other staff members for help should she not be available. The positioning of the counter was an influencing factor in this, as part of the counter next to the children's section is child-height and children are often served from here by the children's librarian at busy periods and during class visits. It would appear, therefore, that although it is often assumed that the separate library fosters a stronger relationship between librarian and child, this relationship can take place in an open plan library also. It can also be argued that it could be beneficial to the child to be used to asking a variety of people for help with an enquiry, as he will be required to do this in the future and will increase his confidence.

6.4 Supervision of the children's area

Staff in children's departments have two main duties, as mentioned by the respondent from Nottinghamshire county library:

"Staffing levels - need to be able to supervise area easily for children's safety and respond to children's enquiries."

Dealing with enquiries is the principal duty of the children's librarians; supervision is perhaps less important as parents generally maintain responsibility for their children's well-being whilst they are in the library. Sheffield's libraries display posters, as specified in the Library Association Guidelines (1997) asking parents not to leave children unsupervised in the library as staff cannot be held responsible for their actions or well-being, however from a Health and Safety point of view, there should always be a member of staff with a full view of the children's library, and according to the 1997 Library Association Guidelines this visibility should include cctv facilities.

6.5 Safety

In interviews, parents were divided over which type of library they believed was safer for their children. Those who used open plan libraries believed them to be safer as they could maintain supervision over their children; those who used separate libraries believed them to be the safest, particularly at Library C where the children's library is located upstairs. The safety aspect of the separate room was illustrated by the willingness of mothers to let their babies crawl in freedom on the library floor; all stated that they would not let them do this in an open plan library as it was far more dangerous. No child mentioned the safety aspect when interviewed, and it is not their prime concern.

One questionnaire return mentioned that the separate library was safer for the lone child; observations and interviews in Sheffield would suggest that children using the library alone has more to do with the community that the library serves and the atmosphere and size of the library than its design. Most children using Libraries A and C did so alone or with friends; at Library D half came alone and

half with a parent, and parents accompanied all the children interviewed at Library B. The communities using Libraries A and C are more multicultural than other areas; many Asian parents do not tend to use the library themselves and their children tend to come alone or accompany younger siblings. It is essential for the librarian to know the community and its trends and needs, and in such areas as those served by Libraries A and C supervision of the children's area should be a priority.

6.6 Parental supervision

The general pattern of use in the open plan libraries was observed to be that parents would accompany their children to the library and then leave them to look at the children's section whilst selecting their own materials from the adult department, and would return to collect them from the children's library afterwards. Whilst the parent was choosing their books the child could see their parent from the children's section and would be able to call for them if necessary, and the parent could easily watch their child from the adult library. This is consistent with the suggestions from local authorities that the open plan arrangement facilitates parental supervision and allows parents to select their material at the same time as their children; it is also consistent with the thoughts of two parents who stated that they would have to supervise their children more closely in a separate room arrangement. However, there is a discrepancy between this and the numbers of parents in open plan libraries who stated in interviews that they take their children into the adult section whilst they are choosing their books, for reasons of supervision. This second result is consistent with the results of the interviews with parents in separate libraries, where a significant number felt that they would have to supervise their children more should the library change to an open plan arrangement. These two opposite results were discovered through different research methods; the reason for the interviews revealing a large amount of parental supervision was partly due to the interviews taking place in the children's area itself and these results could have been significantly different had the interviews been conducted at the counter or exit point. The implications for the child are unclear; although the open plan library can provide a common ground between freedom and safety, the need that many parents feel to supervise their

children in an open plan library at all times may prove to be oppressive for the child.

Parental supervision of children's choices of books was observed to be significantly higher at Library D than at the other libraries. This could be a result of the location of the building in a park, set back from the main road, and the children's library having a separate entry and exit point from the adult department, meaning more parents are likely to accompany their children for safety reasons. If children's choices are significantly altered by the presence of their parents, this is probably more as a result of the design and location of the entire building rather than the children's library being a separate department.

6.7 Conclusion

The staffing and supervision issues therefore present many opposing implications for library design. To alter the staff perception of children's work being inferior, all staff should be involved in services to all users and this can be done most effectively in an open plan environment, where it is equally possible for the child to relate to the librarian. Parents appear to be divided over which environment requires them to supervise their child most closely, and in most cases, parents and children felt safety through familiarity; they used their local library regularly and were happy in their environment, whether separate or open plan.

Chapter 7. Transition

"One of the main objectives of work with children should be to produce adult users, and boundaries between adult and children's aspects of the service should be minimised, both publicly and administratively." (Library Association Guidelines, 1991, p10)

The public library service aims to promote itself to the entire community and it is hoped that children who begin to use the library at an early age will continue to use the library as adults. The transition between children's and adult materials is often perceived to be a difficult process, and children move on to adult materials at different ages, developmental stages, and for different educational or leisure reasons. In Sheffield's libraries, one library card allows the user to borrow both adults' and children's books in any of the city's libraries, therefore there is no administrative barrier for the child to overcome and the process can occur gradually as the child requires. However, it is a common perception that the separate children's library is a barrier to the child's progression to adult materials.

7.1. Local authorities' views

Much of the written discussion on the respective merits of the open plan and separate library, including the Library Association Guidelines (1991 and 1997) has stated that the open plan arrangement facilitates the child's transition from children's materials to adult, therefore implying that the separate children's department can be seen as a barrier to this transition which must be overcome.

Eight of the respondents from local authorities agreed; the following comments illustrate their views:

"Children should not be segregated from adults, it allows freedom of movement from one department to another and creates less barriers when a child feels they wish to move up to the adult library." (Lancashire)

"Open plan means that children are used to the environs of the adult library - it is not such a huge step to transfer." (Bromley)

"I believe children should share many aspects of library provision with adults. They will eventually grow into adults and should not feel that the adult library is another world altogether." (Doncaster)

From these comments it is apparent that there are two aspects of transition which may prove to be a problem for a child. The obvious aspect is the accessibility of adult materials, but also deemed to be important is the change in atmosphere between the children's department and the adults'.

7.2 Library users' views on transition

Very few parents or children mentioned transition to adult stock when interviewed; on the whole parents were primarily concerned with supervision. All the comments about ease of transition came from parents at the open plan libraries; two mentioned that transition to adult stock was easier in an open plan arrangement, and one of these welcomed the policy of the children's librarian to control what was issued to children from the adult department, and gave the example of Stephen King novels, the content of which is often unsuitable for children below a certain age. One parent suggested that the open plan arrangement was better for older children; this view was echoed by an 11 year old at Library D who suggested that the open plan arrangement is better for teenagers because they will be using both adults' and children's books.

7.3 Children's use of adult facilities

It would appear so far that the literature on the subject has proved to be correct; however, in practice, the picture is rather different. If open-plan libraries facilitate the transition from junior to adult stock one would expect to find more children using the adult department in an open plan library than in a separate one. Observations of children using the adult library present quite a distorted picture as

it was impossible to observe children going to use the adult department from separate libraries; with hindsight it may have been beneficial to the study to observe the adult department for one day to discover how frequently it was used by children. In the open plan libraries, a small number of children used adult stock, compared to the large numbers of children who went into the adult library to look at the videos or to find their parents. The interviews with children and parents provided more revealing results.

The majority of children interviewed at open plan libraries said they did not use the adult library; of those that did, four said they used materials in the adult department whilst the remaining three only went there to meet their parents. One seven year old at Library B said that he did not use adult materials, yet when interviewed, his father said that he took his son to look at the sport books in the adult section, and that it was likely his son was unaware of the division between children's and adult stock. Of the children interviewed in the separate libraries, twelve used the adult library whilst four did not, therefore reversing the results from the open plan libraries. Most of these twelve said that they either went to use adult non-fiction to assist with their homework, or to use the audio-visual materials that are not provided in Sheffield's children's libraries. Since the average age of the respondents was very similar in all four libraries, it is reasonable to conclude from this that children who used the separate libraries used the adult department more than their counterparts in the open plan libraries.

Interviews with parents revealed that parents were more likely to take their children into the adult department in a separate library than in an open plan one. A few parents took their children to look at the adult stock or the audio-visual materials, but for the most part, they took their children with them whilst they were selecting their own materials, for the purpose of supervision. The graph below shows parents' responses to the question in each kind of library.

Fig 2 Graph showing the percentage of parents who take their children to the adult department in each kind of library.
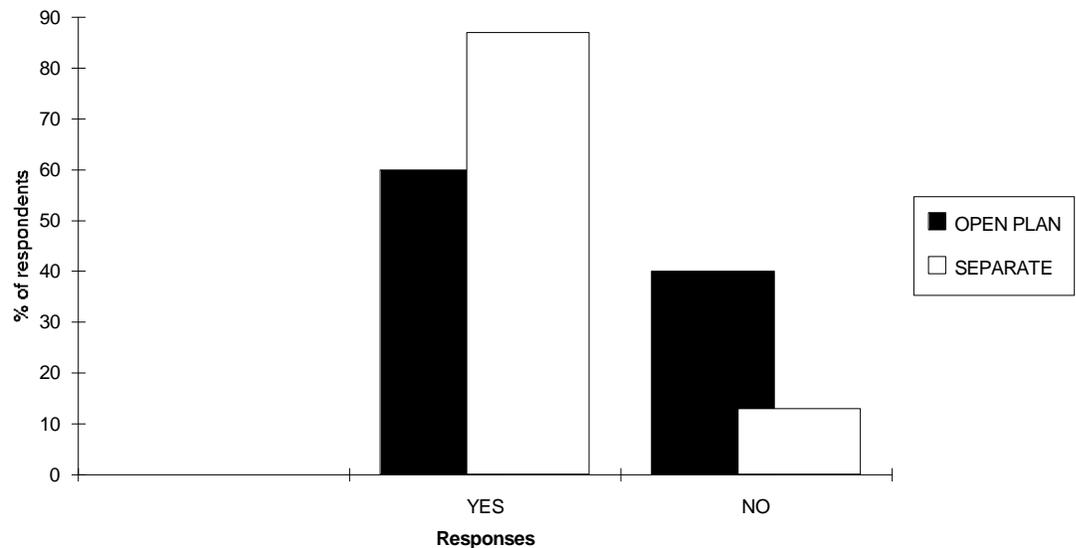
Many parents who supervised their children in the adult library stated that they took their children to the children's department first, to keep them occupied with a book whilst parents chose their own. Although in these cases the children were mainly too young to be reading adult stock, the time they spent in the adult department would still have been valuable. The children would have been introduced to the environment and atmosphere of the adult library from an early age, and because it was a time when they would be reading their own materials, they would come to associate the adult department with quiet reading. This would eventually be beneficial to the child when they wished to transfer, as they would be familiar with the environment and atmosphere of the adult department.

7.4 Other factors influencing transition

Other factors apart from the location of the two department appear to have more of an influence over the ease of transition from the children's library to the adults'. The first of these is the continuation of the classification by subject and genre in the adult department that is used in the children's department. By far the majority of children interviewed said they found it easy to locate the materials they

required; one seven year old at Library B, when asked what he liked about the library, said 'the subject index on the wall that helps you find books'. The continuation of the subject index into the adult department means it is just as likely that these children will find the adult department easy to use when they come to transfer.

The second factor is the location and stock of the teenage or young adult collection. In both Libraries A and B, the young adult books were displayed between the adults and the children's departments, and at Libraries C and D the teenage section forms part of the children's room. The numbers of teenagers interviewed did not constitute a large enough sample to draw any valid conclusions from this group about ease of transfer, and the reading habits of young adults is a large enough topic to merit a research project in its own right. However, some interesting discoveries are that firstly, some interviews and observations would suggest that some teenage users only use the young adult books and do not visit either the children's or the adults' departments, and secondly, if the teenage collection is within the children's department the stock necessarily has to be restricted, for example some horror books which appeal to teenagers cannot be displayed in that section in case they are read by younger children. A wider scope of material is therefore possible in teenage sections in open plan libraries and adult departments, and it would be interesting to compare the differences in stock composition between the two to discover if this does in fact take place.

The third factor mentioned in several questionnaire responses was the integration of children's and adult stock as well as space. Dorset council mentioned that the open plan arrangement made effective use of the available stock:

> *"Children's books are often a good starting point for adults, and children's interest in a subject often goes beyond children's books...I would eventually like to see some form of integrated stock."*

Gloucestershire council already offers integrated non-fiction stock in some of its libraries:

"...but generally this tends to advantage adults (who can find easy books on a subject) and staff (who can find something on a subject) but not children (who may well not be able to cope with reading the resource that is found or offered.)"

However, Kirklees council disagreed with the idea:

"I would not integrate stock as I see it necessary for young people to have their own space."

7.5 Conclusion

It has therefore become clear throughout this study that children who use both types of libraries are equally likely to visit the adult department, whether to look at the bookstock or the audio-visual materials, or simply so that they can remain under the supervision of a parent. They will therefore be familiar with the adult library and its atmosphere; to a certain extent this negates the argument that the open plan library eases transition. It must also be considered that there are other factors influencing a child's transition to use of the adult library, which may prove to be more influential than the location of the children's library.

Chapter 8 Atmosphere

8.1. Ambience

The ambience of the library is a difficult subject to define as it is comprised of a number of contributing factors such as design, decoration and friendliness of staff, which are covered in other chapters. However, throughout the interview process, many general comments were made which did not fit easily into any of the categories defined previously but were considered to be important to the study nevertheless, as the atmosphere of a place can be just as crucial an influence on the child's use of library services.

Opinions were divided over which type of library provided the best atmosphere for the child. Parents at Library B commented that the library had a much less 'stuffy' atmosphere than the separate libraries, and that it made the library a happier place to be to have children wandering through the adult department. On the other hand, a parent at Library C stated that

"Open plan libraries are claustrophobic; separate libraries make children feel special, in an open plan it's like they're always being watched."

A parent at Library D agreed:

"Separate libraries are child-friendly and make them feel important."

An eighteen year old at Library D, whilst not expressing a personal preference for either layout, commented that younger children might find the presence of adults intimidating, although contrary to this, a nine-year old at Library B said she liked to be able to 'see all the people' while she was reading.

It was considered that if children were comfortable with the atmosphere and ambience of the library, they were more likely to read books whilst in the library, rather than selecting their materials and returning home. Naturally most children preferred to read at home; many said they had more time to read at home

and that they liked to read in bed. However, the proportion of children who chose to read in the library was interesting, as the graph shows.

Fig. 3 Graph showing where children prefer to read
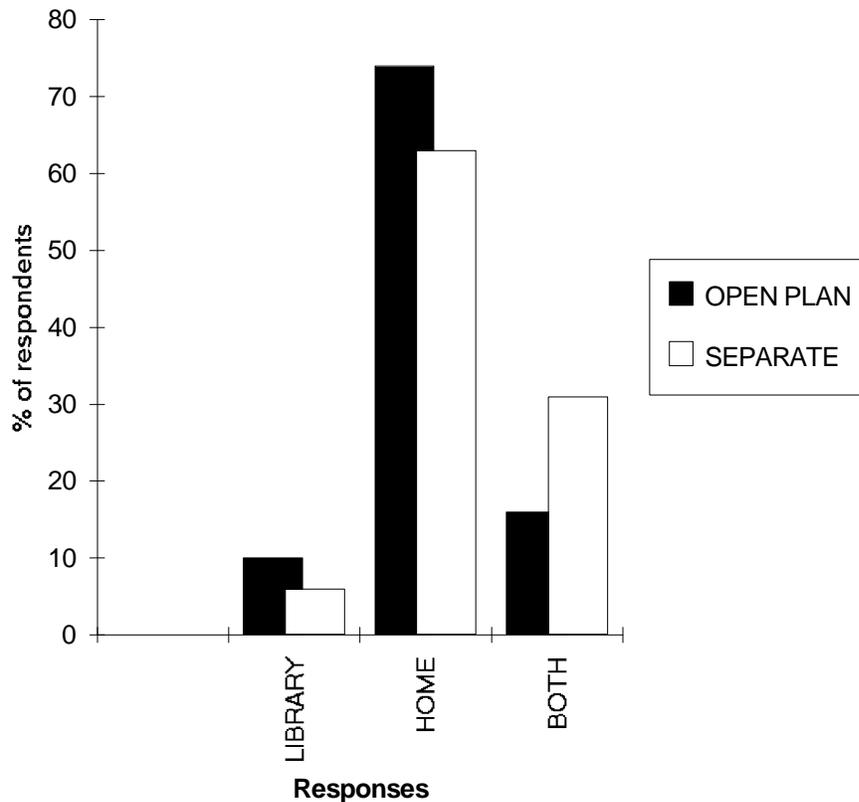
It can be seen, therefore, that if the figures for library readers and those that did both are added, significantly more children stated that they liked to read in the separate library. It was not possible to compare this with the observation study as many occurrences were being recorded and it was impossible to record how long each individual child spent reading in the library.

The vast majority of the parents who consented to be interviewed stated that they chose to use these particular libraries because they were closest to where they lived; with this in mind it can be inferred that library users become used to one library in particular - its stock, staff, layout and atmosphere - and familiarity with surroundings will usually produce a positive viewpoint.

8.2. Noise

It is now generally accepted that the public library, although being a public place for quiet reflection, can no longer remain silent. The introduction of technology to the library has introduced the mechanical noise of computers, photocopiers and telephones; it has also followed that the public, especially children, cannot be expected to maintain silence as this is an unnatural state in such an environment. However, the ambience of the adult section of the public library is such that noise is normally kept to a minimum naturally, without need for requests for silence from the librarian.

Children, on the other hand, need to be able to make noise and to a certain extent, until they reach an age where they need to use the library for study purposes, are unaware of the unwritten rule of quiet in the adult library. Pre-school children are unused to maintaining quiet for any length of time, and older children associate silence with the controlling atmosphere of school. The developments in technology and the emphasis on the encouragement of children to enjoy the whole library experience is incompatible with maintaining silence in the library and a certain amount of noise must be permitted. However, problems arise when noise levels coming from the children's library are deemed to be excessive.

8.2.1 Noise levels

Generally, the children using the separate children's rooms were quieter than those using open plan libraries. This was an unexpected result, as many of the articles relating to this topic suggested that one of the reasons for designating the children's department as a separate room was that children could then have the freedom to socialise and be noisy without affecting other library users. Reasons for this finding are varied. Firstly, on a practical level, the activity toys provided at one open plan library encouraged the children to socialise and play noisily; this would therefore be a result of the facilities provided rather than the design of the library itself. A second practical reason is that the open plan library has far more background noise; as Dewe (1995) writes,

"Noise from conversation, equipment and movement can be an irritating distraction for both staff and users, especially in open plan libraries." (p140)

With this being the case the child would see no reason for being quiet himself. Thirdly, it was observed that many children left alone in the open plan library, especially the younger children, would shout for their parents across the library when they wanted to speak to them or show them something interesting. Here it is possible to envisage a conflict of interests; from the child's point of view it is an advantage to be able to shout for a parent across the library instead of having to go and find them; however, this may well prove irritating to the adult user. A number of older children were aware that they might be disturbing adult users; one ten-year old at Library D thought that for this reason adults would prefer children to have a separate room whilst the design of the library made no difference to children themselves; and an eleven year old at Library C stated that the separate arrangement was the better of the two because *"older people like to read in peace, they like to read newspapers in quiet."*

One theory to explain the quieter nature of the separate library is that the separate room has less background noise and seemed to have its own ambience similar to the adult department. It is possible that children are more aware of the needs of other children when they are in the library but cannot identify with adult users and their needs.

8.2.2 Parental control
The most significant discovery in this area was that parents exercised more control over the behaviour of their children in the open plan library than in the separate department, and parents of children using separate libraries felt that they would have to exercise considerably more control over their children's noise levels should the library ever be converted to an open plan arrangement. Incidences of parents telling their children off for making too much noise in open plan libraries outnumbered those in the separate libraries by ten to one (see Appendix D). It would appear that parents are far more conscious of the effects a noisy child will have on adult library users; interviews with parents in separate children's departments revealed that in a separate library there was perceived to be less pressure on the parents to control the noise their children made.

"Children need the freedom to choose and talk about their choices without annoying others." (Parent, Library C)

" (In a separate library) They don't have to be quiet and we don't have to tell them off." (Parent, Library D)

This would suggest that in certain ways the open plan library is far from being liberating to the child and is in fact a more oppressive environment than the separate children's library.

8.2.3 Local authorities' views

Noise levels and atmosphere did not feature heavily in the questionnaire returns; the one significant response in this area was from the London Borough of Southwark, where policy was wholly dictated by the philosophy that:

"Children need separate, safe, 'child-centred' spaces in which they can roam and read freely/noisily/happily, away from adult eyes and temperaments."

8.2.4 Activity groups

The librarians at the open plan libraries stated that the majority of the complaints they received concerning the noise coming from the children's department concerned school class visits to the library and activity groups. It is difficult to accommodate large numbers of children all together in such an environment and even more so when they are all very well acquainted and under the direction of a maximum of three adults. The available space in the open plan library is often less than in the separate library and therefore children are forced into a smaller area, which encourages rather than controls noise. The separate library lends itself much better to the reception of school classes; although there may be problems with the noise level on entering and leaving the building, while the children are inside the library there is minimum disturbance to other users. Teachers accompanying visits to open plan libraries were generally more concerned about the noise made by their classes and made frequent attempts to minimise this. One teacher accompanying a class visit to Library A stated that she would be happier with a separate arrangement as she was very conscious of

children disturbing adult users at present and there would be less need to control noise levels in a different environment.

8.2.5 Background noise

Until this point the emphasis has been on the child as the generator of noise. However, a different perspective was revealed through interviews with children and conversations with librarians. Although Dewe (1995) suggests that children are accustomed to listening to music whilst reading or studying and may not be quite so distracted by background noise (p140), it became apparent through interviews that some of the older children liked the separate room arrangement because it gave them peace and quiet away from the busy adult library. An eleven year old at Library A said *"Open plan is noisy - you keep looking up every couple of minutes when you're trying to read."* This view was reinforced by a librarian of a separate children's department who had witnessed a storytelling event in an open plan library; the storyteller had complained that the background noise from the issue desk was too great for either her or the children to be able to concentrate. This demonstrates that children require quiet places as well as adults and the library should be designed to accommodate this if at all possible.

8.3 Conclusion

In terms of noise levels the separate room appears to be the most appropriate form of provision. It is clear from this study that children need to be able to make noise at some times and at others require a quiet place in which to read. It is possible to incorporate quiet places into an open plan library design, such as the alcoves in the new Croydon Central Children's Library (Dewe, 1995:192), which would to a certain extent minimise the problems caused by noise, especially if built into the adult department also.

Chapter 9 Activity Groups

Activity groups and events, such as school class visits to the library and storytimes for pre-school children are an important part of public library services to children, promoting the library's books and services, and encouraging literacy and learning.

9.1 School class visits

According to teachers and librarians, the purpose of visits to the library by school classes is to introduce the children to a wider range of literature than that provided by the school and to introduce the concept of the library to those who do not use the library with their parents. Generally, the teachers preferred the idea of the separate room, as it is much simpler to control and supervise thirty children in such an environment, and there is less need to control noise levels. However, the two theoretical purposes of the school class visit were fulfilled in both types of library, the only difference being that teachers tended to control the noise level more in the open plan libraries, however, these children were from a younger year group and therefore required more guidance and supervision. The separate room is therefore more appropriate on a practical and supervisory level, and more research needs to be undertaken to discover if teachers do control groups more forcefully in open plan libraries; if so this may mean that class groups of children may find the open plan library a more oppressive environment than the separate library.

9.2 Storytimes and activities

Storytimes for the pre-school child have multiple functions; as well as introducing young children to books and reading, they introduce the child to the library as a quieter place than nursery school, where they can meet and interact with a smaller group of children. The arts and crafts associated with these storytimes encourage creativity whilst increasing understanding of the story and doing a different activity, which holds their attention. Parents usually stay, but at a

distance, and can relax whilst their children are occupied. The nature of storytimes means that a quiet environment is required as young children are easily distracted by background noise. Children also need to have space in order to do crafts; although no under-fives sessions were observed in open plan libraries it is difficult to envisage how crafts could be organised in the library itself due to the lack of space.

9.3 Design issues

Much of the literature advocates a separate activities room for the open plan library to accommodate class visits, crafts and messy activities. This would minimise the amount of noise coming from the children's library and also protect the bookstock from paint and glue from craft sessions. Library B and Library A both have rooms adjoining the library which can be used for such activities. However, there are two problems with the use of such rooms. Firstly, it has been the case at Library B and Library A that these rooms are not specifically used for library events and services, and therefore the library has to compete with other facilities for use of these rooms. Secondly, as the children's librarian at Library D mentioned, the object of such activities is to introduce the child to the library and enjoyment of reading; if the activity takes place in a designated activities room the child will not associate the activity with the library.

Without the facility of a separate activities room, libraries need to maximise the available space in order to run activities for children. Library C makes use of a separate room behind the counter as a quiet and comfortable place for storytelling, returning to the tables in the main children's library for crafts and activities. The change of environments throughout holds children's interest, although the librarian suggested that the children sometimes become tired of moving between locations for different activities, especially if she reads them another story after they have completed their crafts. The children's library is closed to other borrowers during activities; this did not affect other borrowers particularly as the activities take place only during term time when children are at school; the focus group of parents appreciated the time and attention devoted to their children. At Library D, the study tables are moved together to create a larger floor space for storytelling and

to provide a larger table for crafts, at which parents can sit with their children and take part in the session. Library B's storytime castle is an environment designed specifically for storytimes and is used as such, leaving the rest of the children's library free to other borrowers whilst activities are taking place.

9.4 Conclusion

All libraries accommodate groups of children; some do so more than others. The specific design issues arising from the accommodation of such groups are noise and space; if the library is heavily used by a number of local schools then noise is likely to be a major issue and the separate children's library or, in an open plan library, a specific room designed for storytelling and activities, would provide the best alternatives to ensure that adult users are not disturbed and that the children can enjoy the library experience freely without need for strict control on the part of their teacher. Similarly, the use of the library by large numbers of schoolchildren would suggest a need for a large amount of space, which is also best catered for in the separate library. In places where the child population is smaller and there are few local schools, the open plan library would be the best type of accommodation.

Chapter 10 Promotion

One county authority made the point that the promotion of the library service was facilitated by an open plan arrangement. Since the library service needs to promote itself within the community it serves, it is important to consider the implications of library design on service promotion to both children and adults. Promotion in libraries takes two general forms, the promotion of books and reading, and the promotion of other services, such as activity groups for children.

10.1. The promotion of reading

All the libraries involved in this study incorporated display shelving into their children's departments. In some cases this took the form of a shelf designed to display the front covers of books in order to attract the child's attention, as part of the main furniture of the children's department. Others used display stands produced by publishing companies for particular series of books; Library D in particular used such display stands, with additional displays of stock on book stands on the tables in the children's library, which could be moved if necessary, for example when the tables were required for use by an activity group. During the observation period of the study it was noted that children were attracted to these display stands and frequently looked at the material that was on display. In this there was little difference in activity between the open plan and separate libraries, however as this was not a main objective of the study, less attention was paid to this area than to others. It can be concluded that display stands should be incorporated into all libraries; the separate library has more available space for the specialist displays from publishers, but free-standing moveable bookstands can also be used to maximise shelving space in the open plan library whilst still displaying books.

Other promotions through non-book displays, such as the advertising for a reading promotion, can be displayed in an open plan library to attract the attention of both adults and children. This was mentioned by the librarians at Library B; the emphasis at Library B is on library use as a family activity. The promotion of reading in this way means that not only can adults who use the library regularly

introduce their children to the library via some kind of publicised reading activity, but also there is more scope for the promotion of an idea to the family as a whole, in which both parents and children can participate in and benefit from. For example, the recent reading promotions in Sheffield's children's libraries would both be effective in the adult department and they could be marketed as a family activity. In separate children's departments the family aspect of promotion is much more difficult to emphasise and the library needs to put more energy into the promotion of the scheme to its younger users, especially to those who use the library alone, without parental encouragement to widen their choice of reading matter.

10.2. Promotion of extension activities

Depending on their location within the library, displays advertising competitions and activities are likely to have a wider audience in an open plan library; the children's librarian in a separate department would therefore need to supplement such displays by promoting events and competitions in person. At Libraries C and D this was observed to be the case, as the children's librarians mentioned forthcoming events to the children and their parents when they brought their books to be issued. However, it was difficult to compare this with the promotional activities of children's librarians in the open plan libraries, as the vantage point of the observer was out of earshot of the counter in both cases, making a conclusion on this impossible.

One distinct advantage that the open plan library has in the area of promotion is that all adults can see the activities taking place in the children's department. One children's librarian from a county authority mentioned this as a justification for the use of the open plan arrangement:

> *"There are advantages in open plan libraries - as long as there is a clearly defined area for children...these include showing adults - parents, grandparents etc. what we do, if in a separate room the services to children may need greater promotion."* (Wiltshire)

10.3 Conclusion

It would therefore appear that different kinds of library need to promote their services in different ways; the open plan arrangement facilitates the use of visual displays, while the separate department, whilst using these displays, benefits more from personal promotion by the children's librarian, which is beneficial to the relationship between the librarian and the child, but at the same time has consequences for the use of staff time.

Chapter 11 Design Issues, Furnishings and Environment

11.1 The children's librarian and the architect

Libraries are buildings designed for a specific purpose; the most recent writing on the subject (Dewe, 1995) functions as a handbook for the children's librarian in order that they can negotiate with the architect and ensure that the important and practical facilities and features are incorporated into the overall design. This is a process which is described in a number of American journals (see Rohlf, 1990; Sandlian, 1993; Sandlian and Walters, 1990 and Dixon, 1991). In Sheffield, the library services produce a brief for the new library or renovation, which forms the basis of the process, and submits it to the council's Design and Building Services, but the manager of the Learning and Young People's Unit for Sheffield Leisure Services describes the planning process as a 'hit and miss' affair. Library B is Sheffield's largest and most recent community library, and although it was designed to have certain advantages, such as disabled access, good lighting and a feeling of space and light, the librarians felt that the primary concern of the architects was the appearance of the building itself rather than the impact of the design on the practical issues of running a library. A particular problem was the supervision of the children's department; staffing levels do not permit the desk in the children's section to be manned, and the view of the children's department from the counter is obscured. Particularly vulnerable are the storytime castle, which now has to remain locked, and the area designated for the under-fives, which is even difficult to oversee from the junior desk.

11.2 Defining the children's area

Whatever the location of the children's department, design, decoration and furnishings are all vitally important to the creation of an environment which is both attractive and interesting to children. This is the focus of many American articles, including Cohen and Cohen, 1978; Kaspik, 1988; Habley, 1978; and Infantino, 1978. Some of the respondents to the questionnaire, whilst favouring the open plan arrangement, qualified this statement by saying that the children's area should

be well-defined and slightly separate from the adult stock, in order to attract the child and provide him with a secure environment in which he can feel comfortable:

"In an open plan arrangement an area needs to be set aside for activities, storytimes etc. with kinder boxes, soft toys, bean bags etc. so the children can identify and feel secure in that place." (Doncaster)

"We do try to make children's area slightly separate and attractive to children." (York)

The open plan libraries in the case study both had clearly defined children's areas; Library A's is divided from the adult section by means of mobile shelving units, and Library B has a raised area which constitutes the greater part of the children's section, which is further defined by means of a different coloured carpet from the adult section. As a result of such decoration and arrangements of furniture, a number of parents commented that the children's department was separated anyway and saw few differences between these libraries and ones with separate rooms.

11.2.1 Decoration

The decoration of the children's department is important to producing a welcoming atmosphere for the child; this can be difficult in an open plan library where one colour is usually used throughout both departments. The importance of decoration was expressed by a focus group of parents at Library C, where a redecoration of the children's department took place very recently, and the parents considered it to be a definite improvement. All the libraries made use of publishers' posters and wall displays; Library D in particular has a large amount of wall space and this is filled with collages of characters from books; parents commented that these were both interesting to the child and appropriate decorations for a library. Library C displays artwork done by children in part of the library; a parent commented that this was encouraging to other children as well as being decorative.

11.2.2. Features

Features can make a very great difference to the child's perception of the library. Library B is well known for the dragon which inhabits the children's area and the storytime castle, which were both observed to inspire excitement in

children, particularly amongst class groups. Library D has a train-shaped kinderbox which young children can sit in whilst reading; this is also a very popular feature, and appreciated by parents. Features challenge the common opinion amongst children that libraries are boring places; they do not appear to distract the child's attention from reading, as the storytime castle provides a quiet alcove in which to read, and several children were observed reading aloud to the dragon, showing the benefits of having a captive (if inert!) audience. A similar phenomenon was observed at Library A, where several children read aloud to the large cuddly toys provided.

11.2.3 Toys

The activity toys at Library B were perceived to be more of a problem. The miniature roundabout and climbing frame provided for the younger children were incredibly popular, and produced a vast increase in the amount of noise, and also a conflict of interests. The children were obviously enjoying themselves a great deal, but it worried librarians that the children were uninterested in the books, although no parents complained, many were observed to try several times to take their children away from the toys to look at the books instead; a significant number were unsuccessful in this exercise and had to choose books for their children whilst they continued to play. Although these toys have a benefit in that they help to make children feel at home in their environment, they could be considered to be contrary to the aim of the public library, to promote literacy and enjoyment of reading.

11.2.4 Furnishings

A range of furnishings was provided in each library; these included kinder boxes, miniature chairs, soft furnishings and study tables and chairs. These ensure that not only every age group is catered for but also every purpose for which the child will use the library. Parents in both types of library commented favourably on the range of seating and display available. The use of smaller furnishings can counteract the size of the whole children's department; the focus group of parents of under-fives at Library C said that the presence of the small scale tables and chairs for very young children made it into an area where they would feel comfortable and not intimidated by the rest of the children's library.

11.3 Design issues for particular age groups

Design issues arise between the different age groups of the children using the library. Three of the libraries observed designated a specific corner of the library for the pre-school child, as the stock required is different and best displayed in kinderboxes which are far more accessible to the younger child, and as mentioned previously, the young child may feel intimidated by the rest of the children's library. All the libraries observed had a specific area for young adult fiction; Library C also provides different seating in this department making the teenage section slightly separate from the rest of the children's library. Library C's computer, together with the reference books, constitutes another distinct area for homework and study. This compartmentalisation means that materials are easier to locate and that the library can offer a range of surroundings to suit the purposes of all its users.

11.4 Conclusion

Throughout this section it is apparent that not only should the children's library have its own identity defined by decoration, but that the larger library can be further divided into areas to suit the various needs of its customers. Children's librarians need to be able to liaise with architects to amalgamate the best aesthetic design with the most convenient and functional. Within the children's library itself, it is beneficial to have appropriate displays and features, however the use of activity toys in the library should be carefully controlled.

Chapter 12 Forward Planning

Developments in children's library services in recent years have resulted from social and technological change, and have included the expansion of facilities for the under fives and their parents and carers, specific areas for teenagers and young adults, developments in the lending of audio-visual materials from the children's department and most recently the introduction of homework centres for children, which includes the use of reference stock and computers with CD-ROM facilities. The library service needs to be flexible, up-to-date and responsive to its users, which implies that it is important during the design process to allow for the development and evolution of library facilities in the future. As Kaspik (1988) states,

> *"...analysing your present youth services department is not enough. (It is also necessary to consider) the immediate and near distant future. Will the new facility provide for an unprojected expansion of services and materials in the future?"* (p24)

12.1 Technological change

A particularly relevant example of future planning has been the introduction of computer services for public access; Sheffield has recently begun to introduce CD-ROM facilities to children's service points and it is reasonable to assume that the Internet will also be available for use at some future point. UK libraries can look to America and Canada for a vision of the children's library of the future; the new public library in Vancouver, Canada, has

> *"...high-tech toys such as the 8 CD-ROM stations (which combine text, sound graphics and video effects)...There are also special stations set up with live story books for preschoolers."* (Lees 1997:340).

As stated in *Reading the Future* (1997) the government is committed to the introduction of access to computer facilities to all UK public libraries:

"The biggest changes in public libraries over the coming years will arise from the development of information technology (IT)...the government does predict that, whatever the technology, there will be a central role for public libraries." (p10)

The Government's commitment to 'IT for All' must include access to technology for children, although interestingly, in *Reading the Future*, the impact of IT upon children's services is not mentioned. It is therefore clear that libraries, both adults' and children's departments, should be designed to accommodate advances in technology.

12.2 Social change

The other factor which deserves consideration is social change; *Investing in Children* (1995) states that social changes in family structure and income have meant that many more children do not have the privacy to study at home and are more reliant on the library, resulting in the need for the library to develop its services in that direction which may well involve a rearrangement of the available space. Anderson (1978) describes the effect that social change has had on American children's libraries.

12.3 Design issues

The need to be able to develop services and integrate further resources into the children's library can be affected by both location and size. It was observed that the open plan children's libraries in the study were naturally smaller than the separate children's rooms and as such had little scope for further developments; the introduction or expansion of any part of the service would mean an extensive reorganisation at the expense of a different service. In an open plan library like Library A, where a larger proportion of the shelf units are mobile, it would be possible to incorporate, for example, a larger teenage section or a designated area for the pre-school child by rearrangement of the furniture to create a slightly larger children's area. Library B, as a more recent design project, already incorporates

these two areas into its design, but further developments such as the possible introduction of a homework centre with a computer for use by children is difficult to envisage as space is limited and the furniture is less easily rearranged. Although microcomputers were provided for adults at Library B in 1989 (Harrison, 1990:272), the possibility of making computing facilities available to children was a distant prospect when Library B was built, and as such the possibility was unaccounted for in the design of the library. Separate libraries such as Libraries C and D are less restricted in the arrangement of materials within their children's departments and have a larger area in which to develop such services.

Apart from space, the location of the children's library also presents additional issues, especially when introducing computers and multimedia equipment to the children's library. These issues can be divided into security measures and competition for resources.

12.3.1 Security

Expensive resources require surveillance to protect against accidental damage as well as theft and vandalism; it is thus sensible to keep the computer equipment close to the issue desk where a member of staff is always on duty. This is less problematic in the separate children's department which has its own issue desk than in the open plan library, where installing a computer for children near the issue desk could mean that the computer is located away from the rest of the children's stock and close to a very busy counter, which could prove intimidating to children as well as being distracting.

Video cassettes, compact discs and in some libraries, computer games, are normally held behind the counter or enquiry desk for security reasons. It is reasonable to assume that multimedia stock such as these will continue to expand within libraries and provision must be made for this. At present, Sheffield houses the compact discs and video cassettes within the adult departments of its libraries and the young user has to be fourteen years of age to borrow compact discs and eighteen to borrow video cassettes. It is possible that with the expansion of such stock in the future, children's videos and possibly a selection of compact discs as well as story cassettes may be moved to the children's department which would require a rearrangement of space and a review of security.

12.3.2 Competition for resources

With limited resources and large numbers of children using these, control has to be exercised over how long an individual child can use computer facilities provided in the library. At Library C a booking system is operated are allocated half-hour time slots by the children's librarian. Ensuring that every child has equal access to this resource is another reason for locating the computer close to the issue desk, where the librarian can intervene if a child is unwilling to give up their turn on the computer at the end of the allocated time slot.

An additional factor mentioned in a questionnaire response from a London Borough was that the separate library *"allows children to have greater access to PC's, CD-ROMS where available - not competing with adults."* The importance of the computer in modern life means that both adults and children need to be able to use its facilities. Financial pressure on libraries means that in some cases it may only be possible to have one machine in a library and the open plan arrangement would accommodate a shared resource such as this much better than an separate library. However, in this situation adults could consider the needs of the child trivial compared to their own and dominate computer facilities. Although more expensive to arrange, the separate library offers the possibility of the provision of computer resources for both adults and children, which can be adapted to both their purposes, and housed within their own departments, so that neither has to compete.

12.4 Conclusion

The separate library would therefore appear to offer the most potential for the expansion of the service in the future, especially for the expansion of study facilities and the introduction of information technology. The open plan library can accommodate these equally well as long as it has been designed with enough space to be able to cope with the changes and the additional security measures these will require, and can ensure equality of access to resources for both adults and children.

Chapter 13 Conclusion

13.1 Summary of key findings

13.1.1 Policy

- There are no national prescriptive guidelines on children's library location. (5.1)
- 54% of the local authorities questioned had policies, 85% of whom favoured the open plan arrangement. (5.2)
- The majority based their policy/decisions on budgets and staffing, and reinforced their faith in these decisions by stating the advantages to the child of their choice of provision. (5.2)
- Decisions on children's library location appear to be a compromise between the perceived advantages to the child and the resources available. (5.2)

13.1.2 Staffing and supervision

- The majority of local authorities mentioned economy of staffing as a justification for using the open plan arrangement.(6.1)
- Many staff are reluctant to work with children and would thus oppose the introduction of an open plan arrangement, where all staff serve all users.(6.2)
- Although it is often assumed that the separate library fosters a stronger librarian/child relationship, this was observed in open plan libraries also; children are equally likely to ask the librarian for help in both types of library. (6.3)
- Parents found safety through familiarity; habitual library users believed that the layout they were accustomed to was safest for their children.(6.5)
- The patterns of parental supervision were found to be different depending on the research methods used and thus need to be investigated further; although the open plan library can be liberating in terms of access, the need that many parents feel to supervise their children at all times may make the open-plan library more oppressive for the child than the separate library. (6.6)

13.1.3 Transition

- It is generally believed that the open plan library facilitates a child's transition from children's stock to adults'; nine out of 23 local authorities agreed. (7.1)
- Few parents or children mentioned transition. (7.2)
- More children interviewed in separate libraries said they used the adult library than in open plan libraries.(7.3)
- Parents were just as likely to take their children to the adult department in a separate library as an open plan library; this would give the child a similar experience of the adult library environment and atmosphere. (7.3)
- Classification by subject, the location of the teenage department and the integration of areas of children's and adult non-fiction will have as much of an effect on transition as the location of the two departments. (7.4)

13.1.4 Atmosphere

- Opinions were divided over which type of library provided the best atmosphere for the child; parents generally thought that the library they used provided the best atmosphere, whether separate or open plan. (8.1)
- Children were generally quieter in separate libraries, because:
    - the activity toys provided at one open plan library encouraged noisy play.
    - the open plan library has far more background noise; children may feel that they do not need to be quiet.
    - younger children left alone in open plan libraries would shout for their parents across the library. (8.2.1)
- Parents were observed to control their children's noise more in open plan libraries than in separate libraries; this would suggest that the open plan library can be oppressive to the child. (8.2.2)
- Teachers tended to be happier with the separate arrangement for class visits as they were very conscious of their class disturbing adult library users. (8.2.4)
- The increased levels of background noise in the open plan library can be disruptive to children reading and storytelling events. (8.2.5)

13.1.5 Activity groups

- Class visits and storytimes are best accommodated in the separate children's room. (9.1, 9.2)
- Space is the important factor when organising activities and can be done by using a separate activities room or by having flexible shelving units and furnishings which can be moved to create space. (9.3)

13.1.6 Promotion
- The open plan arrangement facilitates the use of visual displays, which can be arranged to appeal to adults and children together.
- The separate library benefits from additional, personal promotion of events by the children's librarian.

13.1.7 Design issues
- Librarians and architects need to co-operate on design projects to produce an aesthetically pleasing building which is suitable for the practical purpose for which it is intended. (11.1)
- It is generally agreed that children need their own space within library buildings, which should be defined by furnishings and decoration.(11.2., 11.2.1)
- Features and toys are useful in creating an appealing environment for children, although care must be taken to provide toys that will not distract children from books. (11.2.2, 11.2.3)
- Different age groups of children have different design requirements, which should be accommodated, space permitting. (11.3)

13.1.8 Forward Planning
- Libraries should allow for technological advances and social change (12.1, 12.2). This will include
  - adequate space for expansion
  - flexibility (12.3)
  - provision for security of expensive resources (12.3.1)
  - provision for equal access for adults and children to resources. (12.3.2)

13.2 General conclusion

It is impossible to draw any firm conclusion about which of the two types of library design are better for the child, as both offer advantages and have their disadvantages. However, it is apparent from this study that some of the assumptions made about each kind of library have proved to be unfounded in the four libraries studied. Firstly, there was no perceived advantage for children using open plan libraries when transition is considered; it was found that children who use separate libraries go into the adult library as frequently and as such will become accustomed to its stock, layout and atmosphere, easing transition from the children's department when they need to do so. Secondly it is often perceived that there is a better relationship between the children's librarian and the child in a separate arrangement; however, children in open plan libraries were just as likely to ask the librarian for help with an enquiry, and similar relationships were observed to take place within the open plan library.

Additionally, the issue of control arose; it was observed and discovered through interviews that many parents supervised their children more closely in the open plan libraries and were very careful to control the noise their children made. A frequent response from parents in separate libraries was that should their library convert to an open plan arrangement they would have to supervise their children far more closely, from the point of view of safety and preventing them from disturbing adult library users. This could lead to a far more oppressive environment for the child.

Parents were asked two direct questions on the design of the children's library; which they thought was most appropriate for their child, and what their reaction would be if it was decided to change the layout of the library to the open plan or separate arrangement, depending on the location of the interviews. Responses to the first question, with one or two exceptions, were overwhelmingly in favour of the library the parent used and knew well, as the graph below shows.

Fig. 4 Graph showing the responses of parents when asked which design was most appropriate for their child
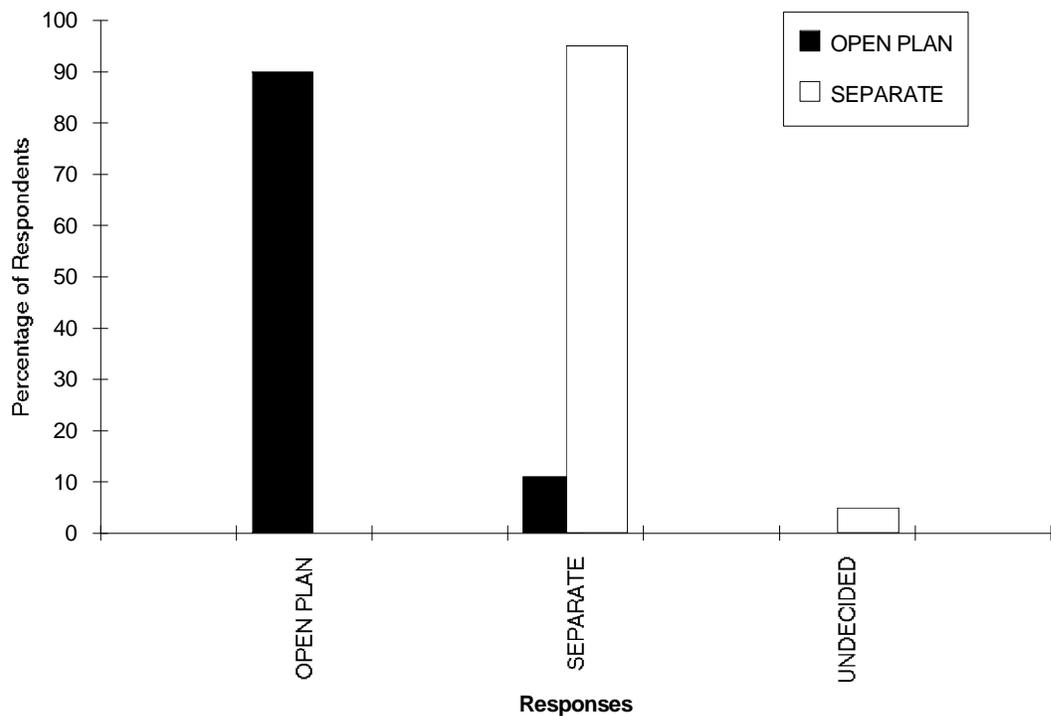
The graph below shows the percentage of responses to the second question from parents in each kind of library. It is interesting to note that a significantly larger proportion of the respondents in separate libraries had a definite opinion; a large proportion of the respondents in open plan libraries stated that the layout of the library was of little concern to them, although more parents using open plan libraries approved of a change to a separate room. In the separate libraries there were a number of parents who stated that they would accept the change to open plan but wouldn't necessarily like it; one parent said she knew that Sheffield's financial situation was poor and if this was the only way of keeping the children's library open then she would accept it; another parent mentioned that the change to the open plan arrangement would also result in the standardisation of opening hours.

Fig. 5 Graph showing responses from parents to the suggestion that the library might change to the opposite layout

Fig. 6 Graph showing the opinions of children in each type of library
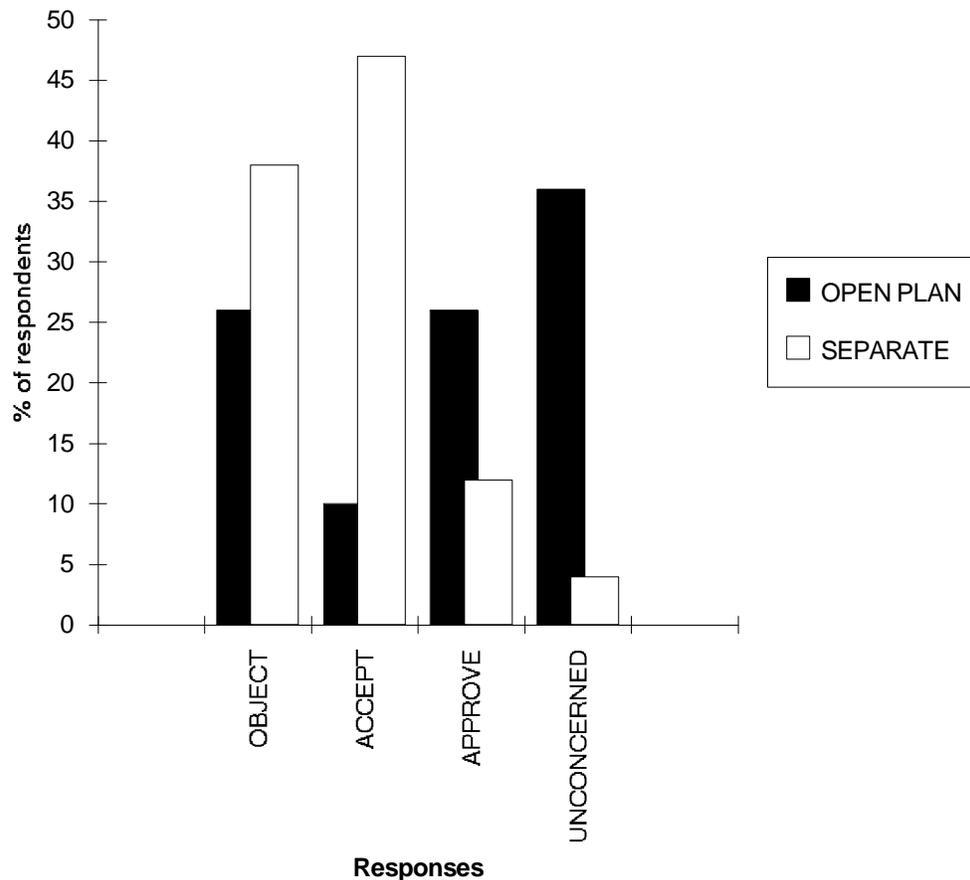
The children themselves, when asked which type of library they preferred to use, on the whole voted for the one that they used frequently and were comfortable with. The graph below shows the percentage of responses of the children in each kind of library. It was interesting to find that no child who used a separate library wanted it to convert to an open plan arrangement, whilst a small percentage of those who used open plan libraries would have preferred a separate room. A significant number of children said that they had never thought about the design of their library before; many considered for a long time before answering and could not think of any particular reason for their choice; some stated that it didn't matter how the library was arranged; finding information and leisure reading was obviously their first priority.

It can therefore be seen that on the whole, children and parents alike tend to become used to a particular library (usually their local branch library), its design and atmosphere, and with a few exceptions, believe this particular layout to be the most appropriate.

13.3 Suggestions for further research

A study such as this is wide-ranging in scope and as such few of the component parts have been studied in depth; many, such as staffing of children's

libraries, transition and the importance of design and furniture to the children's library could form research projects in their own right. Similarly, it is equally possible to extend this study either practically or theoretically; practically, one could research the views of more children and parents, in other types of library, for example, the separate children's building, or the adjacent but separate children's department which shares an issue desk with the adult department. The study could also be extended to take in the views of adults using open plan libraries and how the presence of children affects their library use. Theoretically, the study could be viewed from a different perspective, for example from the perspective of child psychology, or from theories of human use and arrangement of space.

Following the results of this study, it would be interesting to study in more depth issues of parental control in children's libraries. Throughout the observation study it was noted that parents frequently tell their children to be quiet, stop them from playing, and control their choices of books; this would appear to be inconsistent with the modern idea that children should have the freedom to use their library as they wish, and very constraining for the child; as an improbable hypothesis, it could be suggested that this constraining experience is part of the reason why children start to use the library less during their teenage years.

An interesting point that arose through discussion with librarians is that staff attitudes to children's work do not appear to have changed since the 1950s; it would be interesting to discover whether this attitude does still exist, if so, why, and whether the introduction of the open plan arrangement to many UK libraries has in fact changed this attitude.

Appendices

Appendix A: Documents distributed to the Heads of Children's Services in Local Authorities

<div style="border:1px solid">

46 Blakeney Road
Crookes
Sheffield
S10 1FE

6th July 1997

Dear Sir/Madam,

Research into Children's Library Location

I am presently conducting a research project as part of my MA course at the Department of Information Studies, University of Sheffield; the project involves investigating the advantages and disadvantages of the separate children's library and the open-plan, integrated library.

I would be interested to receive your views on this subject and would therefore be very grateful if you could take a few moments to complete the enclosed questionnaire; I have tried to keep it as short as possible in order to maximise the response rate!

Thank you for your time; I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,

Faye Sisson
MA Librarianship
University of Sheffield.
e-mail lip96fs@sheffield.ac.uk

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CHILDREN'S LIBRARY LOCATION AND DESIGN: A QUESTIONNAIRE

1. If your authority were to open or renovate a library, what is the policy for the arrangement of the children's department in relation to the adult department? (please tick)

Type of Provision	
Separate, self-contained building	
Separate rooms with own service desk	
Separate rooms with shared service desk	
Open plan, shared adult and children's room	
Integrated stock as well as space	
Other (please specify)	

2. On what basis was this decision made?

3. Do you personally agree with this policy?   **YES/NO**

4. Please state your reasons for this decision. (If you disagree with the stated authority policy please indicate which type of provision you would prefer to see.)

5. Has this issue arisen recently in your authority? If so I would be interested in any additional comments you may like to make.

Appendix B: Interview sheets for parents and children

Interviews with Parents/Carers

1. How old is/are your child/ren?..

2. Do you use any other libraries for yourself or your child? YES/NO

If so which? (Are they separate or open plan?)

Why do you use this one? Closest / Staff / Stock /While shopping/Other

3. Do you feel that a separate or open plan library is more appropriate for your child/ren?...

Separate/O-P

Explain...?

4. What do you like/dislike about the design and layout of this particular library?

5. Do you take your child/ren to the adult department? YES/NO

Why?

6. If it were proposed that the layout of the library would change to the opposite arrangement, what would your reaction be?

Interviews with children

1. How old are you?..................................

2. Who do you come to the library with?

Mum/Dad   School
Brother/sister   Other relative
Friends   On your own

3. What do you like about the library?

4. Is it easy to find the things you want? YES/NO/SOMETIMES

Do you ever ask the librarian for help when you can't find the book you want? YES/NO

5. Do you read in the library or take books home to read?

Library   Home   Both

Why?

6. Do you ever go into the adult library? Why?

Meet parent/carer
CD's/Videos
Interested
Homework
Other

7. Have you ever thought about the design of the library? - would you prefer to have a room especially for children, or would you like to be where you can see the adult library as well?
SEPARATE/O-P

Appendix C: Data acquired from questionnaires to local authorities

Is there a policy for the arrangement of the departments within a library?

	Metropolitan Borough Councils	London Boroughs	Counties
Yes	3	4	5
No	5	2	4

What type of provision for children's libraries is there?

	MBCs	London Boroughs	Counties
Separate with own service desk		2	
Separate with shared service desk	2	1	
Open plan	4	2	7
Varied	2	1	2

Reasons for open plan

	MBCs	LBs	Cs
Space restrictions	2	1	5
Staffing	5	2	5
Budget restrictions	4	-	2
User surveys	1	-	-
Eases transition	2	2	4
Higher visibility	-	1	-
Parents can choose books at the same time	-	1	1
More adults will use the children's library	-	1	1
Flexibility	1	-	1
Tackles departmental mentality of staff	-	-	1
Nowhere is out of bounds	-	-	2
Eases promotion	-	-	1
Parents can supervise their children	-	-	1
Library Association Guidelines	1	-	-
Equality of service to adults and children	-	-	1

Needs to be away from reference areas	-	-	1
Needs to be defined by decoration	2	1	3
Shared desk	-	-	3

Reasons against open plan

Staffing suffers	-	1	-
Space or time needs to be allocated for activities	-	-	1

Reasons for separate provision

	MBCs	LBs	Cs
Class visits	1	2	-
Noise	1	2	-
Need to be away from adult temperaments	-	1	-
Activities	1	2	-
Greater access to PCs	-	1	-
Market research	-	1	-
Better relationship with staff	-	1	-
Independence and confidence	-	1	-
Safer for lone child	-	2	-
Parents can leave children	-	1	-

Reasons against separate provision

Lack of communication between staff	-	1	-
Reduced staff means children's library will have to be closed	-	1	-
Health and safety issues	-	1	-

Appendix D: Data obtained from observations

	A	B	C	D	OP	SEP
Total number of children observed	59	100	50	95	159	145
Children going straight to videos/CDs	9	1	CS	CS	10	-
Parents leaving children in children's department	4	11	6	4	15	10
Parents helping children choose books	9	15	8	21	24	29
Children asking for help at the desk	6	CS	2	4	6	6
Parents telling children off about noise	5	5	1	0	10	1
Children going straight to toys	1	42	0	1	43	1
Children going to find parents in adult	7	18	0	0	25	0
Children making lots of noise	1	7	0	2	8	2
Children using adult books	7	7	1	0	14	1
Children choosing from display stands	6	2	2	9	8	11
Parents choosing books while children play	0	5	0	0	5	0
Children going straight to books	44	39	18	60	83	78
Lone adults in children's department	NC	5	1	1	5	2
Parents taking children to adult library	0	1	0	0	1	0
Children shouting for parents across the library	1	4	0	0	5	0
Parents reading with children	0	0	5	7	0	12
Children going straight to computer	N/A	N/A	11	N/A	N/A	11
Children reading in the library	0	1	8	9	1	17

OP = Total Open Plan, SEP = Total Separate

CS = could not see
NC = not counted (not thought to be significant at the time)

Appendix E: Data obtained from interviews with children

Library A

1. Age of respondents:

5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
				2	1	4			1	

2. Who do they come to the library with?

Parent	Brother/sister	Friends	Other relative	On own
3	-	2	-	3

3.What do they like best?

Books	Toys	CD/Video	Computer
7	-	-	N/A

4a. Is it easy to find things?

Yes	No	Sometimes
5	3	-

b. Do they ever ask for help?

Yes	No	Never had to
6	2	

5. Library or home reader?

Library	Home	Both
2	5	1

6a. Do they use the adult library?

Yes	No
2	6

b. What for?

Meet parent	CD/Video	Homework	Read books
1	-	-	1

7. Separate or open plan?

Separate	Open plan	Not bothered

2	5	1

Library B

1. Age of respondents:

5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
		2	1	3	2		2		1	

2. Who do they come to the library with?

Parent	Brother/sister	Friends	Other relative	On own
10	-	-	1	1

3. What do they like best?

Books	Toys	CD/Video	Computer
10	-	1	N/A

4a. Is it easy to find things?

Yes	No	Sometimes
8	2	1

b. Do they ever ask for help?

Yes	No	Never had to
5	2	4

5. Library or home reader?

Library	Home	Both
-	9	2

6a. Do they use the adult library?

Yes	No
5	6

b. What for?

Meet parent	CD/Video	Homework	Read books
2	1	2	1

7. Separate or open plan?

Separate	Open plan	Not bothered

-	6	5

Library C

1. Age of respondents:

5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1		1		1		1	1	1	1	1

2. Who do they come to the library with?

Parent	Brother/sister	Friends	Other relative	On own
1	3	3	2	1

3. What do they like best?

Books	Toys	CD/Video	Computer
4	-	-	5

4a. Is it easy to find things?

Yes	No	Sometimes
5	1	-

b. Do they ever ask for help?

Yes	No	Never had to
5	1	-

5. Library or home reader?

Library	Home	Both
1	5	2

6a. Do they use the adult library?

Yes	No
5	3

b. What for?

Meet parent	CD/Video	Homework	Read books
-	2	3	-

7. Separate or open plan?

Separate	Open plan	Not bothered

8	-	-

Library D

1. Age of respondents:

5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
			1	1	2	2	1			

2. Who do they come to the library with?

Parent	Brother/sister	Friends	Other relative	On own
5	-	1	-	3

3.What do they like best?

Books	Toys	CD/Video	Computer
7	-	N/A	N/A

4a. Is it easy to find things?

Yes	No	Sometimes
8	-	-

b. Do they ever ask for help?

Yes	No	Never had to
6	2	-

5. Library or home reader?

Library	Home	Both
-	5	3

6a. Do they use the adult library?

Yes	No
7	1

b. What for?

Meet parent	CD/Video	Homework	Read books
1	4	1	2

7. Separate or open plan?

Separate	Open plan	Not bothered
6	-	2

Appendix F: Data obtained from interviews with parents

<u>Library A</u>

1. Ages of respondents' children

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
	3		1	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	2			

2a. Do they use other libraries?

Yes	No
-	9

b. Why do they use this one?

Closest	Staff	Stock	While shopping	Other
6	-	1	1	1

3. Which is most appropriate for their children?

Separate	Open plan
2	7

4a. Do they take their children to the adult department?

Yes	No
5	4

b. Why?

Choosing own	Videos/CDs	Look at stock	Other
4	-	1	-

6. Would they object to a change of arrangement?

Yes	No
3	6

Library B

1. Ages of respondents' children

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
3	2			3	1	2	2		1					

2a. Do they use other libraries?

Yes	No
3	7

b. Why do they use this one?

Closest	Staff	Stock	While shopping	Other
8	-	-	2	-

3. Which is most appropriate for their children?

Separate	Open plan
-	10

4a. Do they take their children to the adult department?

Yes	No
9	1

b. Why?

Choosing own	Videos/CDs	Look at stock	Other
5	1	3	-

6. Would they object to a change of arrangement?

Yes	No
6	4

Library C

1. Ages of respondents' children

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
	1	2	4		2		1	1						

2a. Do they use other libraries?

Yes	No
5	3

b. Why do they use this one?

Closest	Staff	Stock	While shopping	Other
7	-	-	-	1

3. Which is most appropriate for their children?

Separate	Open plan
7	

(1 undecided)

4a. Do they take their children to the adult department?

Yes	No
3	2

b. Why?

Choosing own	Videos/CDs	Look at stock	Other
1	2	-	-

6. Would they object to a change of arrangement?

Yes	No
7	1

Library D

1. Ages of respondents' children

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
2		2	5		2	2	1	1	3	2				

2a. Do they use other libraries?

Yes	No
4	9

b. Why do they use this one?

Closest	Staff	Stock	While shopping	Other
8	-	-	-	5

3. Which is most appropriate for their children?

Separate	Open plan
13	-

4a. Do they take their children to the adult department?

Yes	No
10	-

b. Why?

Choosing own	Videos/CDs	Look at stock	Other
8	2		

6. Would they object to a change of arrangement?

Yes	No
9	4

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