

**The Impact of public library use on the
educational attainment of primary school
children.**

by

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Abstract

The development of basic literacy skills, driven by the low standards in this country, is one of the most important aspects of education and the Government has emphasised this with several initiatives aimed at improving reading standards. Early access to books and stories is known to be influential in improving children's attainment of literacy during the early school years, yet the impact that the public library has in this area has undergone little investigation.

Several factors were found to be very influential in this area of children's development and so any attempts to isolate public library use as a factor in educational attainment could not paint a true picture of the situation. Thus, a qualitative approach to the problem was adopted and the views of parents/carers, children's librarians and teachers were obtained on the matter. Children's reading material was investigated in order to establish the reading habits of both library users and non-users and to examine the range of books that both groups were reading. School libraries were also investigated to examine the influence that they were having on children's reading, especially as for some children they are the only source of books.

It was found that public libraries gave children access to a wider range of books than could be provided in the school library, and that the range of books public library users were reading was greater than that of non-users.

In general, those parents/carers whose children were public library users felt that the public library is of great value to children in many ways and its educational value is all-encompassing. The parents/carers whose children were not library users generally felt that their children were well provided for and, although the public library could help in terms of a wider access to reference and non-fiction materials, its impact was not significant enough to disrupt the status quo. Overall, therefore, parents/carers and

teachers were divided on the extent of the impact that the public library has on children's educational attainment.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Background

The current Government's mantra of "education, education, education" should by now be familiar to us all and the desire to improve the standards of education in the United Kingdom is driven by the fact that:

"Almost 30% of young people fail to reach NVQ Level 2 by the age of nineteen. Seven million adults have no formal qualifications at all; twenty-one million adults have not reached Level 3 (equivalent to two A Levels) and more than one in five of all adults have poor literacy and numeracy skills" (Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), 1998:12).

The development of basic literacy skills is one of the most important aspects of education and the Government has emphasised this with several initiatives.

The National Literacy Strategy was introduced in 1997 in recognition of the fact that:

"standards of literacy in this country have not changed significantly between the end of the war and the early 1990s and that there is a wide variation in performance among primary schools" (National Literacy Trust, 1999).

The Strategy aims to increase the number of eleven year olds attaining the expected standards for their age in English (i.e. Level 4 in the Key Stage Two National Curriculum Test) to eighty percent by the year 2002, (it is currently sixty-five percent). The National Year of Reading, which is currently being celebrated, aims to "change the way the nation reads" by "promoting reading through events and initiatives designed to encourage everyone to read for pleasure and for information, more widely and more often" (National Year of Reading, 1999). The introduction of the National Grid for Learning, connecting educational services on the Internet in support of teaching, learning and training, is intended to raise educational standards, not only among school-age children but also among the population at large.

This emphasis on lifelong-learning is an opportunity for public libraries to promote their role in encouraging and stimulating both independent and formal learning, yet their value in this area has still yet to be fully appreciated and acknowledged by key

policy makers. Due to begin in September 1999, researchers at the Department of Information Studies, University of Sheffield will undertake a study to examine fully the value and impact of public libraries in this area. The project, “‘Low Achievers - Lifelong Learners’. An investigation into public libraries’ impact on educational disadvantage and exclusion”, funded by the British Library’s Research and Innovation Centre (BLRIC), intends to look at the educational value and impact of public libraries, focusing primarily on adult learners. This present study aims to contribute to the aforementioned research by investigating the impact and value of the public library for primary school children.

1.1 Early Years Development

The DfEE (1997b) claims that “the ability of primary teachers to teach literacy is by far the most important factor in whether or not children learn to read and write well” (p.19). While the teaching of literacy in the primary school cannot be undervalued, much of the literature relating to children’s development and literacy claims that children’s development begins long before they enter the formal education system, and cites other factors as having greater influence. The factors that influence children’s development and educational attainment will be discussed fully in Chapter Five.

“Give me a child for the first seven years, and you may do what you like with it afterwards.” (Ball, 1994) The vital importance of the earliest years in a child’s development is clearly expressed in this Jesuit maxim and recognition of this importance has grown increasingly over the last few years. Books and stories have played a large role in child development for a long time, but it is only in recent years that their importance to the development of even the youngest babies has been recognised.

Weinberger (1996) states that the ideas about how children become literate have undergone substantial changes in the course of the last decade, suggesting that “literacy development starts soon after a child is born” (p.3) and that children who are surrounded by printed material and have access to printed material become literate through their

interaction with these resources. This view is also shared by Wade and Moore (1993) whose work on the Bookstart scheme was underpinned by the belief “in reading’s centrality to learning and by the importance of sharing books with very young children” (p.6). In an attempt to encourage all parents of seven-to-nine month old babies to adopt this viewpoint, the scheme provided parents with a pack containing a board book, a nursery rhyme poster, a booklet for parents, a leaflet with key messages about the benefits of sharing books and rhymes with babies, a book list, information about local library services and a special joining form.¹

A Gift for Life (Wade and Moore, 1998) claims that “children who arrive at school with a head start in literacy tend to stay ahead during the first two years of schooling” (p.9). The findings from the Bookstart scheme itself showed that the children who had participated in the scheme performed better in Baseline Assessments than those who had not been involved, and, significantly, that they performed better across the curriculum, not just in literacy.

The success of the pilot scheme in 1992 encouraged the establishment of over sixty Bookstart projects in the United Kingdom, yet each had to be self-financing and usually struggled to find sponsorship. This year, however, saw the start of a national Bookstart scheme, into which Sainsbury’s has invested six million pounds, from which thousands more babies will benefit, as their parents become more aware of the importance of sharing books with their child. The Library Association Record (1999a) notes that

“Although the importance of early literacy development is unquestionable, it was the dramatic results from the pilot project which led the organisers to recommend guaranteed funding for Bookstart to make it a national project – and the right of every child” (p.78).

Wade, one of the founders of the Bookstart scheme, discusses the importance of extensive reading for increasing a child’s ability to use language in his book *Story at*

¹ From Bookstart Briefing, Birmingham City Libraries

Home and at School (1984). However, as an indication of how current this idea of sharing stories with the very young is, it is worth noting that in the booklist of suggested reading, not one book that he mentions is recommended for children under the age of three, and this only eight years before the start of the pilot project.

The Government has also recognised that “children’s early years are precious. And bringing together learning, play, care and education can give them a head start for life” (Hodge, 1999). However, its proposals for education targets for three to five year olds have been met with caution and concern, with critics believing that young children need more time to develop “social, communication and language skills” (Carvel, 1999), before they undertake a structured programme of literacy development.

The importance of early literacy development, however, does not simply benefit the child as an individual, but also benefits society as a whole. Ball (1994) believes in the “importance of early learning as a preparation for effective education to promote social welfare and social order, and to develop a world class workforce” (p.6). He believes that investing in children when they are just starting out in life will reduce the risk of juvenile delinquency, disaffection, drop-out and failure later on. He also believes that the expense of providing all children, from all backgrounds, with a quality early education is less, in the long-term, than the expense of putting right the problems that arise through having a poorly-educated population. Trevor Dickinson, a former Her Majesty’s Inspector (HMI), also adopts this viewpoint. During a recent talk, he stated that many of those who end up in prison have a very poor standard of literacy, and expressed the opinion that money needs to be spent more wisely from the beginning to improve standards in this country. In light of this, schemes such as Bookstart, which can reach every child regardless of his or her background, can only have a positive influence and should be encouraged.

1.2 Reading and Educational Attainment in the Early Years

The Bookstart project has brought to prominence the importance of early access to books and stories, yet much research has already taken place that investigates the

relationship between early literacy and future educational achievements. Wells and Raban in Blatchford et al (1985), for example, found that “knowledge of literacy on entry to school was the single best prediction of reading attainment at seven years” (p.53), whilst Wells (1987) states that “there is a very strong relationship between knowledge of literacy at age five and all later assessments of such achievement” (p.147).

Reading the Future (DNH, 1997) claims that “young children’s experience of books and stories is known to have a considerable impact on their future educational attainment” (p.20). This view is also supported by *Investing in Children* (DNH, 1995), which states that

“it has been proven beyond doubt that children who are encouraged to read in their pre-school and early school years ... have a considerable advantage in terms of educational performance and later achievement over those who have not been provided with these opportunities” (p.11)

1.3 Public Library Services to Children

The recognition that children are the future of public library services and form the adult audience of the next generation has placed a greater emphasis on public library services to children in recent times. Kinnell (1996) notes that “by the 1960s children’s work was firmly established as one of the most important of all services” and that “expansion of children’s library services testify to the growth in this more child-centred approach to library provision” (p.183). Nonetheless, Williams (1995) believes that there is more work to be done and that “children must assume a growing priority within our services” (p.28).

The number of reports and recommendations that have been published that have aimed to set standards and improve provision for children within the public library service emphasise the value that has been placed on these services. *Children and Young People: Library Association Guidelines for Public Library Services* (Blanshard, 1997) recognises that the public library has an extremely important role to play in childhood development because “it plays a formative role at a time when children’s mental

boundaries are not yet fixed” (p.13) and that libraries and their resources can aid a child’s intellectual, emotional, linguistic, social, educational and motor skills developments.

One of the most important points that the guidelines make is that “the library’s responsibility is to the local child population as a whole, not just users. Every child is a potential user – all children should be reached in some way” (p.14). It therefore states that it is the duty of the public library service to actively encourage children, and their parents/carers on whom they are dependent, to become users of the service and, thereby, aid their development. Schemes such as Bookstart, and the Summer Reading Games, which will be discussed in Chapter Six, are an indication that the public library service is already aware of this and is continually seeking to extend its services to all sectors of the community.

The Guidelines also recognise that young people have a great variety of needs and abilities and that they should not be dealt with as a homogeneous group, a theme which is common to much of the literature. As the title suggests, Hill’s *Children are People* (1973) gave expression to the belief that children are individuals who can think for themselves, who have their own opinions and whose response to reading, even at the youngest age, relates to their own experiences. This sense of individuality leads Hill to claim that it is “important for libraries to try to introduce books to individual children in the library, but we should always have a sense of proportion about how much success we are likely to have” (p.70). Similarly, Spink (1989) writes that:

“While in the library, the young user is an *individual*. He or she does not bring associations of failure or disadvantage, of prestige or advantage into the library. The library is neutral ground and should be welcoming, catering for the poor reader, the poor learner, the gifted, the disturbed, and the insecure” (p.85).

Elkin and Lonsdale (1996) also confirm this view, stating that “all children are individuals and need to be perceived as such and helped to reach their full potential, whatever that may be”. They go on to suggest that it is “only through wide access to

books and other learning materials that every child is empowered to achieve its potential, and the library is the most significant point of access” (p.4).

Investing in Children (Department of National Heritage (DNH), 1995) was a highly influential report, which set out a number of key recommendations for children’s services. The report also recognises that children have different needs and different requirements depending on their stage of development and their abilities, and that the public library service must cater effectively for all children and satisfy their demands.

“The needs of the individuals ... for books, for libraries and for encouragement of reading and the use of information, should be the starting point for any consideration of library services delivered to them ... and **that recognition of these needs should inform and determine the aims and objectives of all libraries that serve this client group** [i.e. 0-16 years]” (p.5)

The report attests to the value of public libraries, which are freely available to all, as a force in supporting reading, literacy and child development. Yet it strongly criticises the agencies that were created in order to study and combat illiteracy, claiming that “it is a matter of considerable concern that this unique force appears to have been overlooked or at least marginalised” (p.16). However, part of the blame is laid at the door of the library profession itself, for its failure to successfully “promote itself and its services in places that matter” (p.16). Among its recommendations, the report calls for a national body to represent the interests of children and young people, which would act as a channel of communication with the aforementioned agencies.

Since the report was published, efforts have been made to improve children’s services by obtaining the opinions and views of the children themselves. Children’s Public Library User Surveys (PLUS) is an annual survey which questions children about public library services and draws together trends in services, and looks also at planning and development. However, due to the fact that these surveys are now only in their second year, it has not been possible for the authorities who have been involved in the project from the beginning to draw any conclusions as yet. Thus, the extent to which they will aid the provision and service to young people is still unclear.

The Aslib report (1995) is also disparaging about the lack of concern expressed at a governmental and national level and the low profile of public library services for children. It recommends the establishment of an inspectorate, OFLIB, to oversee all public libraries, as well as School Library Services (SLS) and school libraries, in recognition of the fact that they “receive scant attention from OFSTED” (p.178). The report believes that the demands of today’s society on both adults and young people will “make increasing claims on resources for child-centred efforts” and that “the trends suggest that the need for children’s services will increase in the future” (p.54). Although some authorities have responded to this demand, public library services need to further encourage young people to make use of the facilities that the public library can offer. In so doing, the library can help to create the adult user of the future.

The DNH’s *Reading the Future* (1997) claims that more than three in five of school age children use the public library at least once a year and the importance of this statistic is expressed in the belief that libraries are the “first rung on the ladder to literacy and learning throughout life” and that “young children’s experience of books and stories is known to have a considerable impact on their future educational attainment” (p.20)

The literature, therefore, confirms that the paramount importance of the public library service to children cannot be underestimated, as the DNH (1995) asserts:

“at a time when unfulfilled reading potential affects the economic, cultural and social life of the country, the potential of a library, and in particular the public library which is freely available to all, as a force in support of reading and information literacy cannot be too strongly emphasised. ... libraries are uniquely placed to make a significant contribution to the encouragement of reading among children and young people” (p.16).

1.4 Aims and Objectives

There are many factors which influence a child's academic attainment, such as social class, parental involvement and home influences, and it would be physically impossible to attempt to isolate public library use as a factor without creating some highly unethical artificial type of control group. There is much documented evidence (see sections 1.1 and 1.2) to prove that children who are introduced to books and stories at a young age develop a greater interest and enthusiasm for literacy, and are higher educational achievers, than those to whom access to books and stories is limited. Taking this as a foundation for the study, this research intends to look at the quality and range of material that both library users and non-users have access to and examine the contribution that the public library makes to reading, and consequently to educational achievement.

The main objectives of this research are:

- ◆ to investigate the relationship between library use and academic attainment at primary level
- ◆ to compare the range and choice of reading material for library users and non-library users
- ◆ to determine the reading habits of library users and non-library users
- ◆ to determine the effect the public library has on children's attitude to reading
- ◆ to investigate whether the public library promotes and encourages enthusiasm and enjoyment of learning

Chapter Two: Methodology

2.0 Research Methods

The research will investigate the extent to which the public library has an impact on the educational attainment of primary school children by looking at a sample of children from six primary schools. The study will involve Year 1 and Year 5 children in order to incorporate both Key Stage One and Two into the research. It was originally intended to investigate children from Years 2 and 6, as the oldest children in Key Stage One and Two. However, because of Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) which were taking place at the time the fieldwork was being carried out the decision was made to study groups from the year below. The research will seek to identify the value that the public library has for children of this age group by examining the reading habits of both library users and non-users and by investigating the attitude of both of these groups to education and learning. It will also investigate the quality range and choice of material that is available to both groups of children in order to establish the impact that the public library has in this area.

The research approach will be mainly qualitative, although quantitative methods will also be used. Ely et al (1991) state that "... qualitative researchers want those who are studied to speak for themselves, to provide their perspectives in words and other actions." (p.4). In order, therefore, to assess the impact of the public library on this specific group it is necessary to obtain the opinions and views of those who have regular contact with the children and who have knowledge of either their reading interests or their attitude to learning. These people are primarily their parents or carers, their teachers and the local children's librarians. Although the children themselves would be the most obvious source of information about their own habits and opinions, a number of factors prevent them from being a reliable source.

It is believed that quantitative research methods, notably the accumulation and analysis of statistics, would be of limited value in assisting the investigation. Nonetheless, statistical data will be collected during the research, which will identify library users and non-users and provide an initial insight into the reading habits of those

being investigated. It will not, however, provide any insight into the thoughts and feelings of the respondents nor will it allow the researcher "... to understand those being studied from their perspective, from their point of view." (Gorman and Clayton: 1997: p.23).

Gorman and Clayton (1997) cite a number of ways in which qualitative research methods and data analysis techniques can contribute to libraries and library operations, as identified by Daniel R. Hittleman and Alan J. Simon:

- ◆ they are attuned to growing complexity of an information environment that requires flexibility and variability in data analysis
- ◆ they facilitate the use of triangulation to enrich research findings
- ◆ they are responsive to the need for libraries to fulfil their service imperative
- ◆ they are suited to the non-quantitative background of many information professionals
- ◆ they fit the social nature of libraries. (p.31)

The study will examine the role of the public library in the educational development of a sample of primary school children and the majority of the data will be gathered from questionnaires and interviews, although written sources will also be used. The ensuing data will attempt "... to make sense of the situation without imposing pre-existing expectations on the program setting" (Patton, 1987:15), thereby using an inductive approach to investigate whether the public library makes a difference to reading and to children's attitude to reading and learning. The study will be conducted in three areas of different socio-economic groupings in order to obtain a cross-section of opinions and views.

2.1 Literature search

The original intention of the study was to investigate the relationship between the public library and educational attainment in primary school children, concentrating specifically on children aged 5-6 and 9-10. A literature search was, therefore, carried out to determine the extent to which this relationship had already been addressed. It

was found that although there was a lot of literature relating to children's literacy development and the impact of books and stories on educational attainment there was very little literature relating directly to the impact that the public library had in this area.

The search was then widened and material was sought relating to school libraries, children's services within the public library service, factors that influence educational attainment and children's reading habits and reading choices. The impact of books and stories on the very young was also investigated. Due to the large number of factors that influence educational attainment, the search was also extended to include a comparison of the material that was being read by library users and non-users, in order to take an indirect approach to the problem. There was, however, little material to be found in this area.

Other resources which proved useful during the course of the study were internal documents from the Leeds, Birmingham and Sheffield Library and Information Services, census information and Sainsbury's Bookstart documentation.

The literature search was fruitful in that it served to provide a wealth of information relating to the general background and context of the study. However, the qualitative nature of the research and the lack of information relating directly to the subject ensured that the study was guided to a greater extent by the data received during the fieldwork. This lack of material relating to the impact of the public library on educational attainment strengthened the need for the present study to be conducted.

2.2 Preliminary interviews

An informal face-to-face interview was conducted with Alec Williams, Head of Children's Services, Leeds Library and Information Services, who agreed to host the research. From Mr. Williams information was obtained about the organisational structure of children's services in Leeds, about national projects, such as Public Library User Surveys (PLUS), as well as general information concerning city-wide initiatives such as OnLine@Leeds, homework clubs and summer reading schemes. Useful names

and contacts of children's librarians, other librarians and city council workers in various departments were obtained during the interview. Mr. Williams believed that the children's librarians would be the best source of information of schools in each area that might be willing to co-operate in the research, due to the nature of their work and the links that they have established with particular schools.

The possibility of investigating three different socio-economic areas was discussed and the city was dissected accordingly. It was felt that investigating different socio-economic regions would provide a varied cross-section of views and opinions. Mr. Williams suggested council departments that could be contacted which would provide statistical data to justify the areas chosen. Some areas of deprivation in Leeds were already identified via the Department's decision to apply for Sure Start funding in East Leeds and by successful bids for Single Regeneration Budget funding. The areas chosen were initially Wetherby, Oakwood and Belle Isle. Belle Isle was of particular interest because the Children's Librarian for the area, Chris Barber, had conducted a small Bookstart project there several years earlier.

2.3 Interviews

All the face-to-face interviews were tape-recorded so that any extra information that was not noted down at the time could be recalled at a later date. The decision was made not to transcribe the interviews due to limited time. The interviews were semi-structured to obtain opinions and descriptions as well as factual information. Questions were prepared beforehand but as the interviews progressed more issues arose and relevant questions were inserted naturally into the flow of the interview. These were then added to the interview schedule to ensure that they were asked in subsequent interviews. The use of pre-prepared questions guaranteed that all relevant topics were covered.

It was my intention to conduct interviews with a number of different groups:
Face-to-face interviews were conducted with:

- ◆ children's librarians

- ◆ teachers at the 6 primary schools who have responsibility for the school library and for liaising with the Library and Information Service
- ◆ teachers at the 6 primary schools who teach Year 1 and Year 5 pupils

Telephone interviews were conducted with:

- ◆ parents/carers who have indicated via the returned questionnaires that they are willing to answer further questions
- ◆ the children's adviser at Leicestershire Libraries where Children's PLUS was carried out last year

2.4 Interviews with children's librarians

Following the interview with Alec Williams, contact was made with the children's librarians for the aforementioned areas. Meetings were arranged with Laura Hawarth, Children's Librarian for East Leeds (Oakwood) and Chris Barber (South-East Leeds, Belle Isle). The Children's Librarian for Wetherby was unfortunately unable to meet with me due to time constraints and suggested Otley as a similar socio-economic area. Mary Ashford, Children's Librarian for North-West Leeds was therefore contacted and a meeting arranged.

The main purpose of the interviews with the children's librarians was to determine the names of schools that may be willing to participate in the research, to investigate the relationship that these schools have with the public library service and to gain a profile of the library users in the relevant areas. Other questions focused on class visits (both what they consisted of and their impact on library membership); the impact of the summer reading games on membership; whether the libraries had homework clubs; the Bookstart project that took place in Belle Isle and also the one that has just been started by Laura Hawarth in the Seacroft area.

From the interview with Chris Barber it was ascertained that there is only one primary school in the Belle Isle area and so Middleton, a neighbouring area, was suggested as an alternative. However, because some of the children who had

participated in the Bookstart project attended the school in Belle Isle the decision was made to involve schools in the two separate areas.

2.5 Contacting schools

Contact was made with the Head-teachers of each school that was suggested by the children's librarians. Although the necessary details of names and telephone numbers were obtained from the librarians, the Leeds City Council web-site, (www.leeds.gov.uk/educate/educate.html), provided extra information such as the schools' addresses and the number of pupils. All the schools contacted agreed to participate in the research. These schools are:

Oakwood:

- ◆ Kerr Mackie Primary School
- ◆ Roundhay St. John's C of E Primary School

Belle Isle:

- ◆ Windmill Primary School

Middleton:

- ◆ Middleton Primary School

Otley:

- ◆ Otley St. Joseph's RC Primary School
- ◆ Otley The Whartons Primary School

2.6 Questionnaires

The decision was made that the best and most efficient way in which to investigate children's reading habits was through a questionnaire. The advantages of this method are:

- ◆ it allows a wider range and distribution of the sample than the interview method
- ◆ it allows greater economy of effort by its distribution to a large number of people at the same time

- ◆ it facilitates the collection of large amounts of data in a short period of time
- ◆ it can be constructed so that quantitative data is relatively easy to collect and analyse
- ◆ it can be completed at the leisure of the respondents, within the time limits set by the surveyor (Busha and Harter, 1980; Heather and Stone, 1984)

It was intended that the questionnaire would be distributed to parents/carers via the children and the schools. The number of children in Years 1 and 5 was ascertained from the individual schools and the number of questionnaires printed accordingly. The size of the schools varied greatly, with Middleton Primary School having 76 Year 5 pupils while Otley The Whartons Primary School had only 29. In all 275 questionnaires were distributed via Year 1 and 299 via Year 5.

Although the study is intended to be mainly qualitative, the questionnaire largely consisted of quantitative and factual questions. The reason for this was that it was necessary to determine whether the children used a public library, the reason for doing so and the frequency. It was also necessary to find out general information about the children's reading habits, such as the sort of material the children read, where they obtain the material and how many books they read per month.

The questionnaire also invited respondents to qualify their answers to several questions in order to gain their opinions on the impact of public library schemes on their children's reading habits. Interviews would then be conducted by telephone with any parent/carer who was willing to answer further questions on this topic in order to obtain more in-depth responses and more qualitative information. Respondents have been asked to supply their name and telephone number on the questionnaire for this purpose.

The questionnaire itself consisted of an explanatory note to parents/carers about the research that is being carried out, followed by 10, mostly closed, questions. The tenth question asked respondents to list the author and/or title of the last 10 books that their child had read in order to gain an initial insight into the quality and range of books that children were reading. Included with the questionnaire was a request for

parents/carers, or the children themselves, to keep a reading record over a period of several weeks, which would further expand on this knowledge. Due to the fact that an earlier study² had found that more questionnaires were returned that were printed on coloured paper as opposed to white paper, coloured paper was used. (See Appendix 2 for a copy of the questionnaire).

The interviews with the children's librarians helped in the construction of the questionnaire by clarifying the resources that were available at the libraries that the children were most likely to use. For example, it was originally intended to include a question about the use of homework clubs, however none of the libraries actually provide these at the moment and so the question would have been redundant.

The response rate to the questionnaires was 9.7% in the Middleton/Belle Isle area, 17.9% in Oakwood and 25.9% in Otley, giving an overall response rate of 15.5%. Although this figure is quite low, it does not affect the qualitative nature of the study and it was possible to obtain a lot of interesting and useful data from the questionnaires that were returned. It was also assumed, however, that the majority of the questionnaires would be filled in by those who consider their children to be "readers", which could partially explain the low response rate.

The response rate for the reading records was very poor, with only 2.8% returned. However, because the majority of questionnaires were returned with the lists of book titles and authors completed, it was possible to compile quite an extensive and varied list of the books that the respondents had read. Combined with the interviews that were conducted with parents/carers this enabled me to build up a picture of the children's reading. (See chapter Seven).

2.7 Interviews with teachers

I had originally intended to carry out interviews with the Year 1 and 5 teachers as well as the member of staff responsible for the school library. However, problems arose

² Rachel Reilly: The impact of Sheffield public library closures on young children. Sheffield University,

that made it impossible to interview all of the teachers that I had hoped to, such as the number of teachers to interview (some schools had three teachers per year group), teachers' illness and time pressures. Nonetheless, interviews were carried out with at least one representative from each school. The teachers interviewed were:

Middleton Primary School

- ◆ Kirsten Finley (library)
- ◆ Sarah Latham (Year 1)

Windmill Primary School

- ◆ Liz Clynes (library)

Roundhay St. John's C of E Primary School

- ◆ Patricia Wales (library)

Kerr Mackie Primary School

- ◆ Sheila Staverley (Year 1)
- ◆ Barbara Carr (Year 1)
- ◆ Aileen Warren (Year 5)

Otley St. Joseph's RC Primary School

- ◆ Geraldine Fisher (library)
- ◆ Adele Pounder (Year 5)

Otley The Whartons Primary School

- ◆ Jill Pierce (Library)
- ◆ David Rees (Year 1)
- ◆ Anne Davies (Year 5)

The main purposes of the interviews with the teachers responsible for the library were to determine the nature of the relationship of the school with the public library service; to determine the ethos of the school as regards books, reading and the school library and to determine the teachers' opinions of the value of the public library. Questions were therefore asked relating to these issues, as well as some about the school itself, such as a profile of the school.

The class teachers were asked questions about their class' use of the public library and of the school library; their opinion of both libraries; whether they encourage children to use the public library; whether there is a notable difference between those children who use the public library and those who do not; as well as their own personal views concerning the public library and educational attainment. One of the main reasons for interviewing class teachers was to talk about the individual children whose parents/carers had responded to the questionnaire. The reason for this was to gain the teacher's opinion of the child's abilities and interests, as well as some knowledge of that child's background.

2.8 Telephone interviews

Parents/carers were asked via the questionnaire whether they would be willing to answer further questions relating to their child's reading habits and to leave their name and telephone number to enable me to contact them. The response to this request was mixed depending on the school from which the questionnaires were returned. Of the 89 questionnaires that were returned, 28 parents/carers were willing to be interviewed further, and of these 28 only five children were non-library users. I was, however, able to obtain the viewpoint of someone from each school as there was at least one representative from each of the schools who was willing to be interviewed, (in one case the child had actually filled in the questionnaire and put her own name down for the interview). The decision was made not to interview all of the parents/carers due to limited time and so eighteen of the parents/carers were interviewed. The number of non-library users was so small that all of their parents/carers were interviewed in order

to obtain their opinions. The other interviewees were chosen according to their answers to the questionnaire and comments that teachers had made. Those who had children in both Years 1 and 5 were also interviewed.

Due to the fact that the questionnaire retrieved mainly quantitative data it was necessary to also obtain qualitative information and, thereby, a greater insight into the opinions of the parents/carers. There was little opportunity on the questionnaire for parents/carers to express their views, which are highly relevant and important to this study. This, therefore, was the primary motivation for carrying out the telephone interviews.

The interviews were structured, with the interview schedule having been designed in advance. Additional questions were asked, however, whenever an appropriate opportunity arose. For example, when asked how much time a week her daughter spends reading, one mother asked if I meant just in English or in other languages too. This gave rise to questions about the other languages the girl could read, how well she read them and how much time she spent reading in each language. Answers to questions that were both factual and qualitative were sought and so there was a mixture of both open-ended and closed questions. For example, parents/carers were asked at what age they first read to their child and then asked what the motivation was for starting at that age.

Questions were asked about the amount of time the child spends reading or is read to; what sort of material the child likes to read; both the child's opinion of reading and the parent's/carer's; what they think has influenced the child's opinion; where the child gets his/her ideas from about the books that s/he likes to read; whether the child has access to many books at home and the extent to which other people in the house read and the influence that this has had on the child. Questions were then asked specifically about the public library. Why the child does or does not use it; the motivation for joining; the benefits of the public library; whether it has educational benefits or has

helped the child's attitude or enthusiasm for learning and the impact of the summer reading games and storytelling. Parents/carers were also asked for their opinion of their local public library and also their child's school library.

A telephone interview was also conducted with Christina Dyer, Children's Adviser at Leicestershire Libraries. The purpose of the interview was to gain information about Children's PLUS and Christina Dyer was contacted because Leicestershire was one of only three authorities where the surveys had been carried out in 1998. (The analysis of the results of the 1999 survey, from a larger number of authorities, is due for completion in September). Information was received concerning the survey itself, (length, design, promotion), the purpose of the study, as well as the findings and consequences of the survey.

2.9 Limitations of the study

A number of factors imposed limitations on this study:

- ◆ Time constraints
 - ◆ Schools were very busy because of the time of year the study took place - with SATs, report writing, end of year activities, preparing for the Numeracy Hour, and an impending OFSTED inspection.
 - ◆ All the data had to be collected before July because of my forthcoming wedding
 - ◆ Interviews with children were unable to be conducted, due to time constraints and to the age of some of the children

- ◆ Problems with Schools
 - ◆ Participation from the schools varied and it was very much dependent on the attitude of the head-teachers and the individual teachers towards the study
 - ◆ Interviews could only be conducted with eleven of the twenty-four teachers

- ◆ Ethnic Minorities
 - ◆ Although the views and opinions of a cross-section of the community of Leeds was sought, the areas investigated were largely ethnically white and therefore cannot be truly representative of the community.
 - ◆ The only area chosen that had an ethnic mix greater than average for the Leeds Metropolitan district was Oakwood. However, because one of the schools was a Church of England school, the number of ethnic minority children in attendance was not representative.
 - ◆ The inner city area that was chosen was picked because of the previous Bookstart scheme that had been carried out there, however, it was not possible to find out any information from the school about the progression of these children. Had it been possible to discover this earlier, I would have chosen to investigate an inner city area with a greater ethnic mix.

- ◆ Miscellaneous
 - ◆ It was difficult to obtain relevant information about the socio-economic groupings in Leeds. The initial material received from the Community, Benefits and Rights Department, Leeds City Council, proved inconclusive and further data had to be sought
 - ◆ The figures which were used from the 1991 census may be out of date
 - ◆ I omitted to request the child's name to be put onto the reading records and so many were returned anonymously. This, however, was not too great an omission as it was generally possible to work out who the reading records were from, due to the fairly small number of replies. The fact that the source of the book that was read was entered on the reading records also helped to determine whether the child was a library user or not, which was the main point of interest
 - ◆ The majority (84.3%) of the questionnaires were returned by library users so it was often difficult to make comparisons between library users and non-users based on the data retrieved from the questionnaires and interviews

- ◆ Only two parents/carers from the Middleton/Belle Isle area were willing to be interviewed and no reading records were returned, which was not sufficient to draw any conclusions about the reading habits of children living in the deprived areas of the city. Therefore, the issue of social class which was it was hoped would be investigated during this study has not been looked at.

Chapter Three: Community Profiles

3.0 Leeds Metropolitan District

With a population of 727,000 Leeds is the second largest Metropolitan District (M.D.) in the country and the regional capital of the Yorkshire and Humber Region. Although the M.D. has generally become increasingly prosperous there are disparities in the division of wealth across the city. Whilst North Leeds, with its particular concentration of wealth, belongs to the so-called “Golden Triangle” (along with York and Harrogate), South Leeds and the Inner Areas are some of the most deprived parts of the country (Training and Enterprise Council, 1998).

The Times Educational Supplement (TES: Dean, 1997) reports that social class and poverty are two of the key factors that determine primary age children’s educational attainment. In recognition of this fact, Leeds City Council has successfully applied for Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding, part of which is being used to improve educational attainment for Key Stage Two children in SRB areas. Through the development of new learning centres in schools and homework clubs in libraries, the aim is to improve the literacy, numeracy and IT skills of children in under-achieving schools. The participation of Leeds Library and Information Services is an indication that it is gaining the necessary recognition that it is a key player in the education of young people.

3.1 Leeds Library and Information Services

Leeds Library and Information Services is the second largest of its type in the country with 57 static libraries and five mobile libraries, and so, according to one children’s librarian, “the jam is spread rather thinly”. Leeds operates a tiering system, with the busiest and biggest libraries as Tier 1. Apart from the Central library, all the libraries are divided into groups – City, North, East, South-east, South, West and North-west, each with a specialist children’s librarian post. Leeds, like many other library services, considers its services to children to be very important and a restructuring three years ago led to the creation of eight of these posts. At the same time, the opening

hours of many libraries were changed to “child-friendly” times. For example, Otley library went from being open on Wednesday mornings to Wednesday afternoons. Approximately twenty percent of the book fund is spent on children’s stock.

Leeds also has a School Library Service, which provides topic loan boxes, audio fiction boxes, self-selected loans, advisory visits, classification of the school library, library skills, a classification workshop, book talks, and a fiction subscription service. While the majority of these services for primary schools are currently funded by the Local Education Authority (LEA), some must be bought into by the individual school. The implications of this and of future funding proposals will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

3.2 Library and School Community Profiles

Having chosen an affluent, mixed and deprived area of the city to study, it was necessary to find statistical evidence to corroborate these choices. Therefore, the 1991 census and the individual libraries’ community profiles were consulted, and the Community, Benefits and Rights Department, Leeds City Council was contacted and a copy of the Leeds Economy Handbook obtained. Because of the nature of the information, the majority of the data relates to areas that are wider than are served by the individual libraries and, therefore, may not necessarily correspond to the socio-economic grouping that it has been assigned. Community and school profiles were also given verbally by the librarians and teachers with whom I met and the number of pupils receiving free school meals was taken as an indicator of deprivation.

3.3 Otley

Otley is situated in the North-west of Leeds, close to the border with North Yorkshire (Otley The Whartons Primary School sits on the border). It is a small market town with quite a closely-knit community. It is a predominantly white, middle-class area with low unemployment and a lot of owner occupied homes. Figure 1 shows the characteristics of the whole of the Otley and Wharfedale area, of which Otley is a part, from both the census and the Leeds Economy Handbook.

Otley library is situated in the town centre and is a Tier 1 library, which, considering its small size, is an indication of just how busy and well-used a library it is. The children's librarian believes that it is hampered by its size as it cannot carry the amount of stock that it should. The library is open every day (varying hours) and its users constitute a reasonable cross-section of the community.

% Population aged 0-15	19
% Households with no car	25.5
% Lone parent households	2
% Council tenancy households	14.1
% Households receiving council benefit	20-31
Average household income (gross per week)	£383-£410
% Population unemployed or on a government scheme	4.9
% Population ethnically white	99.2

Fig. 1 Community profile for Otley and Wharfedale

Both Otley The Whartons and Otley St. Joseph's are one-form entry schools with approximately 200 pupils. The attainment levels of both of the schools are generally above average, especially as regards Leeds LEA and there are few children receiving free school meals (4% at Otley St. Joseph's and 5% at Otley The Whartons). The teachers at both schools believe that the majority of the children are users of the public library and have access to books at home. On the whole, the children come into school with a lot of skills already, i.e. they are numerate and literate when they enter reception,

which is a good basis on which to work. The majority of parents give both children and school a lot of support and it is an affluent area where parents generally have high expectations.

3.4 Oakwood

Oakwood is situated in the North-east of Leeds and comes under the census boundary of Roundhay, the characteristics of which are shown in figure 2 and are taken from the census and the Leeds Economy Handbook. It is a very varied community with a large number of ethnic minorities, a lot of middle-class, professional people, many families and also many pensioners. It is an area of fairly low unemployment.

Oakwood library is situated on the periphery of the parade of shops in the area. It is a library that is well-used by a cross-section of the community, is open every day (varying hours) and is a Tier 2 library. Although it does not yet have a homework club, it does house a homework collection, which is a reference stock for Key Stages Two and Three.

% Population aged 0-15	20.8
% Households with no car	12.4
% Lone parent households	1.3
% Households receiving council benefit	Less than 20
Average household income (gross per week)	£383-£410
% Population unemployed	3.7
% Population ethnically white	89.1

Fig. 2 Community profile for Roundhay

Roundhay St. John's is a one-form entry school with approximately 230 pupils. The school has few pupils from ethnic minorities due to the fact that it is a Church of England aided school and must, therefore, take a certain number of church pupils. The school has no children who have English as a second language and has relatively few children receiving free school meals (approximately 9%). Kerr Mackie is a two-form

entry school with approximately 430 pupils. The school has a good ethnic mix and several children for whom English is a second language. Like Roundhay St. John's, relatively few children receive free school meals (10%).

The teachers at both schools believe that most of the pupils use the public library outside of school and the attainment levels are above average. The skills with which pupils enter reception, however, vary. Some pupils are “all-singing, all-dancing”, while others “can’t hold a book”. On the whole, the teachers believe that books play a big role in the majority of the children’s lives.

3.5 Middleton and Belle Isle

Middleton and Belle Isle are situated in South Leeds, in a Family Credit Area and an Education Action Zone. The area is one of deprivation, with a very high crime rate, very high unemployment, a drugs problem, low adult literacy, with a very high number of people receiving benefits and is mainly populated by blue-collar workers. There are very few non-white families. There is a low number of owner-occupied homes and a high number of lone-parent households. Figures 3 and 4 show the characteristics of Middleton and Hunslet (which Belle Isle comes under), taken from the census and the Leeds Economy Handbook.

Both Middleton and Belle Isle libraries are Tier 3 and are situated close to the community health clinic. The libraries are fairly small and have a mix of borrowers, although the majority are children and late-middle-aged.

% Population aged 0-15	21.4
% Households with no car	57.8
% Lone parent households	7
% Households receiving council benefit	32-40
Average household income (gross per week)	£300-£333
% Population unemployed or on a government scheme	17.7

% Population ethnically white	98.7
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Fig. 3 Characteristics of Middleton

% Population aged 0-15	22.2
% Households with no car	61.4
% Lone parent households	7.5
% Households receiving council benefit	Over 50
Average household income (gross per week)	£264-£300
% Population unemployed	15.6
% Population ethnically white	89.1

Fig. 4 Characteristics of Hunslet

Middleton Primary School is a three-form entry school with approximately 525 children. It is largely white, approximately one-third of the children come from homes where no-one is in employment and 52% receive free school meals. Windmill Primary School is a two-form entry school with approximately 390 pupils. Again, it is largely white and 66% of the children receive free school meals.

The attainment level at Middleton is well below average, and Windmill's level is also lower than average. The teachers do not think that many of the children use the public library outside of school and doubt that many of their parents are users either. Middleton work very hard in developing children's book awareness whilst they are in nursery, although some children do come into school with awareness of letter sounds and the ability to write their name. None of the teachers believed that the majority of children had a lot of access or exposure to books at home.

Chapter Four: Schools and Libraries

4.0 Schools and The Public Library Service

The relationship between schools and the public library service is very often categorised by their relationship with the SLS as well as with their local branch library. As will be shown later on, there are no rules and no common patterns that govern the use of either of these services by schools and thus, the extent to which schools take advantage of the facilities that are being offered varies enormously.

Local Management of Schools (LMS), the delegation of budgets to individual schools, has had a huge impact on SLS as well as the standard of library provision in schools. Schools are no longer required to spend their money with the SLS, but are now able to spend it wherever they choose. Elkin and Lonsdale (1996) discuss the implications of this and believe that LMS has seen the demise of many SLS. As has been discussed in Chapter Three, the SLS provides schools with a variety of services that are vital in ensuring that pupils have, at the very least, access to a wide-range of quality books. The introduction of LMS has meant that schools can spend their budget with different suppliers, yet without the help of a professional organisation, such as SLS, the quality of the service, of the advice and of the material may be open to question. Elkin and Lonsdale (1996) claim that it

“appears to be generally accepted in the book world, ... that without a good SLS, some schools will make ill-advised purchasing decisions, which will leave them with less money to spend on good children’s literature” (p.112)

The Aslib Report (1995) is also concerned about the possible demise of SLS and believes that they must market themselves to schools in the most effective ways if they are to survive at all. The Report cites the Coopers and Lybrand report for the DNH, *Schools, Library Services and Financial Delegation to Schools* (1994), which claims that:

“there is no evidence to suggest that a commercial provider of loan services will emerge if school library services decline. A decline could impact on the range and quality of learning materials in schools and, through this, on the effective delivery of the national curriculum” (p.191).

The Leeds SLS is currently receiving money from the LEA that enables them to provide a non-fiction service to all primary schools in the area, however, it can no longer afford to supply fiction and schools must buy into the service individually. All secondary schools must choose whether they wish to buy into the SLS at all. From April 2000, however, when the government's Fair Funding policy is introduced, money will be devolved to primary schools. Although the schools must still spend the money with a SLS they can opt out of their local authority and spend it with a different authority.³ Thus, the competition will increase still further and each SLS must market themselves effectively to schools to prevent them from spending their much-needed money elsewhere.

According to the Leeds Weekly News (1999), this spring has seen an increase in the Leeds SLS stock thanks to an extra £50,000 grant, which will buy 7,500 books for the service, and which will help the SLS to continue to provide good quality, current material. The money has arisen because of savings made by the LEA on a number of goods and services. Although the Chair of the Education Committee claims that "because they [SLS] are part of the library service, every single schoolchild in Leeds will benefit", LMS has ensured that this is not strictly true.

Aside from the relationship with the SLS, most schools also have some sort of relationship with their local branch library, or with their local children's librarian. The extent of the contact is very much dependent on the interest of the individual school and the school's distance from the branch library. Blanshard (1998) states that branch libraries must take an active role in encouraging schools to make use of their facilities and that it "must not be assumed that schools will come to the library" (p.176). She writes that

"local libraries must work with the approach to schooling prevalent in their area. Many are a long way from realizing that learning takes place in the whole community and that

³ The Blurbs. Leeds SLS Newsletter, No. 7, Spring 1999.

the library has a clear role to play. Many schools in the UK have even reduced their visits to the library” (p.175).

In Leeds, each area has a children’s librarian who is responsible for the schools in the area. Schools are then divided into catchment areas for each branch library. Attempts are made by the children’s librarians to fulfil the role that Blanshard describes, although the number of schools with which each specialist has to deal prevents them from having as much contact with the schools as they would wish. The children’s librarians aim to have personal contact with each school at least once a year, usually in the summer term when they advertise the summer reading schemes via the main school assembly, and they also aim to keep in touch regularly by writing.

Recommendation 20 of *Investing in Children* (DNH, 1995), states that “schools should introduce children to the public library service” (p.ix). Some children are already familiar with the public library through their own family visits, yet many children belong to families that do not consider the public library a place of importance. For these children, who are completely reliant on adults to take them to a library, the introduction to the public library by their school can be vitally important, not only to support the demands of the National Curriculum, but also to open up a world of opportunity by encouraging them to use the library for enjoyment and pleasure.

The National Curriculum has increased the pressures on the public library service. The shift in teaching methods towards project work and towards pupils taking responsibility for their own learning, as well as the increased demand for multiple copies of individual titles and the simultaneous study of topics by several schools, has meant that school libraries, SLS and public libraries are finding it difficult to cope. The low level of funding of many school libraries has led to:

“schools looking to ‘free’ public library services as an alternative to charged SLS to augment resources through extensive borrowing, heavy use of information services, and more frequent class visits” (DNH, 1995:p.25-26).

The DNH report takes this idea further still by claiming that:

“the public library service in general is not adequately resourced to make up for the deficiencies of educational institutions that cannot or will not provide sufficient

textbooks and library books for their own pupils, nor does it have professional specialist staff in sufficient numbers to cope with the additional demands from pupils who are often inadequately briefed by teachers and unable to use books and other information sources for themselves” (p.64).

Public libraries are, however, increasing their provision of curricular material to support children’s formal education, especially now that homework clubs have been established in many libraries. Williams (1995) claims that an increase in children’s issues is often led by curricular non-fiction material and he believes that the problem needs to be addressed by increasing the book fund for children’s services to meet the different demands and by liaising with schools. If this does not happen, Williams believes that

“the next children who visit a public library will be disappointed twice over – when they don’t find the homework help they need, and later, when they realize the public library can offer them *little more* than homework material” (p.28).

As has already been expressed by *Investing in Children* (DNH, 1995) it is not the duty of the public library to directly support children’s formal education and the Library Association Guidelines (Blanshard, 1997) state that school libraries, public libraries and SLS must communicate with one another to ensure that their individual roles are clearly defined and “to enable maximum benefit from such contacts” (p.31). The Guidelines then outline the provision that the public library service can provide to children, parents, carers and teachers. These are:

- ◆ books and other materials for individual use
- ◆ individual library membership
- ◆ information and reference material for use in the library, and in a variety of media
- ◆ advice/talks to parents and carers about books and reading development
- ◆ class visits to the library to help children develop the habit of reading and library use, and an opportunity for them to learn how to use library resources
- ◆ visits by authors, illustrators and storytellers to public libraries to foster children’s enjoyment of reading and books
- ◆ visits to schools to promote public library use

- ◆ provision in the children's library of books about reading and child care for parents and carers
- ◆ encouragement and support of reading for pleasure

The Leeds public library service has undertaken to fulfil these roles, but many of them can only be fulfilled once a partnership with both the school and the parents/carers has been established.

The use of the local branch library by schools should therefore be very different from the use of the SLS, and it is essential that schools are aware of the different roles that each of these fulfils.

4.1 School Libraries

“The library is not aside from, or a buttress to, the curriculum, but its skills are the very foundation of the curriculum” (Library and Information Services Council, 1984:p.8). Unfortunately the value of libraries in schools is not recognised by everyone and Elkin and Lonsdale (1996) are aware that “library provision in schools is largely hit and miss” (p.79). Morrison and Scott (1994) state that “despite a recognition that the foundations of early approaches to reading and inquiry lay in the primary sector, primary school libraries remained underfunded, underdeveloped, and described in the mid-eighties as ‘watered down’ versions of secondary libraries” (p.1). In some primary schools there has been little change from the situation described above and there is a great need for schools to place greater emphasis on the library and ensure that it is valued by all members of staff.

Funding is one of the biggest problems affecting school library provision and many school libraries are severely underfunded. The Book Trust Report (1992) claims that in 1991-92, the shortfall on what schools were spending on books and what the Book Trust considered sufficient for good provision was £80 million. The lack of funding in schools generally, however, often means that even when the school values its library, it does not have sufficient money to be able to resource it adequately. Marshall in Heather (1984) states that “it is better to have rather fewer books of good quality and

consequently more expensive, than a large number of inferior cheaper books” (p.5). The large number of books available and the limited amount of money that schools have to spend makes it essential for schools to choose very wisely when purchasing material for the school library and the more help that they are willing to accept from the public library service and the SLS, the more likely they are to spend their money on quality items.

The guidelines relating to school libraries (Kinnell, 1992; OFSTED and Libraries, 199-⁴) should be carefully followed by any school in order to ensure a good library. The main points of concern are:

- ◆ the stock should consist of at least thirteen books per pupil
- ◆ the annual budget should be adequate to replace 1/10 of the books each year. Equivalent to buying one book per pupil per year
- ◆ very little of the stock should be over ten years old
- ◆ the stock should be housed in a separate area and be accessible, attractively displayed and effectively promoted
- ◆ every school should formulate a clear written policy for its library provision

4.2 The School Libraries in Otley, Oakwood, Middleton and Belle Isle and their relationship with Leeds Library Services

The Department of Education and Science Report (1991), looking at the provision and use of libraries in forty-two primary schools states that:

“it is true to say of these primary schools, as it was in the HMI “Survey of Secondary School Libraries in 6 LEAs”, that ‘there are disturbing disparities in provision that do not sit well alongside the best intentions of the National Curriculum.’ These disparities are rooted in the differing priorities given by schools to library matters and book buying policies”(p.7).

As will be shown throughout this chapter the standard of provision in each of the school libraries studied during the course of this research also varied immensely.

⁴ Leeds SLS document

4.3 Otley

Otley The Whartons was the only school to have a written library policy, which was formulated by following the SLS guidelines. A lot of time and money has been spent revamping the school library and the SLS was used to ensure that the school used its money wisely and invested in quality material. Seventy-five percent of the stock is two years old due to the fact that most of it was thrown away by the SLS and although the shelves are now only half full, the stock is all of good quality. The library has a budget of £1000, half of which comes from the school budget and half from the Parents' Association, and they have also raised "several thousand" from fundraising in the last few years. The average spending per child per year is five pounds. As far as the librarian was aware, the school had not received the £2000 grant that the government planned to provide to every school for reading materials.

While it is obviously important for a school library to support the curriculum, it is also important that the curriculum is made as broad and as balanced as possible, and this is The Whartons' objectives when choosing books for the library. The librarian believes that it is vitally important for the children to be exposed to books that feature people who may be different from themselves, for example children in wheelchairs, and that the stock reflects the multi-cultural society in which we live. The fiction collection consists of both children's classics as well as popular fiction, such as the *Goosebumps* series. The librarian stresses that while she "does not think they are wonderful, they are the sort of books children like to read". She is also conscious of the gender issue and tries to focus on books for boys because of the concerns over their general lower attainment levels.

It is apparent that a lot of consideration has been given to the physical environment of the library in order to make it attractive and appealing to the pupils. There is a table and chairs for working, animal floor cushions, a dinosaur and elephant bookcase for the Key Stage One books, posters advertising children's books, a map of Leeds and Bradford, a computer, a television and video, a globe and a piano. Many of

the books are displayed face-on to attract the attention of the pupils, which are changed regularly and reflect a topic that is being studied by one year group and these are often the first to be borrowed from the library.

All children in the school are allowed to borrow one book a week and can take any book they choose, from any section. The non-fiction is classified using school Dewey and the fiction is classified with different colour stickers for each Key Stage. Each class has a timetabled library session for half an hour per week, which is staffed with the help of parents. Books that are lost or damaged are replaced by parents.

Library skills are taught from Year 3 onwards so that the pupils know how to use the indexing system and the catalogue. This process was learnt from a SLS workshop and is now taught by the class teachers. Children also use the library throughout the school day to support their class work.

The importance that is placed on books and reading is immediately apparent on entering the school, as there are books everywhere that you go. As well as the main library, the school has:

- ◆ a classroom collection of approximately two hundred books and audio-tapes for each year group
- ◆ a reading tree consisting of children's book reviews
- ◆ specially bought bookmarks for parents to sign showing how long children have spent reading at home, in order to encourage parents to spend more time reading with their children.

The school has a good relationship with the public library service, with the children's librarian for the area visiting the school approximately twice a year and the children's work occasionally displayed in the library. However, because of the distance between the school and the library (a three-mile round trip) the school does not have regular class visits and it is only during the annual book week that the older children in

the school are taken to the public library. The school does, however, encourage the children to join the public library and is confident that many of its pupils are actually members.

The school has a very good relationship with the SLS, having used it, as mentioned above, for the refurbishment of the school library as well as for book loans, and the school continues to follow the SLS guidelines for school libraries.

The teachers at the school all thought highly of the school library and did not feel that the children were at a disadvantage because the school did not make regular use of the public library. Comments included:

- “the children are not disadvantaged because the public library is easily accessible and they are at an age where they can go into town on their own, but it would be another option to help, basically to make them aware”
- “I don’t feel they’re disadvantaged because most will be taken by parents and we have an excellent school library”
- “the children are not disadvantaged because most children are members anyway and the school library is very, very good”
- “very good range and quality [in the school library]. Lots of money gone into it recently and there’s a good selection of books”
- “not as much fiction as the public library. Public library has more fiction for more of the age ranges”

Parents also commented on the school library:

- “I can only praise it. Elizabeth enjoys the books she’s brought home from there, has never complained about the stuff she’s brought home, she’s always pleased to read it so there must be a good selection”
- “It’s improved so much over the last few years. I was worried about them turning out the old books but having so many stopped the children from seeing the lovely books that are available. Certainly improved so much, really good. The quality is probably better than at the public library because they have stricter control over the condition that the books are brought back in”

- “School library quite good. Seems to be a good range. Something for everybody. Enjoys to choose his own books from there. Jack got interested in dinosaurs and we bought a few books but the school library gives him wider access”

There was also a criticism of the school library:

- “The only problem is that the books sometimes have to go back before she’s finished reading them and she can’t renew them, which is disappointing not to finish a story”

Otley St Joseph’s school has only had a separate library budget for the past three years, which was over £300 last year. The school also holds a book fair every year with the publisher Scholastic, for which it gets commission, in books, of fifty percent. This usually provides them with around £400 worth of books, so is well worth doing. However, the librarian stressed that although it is profitable they try to make it fun and encourage reading as well.

A lot of the stock in the library is very old – some of the books I looked at were from the 1960s, but there is a lack of funds to replace them, although they are starting to replenish the stock. The books, however, were in good condition and the school had had an advisory session from the SLS in 1996 before an OFSTED inspection, during which they were informed of gaps in the collection, which they have been attempting to rectify ever since.

The school buys its stock from the local bookshop, where they get a discount, because they were not satisfied with the library supplier that they were using, and consider the shop to be “brilliant”.

The school library is a Key Stage Two library, mainly non-fiction. It is housed in a room which contains mainly traditional book shelves, although it does have a few areas for books to be displayed more prominently. There is a table but the room itself is

not large enough for the children to sit and work in the library. It is used regularly during the school day and children can take out three books a week.

Each classroom also has a book collection and although many of the books are quite old, each class has recently been given £200 from the government reading materials grant to spend on books, which will vastly improve these collections.

Although the school is only a five-minute walk from the public library there are no regular class visits but there are visits at least once in each Key Stage. The only reason for this that was given was a lack of time. Some classes go to the library, but not every year, as it depends on what topic they are covering in class. For example, if the class were covering the post office, the children would go on a visit there. Through this, the children are not encouraged to see the library as a valuable resource to be used on a regular basis, but just as another service within the town. It would seem that it varies from teacher to teacher as to whether they encourage the children to go to the public library. One of the teachers claimed that they do, whilst the other claimed that “generally we’ve got too much(sic.) other things to do”. The children’s librarian visits the school in the summer term to talk about the Summer Reading Games. The SLS is used only for project loan boxes, which are exchanged twice a term.

Comments from teachers and parents include:

- “I think a lot of children go to the library with parents. It’s not the sort of school where parents wouldn’t give them that opportunity. I don’t think they’re missing out”
- “School library seems quite good. Other books here to the ones she has access to at home”
- “Pretty good selection. Always has had loads of books from school”
- “School library ok for a primary school. Most primary schools these days could do with new books. It’s getting better. Nowhere near as good as the public library. Last time the school got money from the Government for books they bought things like *Goosebumps*. I think a lot of children would have

already have read these and the school could have done with buying books that perhaps children hadn't read themselves"

- "Lots of things in there [school library]. Needs more shelving. There are areas that could do with updating, e.g. some non-fiction. There are some very old books but often they're in good condition and they're good stories and the children seem to read them. It's foolish not to have them if they're over ten years old but still in good condition and get read. Children think it's a very good school library"

4.4 Oakwood

Kerr Mackie Primary School has both a Key Stage One and a Key Stage Two library, however, children are unable to take books home from the former. Like all the schools, Kerr Mackie has a reading scheme which the children progress through, generally finishing in Year 3 or 4. Once the children have finished the reading scheme they then become "free readers" and are allowed to take books home from the Key Stage Two library.

During the summer holidays the Key Stage Two library is being extended with money that the school has raised specifically for this purpose, which will relieve some of the pressure of space that was affecting the library. The Key Stage One library, however, still suffers from lack of space and while some of the books can be displayed, many of them have to be piled up. All the classrooms have book collections and the children are encouraged to take books from these whenever they have free time during lessons or whilst they are in the classroom. There is a good range of books in the Key Stage Two library, which they try to keep up to date and they are constantly adding to the collection. The classes do not have set times for using the library during the school day.

Due to the fact that I was unable to speak to the school librarian I was unfortunately not able to find out about the library budget, the book-buying policy or the relationship with the SLS.

The school is approximately ten minutes walk from the public library, however, due to pressure of time (“every moment of the day is full with fulfilling the requirements of the curriculum”) and the fact that there are two major roads between them, the school does not have regular class visits. The librarian comes to the school occasionally but not very often and one teacher thinks that the librarian should take a more active role, for example, by providing leaflets and a promotional package for parents, and sessions when parents could go into the library with their children and be shown around. Another suggested having the mobile library come to the school, which had happened at other schools she had worked in. The teachers encourage parents to take their children to the public library and think that there are many who do go but also many who do not.

Comments from teachers and parents include:

- “Some are disadvantaged by [the school] not going to the public library. A lot go independently”

- “We do a lot of talking to parents about the importance of using the public library right from the nursery, so early on they’re getting the message.

Whenever reading is mentioned we say ‘do extend your child’s reading and visit the library, the librarian will help you to choose books’”

- “School library has a good range of books, building up more. Lots of big books”

- “School library is quite good, there seems to be a good range. It’s current – I don’t get the impression that the fiction is ancient, there are classics as well as modern stuff. There could always be more choice, a lot of the children take a long time to choose”

- “The choice of books for group reading [in the classroom] is very good. A lot of thought has been put into it”

- “The school library could be bigger but they’re extending over the summer. What there is is great. The stock is fine but could be wider. Obviously they know that as they’re extending”

- “Not a lot in the school library. They could do more. Sometimes Alex can’t find a book to read and often reads his own books. It could be better, they need to build it up. Need more books”
- “School library is up and coming”

Roundhay St John’s Primary School does not have a separate library budget, but the money for the library comes out of the language budget, which was approximately £950 last year. Therefore, the frequency with which new stock is bought varies enormously. Almost all the books bought in the last two years have been bought for the Literacy Hour and the only fiction that has been purchased is big books and the accompanying smaller copies. Even the £2000 Government grant was spent, with a couple of exceptions, on Literacy Hour books.

The stock, however, is fairly current because the school building has only been open for seven years and there was no library when the school first opened and so the library was built up during the first three years. The SLS helped to catalogue the books and commented that although the school may not have enough books, what it does have is good quality. The library is non-fiction and the children are not allowed to take books home from here, although the librarian will occasionally permit a child to take a book overnight. Each class has a book collection, as well as a SLS fiction and non-fiction topic box and the children take home a book a week from the class library. The classroom collections are updated through a book club, from which the school gets commission and, like The Whartons, also holds a book fair twice a year. Much of the stock comes from these two sources. The school finds ways around the problem of lack of stock by asking children to bring in books from home. For example, one class had been discussing the Katie Morag books and the teacher asked children to bring in any copies they had at home. In this way, they had enough for the whole class. As the teacher commented “it’s that sort of school and area”.

The children rarely get to use the library itself, however, and the class teachers select books to take into their classroom collections. The library is a fairly small room

and is used largely by the special needs department, but also seems to be used as a general store room, housing music stands etc.

The public library is approximately a ten-minute walk from the school but the children tend to be taken there only for one short period in every academic year because of the logistics of having to have two members of staff to accompany each group that goes. The librarian believes that the librarians at Oakwood library are “very, very good” and they invite the children to special events as well as come into school to talk to the children. They would like to do more with the library but for the time factor. They do encourage the children to use it outside of school, for example, when children bring in books from the public library the teacher says to the other children “you could have gone to the library to get something like this”. The school gets topic boxes and audio boxes from the SLS, and also buy into the fiction service, which they believe will be worthwhile but they had only started this a fortnight earlier so were unable to comment on it.

Comments made by teachers and parents included:

- “The children are disadvantaged in the sense that it’s quite good to put them in an atmosphere which is all books. That is quite good. In the classroom there’re other things going on. But if they were to do it week in week out, relentlessly all year it would become a negative exercise, so I think the fact that they just have a special term when they go [to the public library] is better”
- “The school library needs extending. They’re not encouraged at primary level as much as children should be”

4.5 Middleton and Belle Isle

Middleton Primary School library has a budget of £2500, however this is not for resources that children can borrow but to support literacy teaching. The £2000 Government grant was also spent on literacy resources. Stock tends to be bought whenever the school has a windfall grant or whenever there is a gap in the collection, for example, last year the poetry collection was improved upon. Much of the stock is very

new because so much funding has been available from the Government in the last few years, although much of the non-fiction stock is older. The school library is for Key Stage Two and is therefore not really used by the younger children. The library is located in a large room, with tables and chairs and has both traditional and non-traditional shelving on which the books are displayed. Children are not allowed to take books home from the library, but the stock is well used during the school day.

Each classroom also has a collection of books, many of which are quite old and not in very good condition. However, there is also a large selection of novels available which the children can borrow when they become “free readers”. The younger children have Kaleidoscope books, which are banded into reading ages and give children the opportunity to take home books that do not belong to the reading scheme.

“We didn’t feel it was right to tell parents that they should be reading as many different books as they can and then always send home a reading scheme”.

The school has a very good relationship with the public library, which is located just across the road from the school. Each teacher arranges his/her own time to go to the public library and has a half-hour slot per week. The session is mainly used for exchanging books, however, some library skills work is also occasionally done with the children. The children have individual tickets on which they can borrow, however, their parents have to sign to say that they will be responsible for the books, as the school could not afford to take responsibility. Some children return their books promptly, while others can go for weeks without borrowing another book, despite the best efforts of the teachers to encourage them to return their books. Obviously this means that some children are deprived of the opportunity to have books, which is very sad. They try to encourage the children to use the library outside of school but do not think that many do because they need to have a parent’s signature to be able to borrow and most parents are not willing to take them.

The school borrows non-fiction topic boxes from the SLS and is considering taking audio boxes also. It feels that there is no need to buy into the fiction service as

“we are quite well stocked for the Literacy Hour and the fiction stuff they supply is on an age basis which isn’t really appropriate for our kids because the interest level’s not there because the reading age is lower”.

Windmill Primary School has a library budget of £500 a year, which is spent according to need. The school uses a library supplier approximately once a year, has publishers coming into the school and also buys from bookshops. A lot of new books have been bought recently and none of the stock should be over ten years old. The £2000 Government grant was spent on Literacy Hour material. The library is housed in a fairly large room, and has tables and chairs for the children to work at and has a lot of shelving that can be used to display books well. The library is used a lot within the school, however, the children are not allowed to take books out of school because “we have great difficulty keeping track of their reading books”, so the only books that children take home from school are the reading schemes.

The school does not really seem to have a very good relationship with the public library. There are no class visits even though the public library is approximately ten-minutes from the school because of lack of time and there is an occasional visit from the children’s librarian for the area. The SLS is used only for non-fiction topic boxes. The teachers encourage the children to use the school library, but feel that few use the public library because of the need for a parental signature. Whilst I was at the school it was the first session for the new book club, yet only three children out of seventy turned up for it, which demonstrates the lack of importance and enthusiasm with which books and reading seem to be regarded generally among pupils and parents.

4.6 Summary and Conclusions

- ◆ There are no rules that govern the procedures in school libraries
- ◆ The budget of the library varies enormously from school to school
- ◆ The library budget is often spent on resources for the National Literacy Strategy rather than in support of the curriculum as a whole or in support of a wider curriculum
- ◆ Only one school had devised a library policy, despite it being a key recommendation for a good school library

- ◆ The attitude of the head-teacher to books and reading often determines the value that is placed on them within the school
- ◆ The attitude of the individual teachers, as well as the staff as a whole, contributes to the value that is placed on the importance of books and reading
- ◆ The fact that some schools do not permit children to borrow books from the school library ensures that some children never take home books other than reading scheme books. This is truer of the schools in the deprived areas, where the children are in greater need of access to a wide range of books, due to the lack of books in many of their homes
- ◆ The relationship that schools have with the public library service varies enormously
- ◆ Few schools take full advantage of the SLS. Most are content to receive the bare minimum from it
- ◆ The extent to which teachers were concerned about whether children were using the public library, and encouraged public library use, varied according to the quality of the school library, the amount of access the children had to books in the home and the teacher's own attitude towards the library and the children
- ◆ Some school libraries did not give children the opportunity to choose books in a library environment but were 'watered down' libraries in which the children could only choose from a limited number of books, displayed on a trolley or placed in boxes

Chapter Five: Factors affecting children’s development and educational attainment

5.0 Establishing the reading habit

Smith (1985) states that learning to read is much more than the decoding of letters to sounds and there is very little that can be learnt about reading without reading. One of the teachers agreed with this, stating that reading is like riding a bike – you need to be doing it to learn how to do it. In order for children to take, what Alex Williams described in a recent talk as, the “reading journey”, they must be exposed to books, stories and reading at an early age. In this way reading becomes a pleasure not a chore and we are helping children to open themselves to a lifetime of a love of books.

Children’s academic attainment is nowadays heavily weighted towards the large number of examinations that they sit throughout their school career, from Baseline Assessments and SATs through to GCSEs and A Levels and their formal education is becoming more and more prescriptive. September 1998 saw the introduction of the Literacy Hour and this school year will herald the introduction of the Numeracy Hour, leaving primary school teachers even less time to focus on encouraging the fun side of reading, which, unfortunately, has the potential to turn some children off reading for life. If the “reading journey” has already been embarked upon, however, this is much less likely to happen. Smith (1985) notes that:

“what encourages children to read and thus to learn to read is not some ‘intrinsic reward’ like praise or high marks or a special treat, but being able to read. Watch children engrossed in a book from which they are learning about reading, and there will be no need to ask where the fundamental satisfaction lies” (p.125).

The reading habit can be instilled in children in the earliest years through a partnership between the home and the public library, which is uniquely placed to support and strengthen the process. Book Trust (1992) claims that “reading and enquiry can become habits for life if children learn from an early age to use books and other resources both for information and for pleasure” (p.41). Whilst *Reading the Future* (DNH, 1997) notes that, “libraries provide an important opportunity for young children

to develop reading and a love of books, the first rung on the ladder to literacy and learning throughout life” (p.20). Once children have started school, the partnership is extended to involve home, school and the library and all three have the shared responsibility in fuelling and supporting children’s love of reading.

5.1 Parental responsibility and the home environment

As has been mentioned already in Chapter One, children’s development begins from the moment that they are born and, thus, the home is the place where children first begin to learn and develop. Weinberger (1996) notes that until the 1980s parents were dissuaded from helping their children with learning to read because it was felt that it could hinder their child’s progress. Now this idea has been totally reversed and parents are very much encouraged to introduce their children to stories and print at a very young age because so many studies have found a link between early exposure to books and future educational attainment (as discussed in Chapter One).

Ball (1994) claims that parents are “the most important influence in the child’s life” (p.43) and the extent to which parents themselves are readers, their attitude to reading and the amount of books that are in the home all have a significant impact on a child’s attitude to reading. It is not enough, however, to encourage children to read without the parents setting an example themselves, as Fadiman (1999) notes:

“parents complain that their children don’t read for pleasure ... the children’s rooms are crammed with expensive books, but the parents’ rooms are empty. Those children do not see their parents reading” (p.67).

All of the eighteen children whose parents/carers were interviewed grew up in homes where there were a lot of books. However, only one child said that her parents did not read very often and although she said she enjoyed reading, she did not read very much and tended to read books that were more suited to younger children. Because so many of the children grew up in homes where there were a lot of books, nearly all of them were exposed to books and stories from a very young age. Almost all the parents/carers interviewed believed that their children enjoyed reading, although

naturally some children were more avid readers than others and some children were described as “seasonal readers”:

“She likes reading but it seems to be a winter pastime. She loves sport and being outside and with longer days in the summer she’s out until late and has less time to read ... We all read on holiday so Elizabeth has to read but she always asks to go and buy some books before we go away.”

The majority of parents/carers who were interviewed believed that they themselves had influenced their children’s enjoyment of reading. Comments included:

- “She gets it from me and her gran. I’m a journalist and her gran used to write poems for the children which we made into a book. I was brought up with books and my two seem to enjoy them as well. Their dad likes reading too”
- “She enjoys it because she was introduced to it so young. We all like reading”
- “I read a lot and he’s been brought up with me reading a lot. It’s natural to them”
- “He was certainly encouraged to read and has always seen us reading. We sit as a family and read. It comes from himself but we have encouraged it”
- “My husband spends a vast amount of time reading. I love reading. Reading is part of our thing. It’s quite a book filled house”
- “He has very positive role models. We read and so do his grandparents so he always sees people around him reading”
- “She enjoys it because we always read to her. It’s our influence”
- “Probably gets it from me because I read a lot. It’s something I’ve passed on to both of my children. They see books around the house and I hope that pays off”
- “Reeshka reads nearly all the time, she walks around with a book, just like me”
- “My mother and I both read a lot, although my mother reads in different languages”
- “He sees what I or my daughter are reading and just picks things up”

Having brothers and sisters in the house was also found to be an important factor in some of the children’s reading habits:

- “His younger brother is influenced by Alan’s reading – he wants to read what he’s reading. He [brother] is a phenomenal reader. He read Lord of the Rings at six and

understood it, so it also works the other way around – if my younger brother can read it so can I”

- “She has an older brother and sister who she filters books off from. They’re an influence because she goes into their rooms and selects things to read”

- “The little ones are influenced because they’re interested in books”

- “Jack reads to his younger sister. She loves stories, if you sit down she takes it as a cue for a story. She sees him reading which is a big influence. She listens to him reading his school books”

- “Definitely influence each other’s reading. Zaal can’t wait to read *Goosebumps* but he can’t read them properly yet”

- “Her brother copies her by putting books under his pillow”

Teachers also strongly believed that parental support is one of the most important factors that influence a child’s development and educational attainment. All of them mentioned it when asked what they thought the main influences were and whilst discussing the individual children with the teachers most of them commented on the home support that these children were given and that the fact that these parents/carers had responded to the questionnaire was indicative of this. Comments included:

- “You make assumptions about their home life if a child is good”

- “There are five or six in the class who are not at their chronological reading age and some of these definitely don’t have support or books at home”

- “It stems from home and the encouragement they get from their parents. Those in the class who are not as able don’t have as much support or encouragement at home. People don’t really spend the time with them, they tend to think it’s a school thing”

- “All [the respondents’ children] have encouraging parents, you can see it all the way through”

- “It’s significant that where they have the support of the parents the children do come on”

- “It’s important to read at home with parents because otherwise children see it as a school thing that they can leave behind at the end of the day. It’s complimented by

what you do at home. If both teachers and parents value it, then it must be worthwhile”

Some teachers also commented on the link between home influence and the public library:

- “Those parents that do take their children to the public library are more likely to have an interest in the child’s education and encourage them. Yes, there is a relationship between public library use and educational attainment”

- “There’s a relationship between public library use and educational attainment in as much as it’s the children for whom parents regard reading as important, they’re the children who do well at reading and whose parents probably take them to the public library”

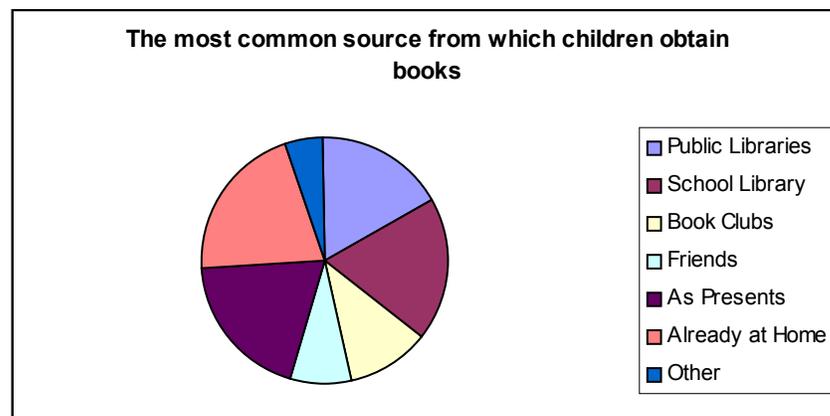
Having established that children are influenced by their parents reading habits, it is now necessary to attempt to establish *how* they are influencing their children. We have already seen that children who are exposed to a large number of books and who see other family members reading are also likely to be readers, but to what extent are these children influenced in their choice of reading material? (For a full discussion of children’s reading habits and choices see Chapter Seven).

From the interviews that were conducted there seems to be little evidence to suggest that parents/carers have a direct influence on the quality of the books that their children are reading. Many of the children were reading the mainstream authors that are currently popular, such as R.L. Stine’s *Goosebumps*, but many were also reading some classics such as C.S. Lewis’ *Narnia* series. The majority of parents/carers were quite happy for their children to read anything that they wanted and would not prevent them from having any book they chose. There were a few exceptions, however, where parents/carers would censor on the grounds of the theme of the book being too old and therefore unsuitable for the child’s age.

It was evident, however, that children are influenced by their parents/carers choice of reading material through the books that are already in the home. For example, one mother has a set of the Complete Works of Shakespeare, which her daughter enjoys delving into from time to time and other parents/carers mentioned that their children enjoy browsing through and choosing books that are on the bookshelves at home:

- “Jonathan is influenced by what’s at home”
- “I read a lot of Terry Pratchett so he’s trying some”

From figure 5 it is possible to see that the majority of respondents to the questionnaire cited books already in the home as the most common source of books for their children, and are thereby having some influence over their children’s reading



material.

Fig. 5

5.2 The Public Library Service

“Public libraries are vital for giving children easy and free access to a wide range of books, forming the basis for a lifetime’s use and enjoyment. It offers them the freedom to browse and choose for themselves. In teaching information skills and the subject courses, most schools require pupils of all ages to use sources outside the school. They should have to search for and assess the information sources as they will have to in their adult working and personal life. The public library is central to this” (Book Trust, 1992: p.47).

As has already been mentioned in Chapter One, the public library has an extremely important role to play in children's overall development. However, the extent to which teachers and parents/carers believe that the public library can aid development and educational attainment can only be judged qualitatively. Due to the nature of the question, the people interviewed had very different opinions on the impact that the public library can have on children's educational attainment.

The majority of interviewees agreed that children who are exposed to books and stories have a considerable advantage in educational terms over those who do not. These children's general knowledge was regularly commented on, as well as their general awareness of the world around them. The language development of these children was also mentioned:

- "It [public library] helps with language development. It gives children the opportunity to look at different books even from an early age and look at language"
- "Their language skills are better, vocabulary much wider, sentence formation. They've got delightful phrases that they can only have got out of books"
- "Kate has a good vocabulary – she picks the right word for the job. It must be books and reading that extends vocabulary"

Thus, for children who come from homes where there are few books and where books are not valued, all the teachers believed that the public library was an essential source and could only be of benefit to the children:

- "If they went to the public library they'd have things to read over holiday time ... they'd read evenings and weekends and holidays and would probably read more widely"
- "Children who don't have books from other sources could definitely benefit from them"
- "At a guess the poorer readers are reluctant readers and neither they nor their parents would think to diversify and go to the public library"

The interviewees were much more divided, however, over the question of the

extent to which the public library played a part in helping children's educational development. All those whose children were users of the public library, as well as some of the teachers and some parents/carers whose children were non-users, agreed that the public library does have a role to play in this area. Several parents/carers whose children were not public library users, however, felt that their children were doing perfectly well at school (with which the teachers agreed) without having any need to use the public library. All of these children, however, had a lot of books at home and were regularly bought books. Few of the interviewees were willing to confidently state that the public library was a major influence over the children, although there were some exceptions to this:

- "Of the few whose general attainment is lower it isn't necessarily because they can't use the public library – some children are naturally born brighter than others"
- "You don't necessarily have to use a public library – it's just one source of reading material, though a good source. Some children learn to read, and learn to read very well, without going to the public library"
- "You can't say, 'yes, he's doing well because he goes to the public library'"
- "You can have some who have a good stock of books at home who never go to the public library but are as capable as another child who does. It certainly helps"

- "You can tell those who go to the public library. It's quite evident which children are going to the public library"
- "You can definitely tell the difference between those who use the public library and those who don't. They have a much wider general knowledge, they can tell you about things. They listen in class and next time they're in the library they get books out on that topic and they contribute to the lesson. They have that advantage over those whose parents just buy them books"

When asked about the educational value of the public library, most of the parents/carers, including those whose children were non-library users, viewed the public

library foremost as a source of reference books and information resources and for that reason, all agreed that using the public library would help their children's education. Some parents/carers, however, saw the library as having a much broader educational purpose. Some of their main points were:

- ◆ Language development – vocabulary, creative writing, comprehension, spelling
- ◆ Finding things out for themselves, self-learning, self-discovery, independence
- ◆ Extending their imagination
- ◆ Formulating their own opinions and views

Parents/carers whose children were library users saw many more advantages that the public library had to offer to their children:

- ◆ Social skills and interaction:
 - ◆ meet friends there; share things; gives them greater confidence; “he has to talk to the librarian to ask for what he wants if he has any problems”
- ◆ Expanding their horizons:
 - ◆ makes them realise what's out there, there's a wider range than you may be able to buy; can get your hands on a wide-range of books; “can keep voracious readers satisfied without incurring a huge overdraft”;
 - ◆ much wider access, try things out; encourages serendipity; enables them to choose for themselves, “he picks up books on things I wouldn't even think of him being interested in”
 - “it's not just one source telling him things. He learns from school, mum and dad, but there's a wealth of information and enjoyment”
- ◆ Knowing how to use a library properly:
 - ◆ get to know their way around the library; feel confident using it; use the computer

Some parents/carers found it difficult to assess the extent to which the public library had affected their children's attitude to reading and learning:

- “it's difficult to separate that from being in a bookish family”
- “it's that ethos of which the public library is a part. The drip, drip, drip effect. Shows them reading is fun, once it's a chore you've lost them”

However, many were convinced that their child was more enthusiastic because going to the public library gave them a degree of independence and responsibility for their own learning behaviour and simply because they enjoy it:

- “the fact that he knows he’s doing such and such a project and can go get his pile of books, take in the information that he needs. Children love the excitement of choosing a new book”
- “it’s helped his enthusiasm in the sense he takes it completely for granted”
- “I don’t suppose he sees it as learning”
- “helped enthusiasm because they enjoy going to the library”
- “made him really interested in books. I don’t think he’d be so interested if we didn’t take him. He really loves going to the library and gets really upset if we can’t go”
- “realises he can get books there to find out more things”

For the teachers, however, it was more the act of going to the library, rather than the library itself that they considered demonstrated a greater enthusiasm and positivity:

- “Those who do use the library have a more positive attitude – more positive in the sense that they go in the first place and they’ll be the ones in later years who’ll use the public library for research etc and be aware it’s there”

5.3 Additional Factors

Blatchford et al (1985) state that social class, ethnic origin and gender are all factors which have been shown to affect children’s educational attainment by the age of eight. Unfortunately this study has been unable to investigate these issues, although it had hoped to investigate the impact of social class.

5.4 Summary and Conclusions

- ◆ Parental support is one of the most influential factors in a child’s educational development
- ◆ The amount of access to books that children have in the home and the age at which children are introduced to books affects their attitude towards books and learning
- ◆ Children are influenced by the reading habits of their parents/carers and also by other children in the household

- ◆ Children are influenced in what they read by their parents/carers to the extent that books that are already in the home are the most common source of reading material
- ◆ Children's reading choices extend much wider than the books that parents/carers read
- ◆ All parents/carers and teachers believed that public library use could only be beneficial to children's education
- ◆ Parents/carers and teachers were divided over the impact the public library has on educational attainment. Those whose children are library users believe that the public library has contributed to their overall development. Parents/carers whose children are non-users believe that their children are doing well enough without using the library
- ◆ Parents/carers were divided over the impact the public library has on children's attitude to and enthusiasm for learning. Some felt that it was a contributory factor, others felt that it was a major influence and some felt that it had no impact at all

Chapter Six: Storytelling and Other Library Activities

6.0 Storytelling and Educational Attainment

One of the most important factors that encourage children to read and become literate is the hearing of stories at a very young age. Even when children are unable to read stories for themselves, they have the ability to listen and by doing so they unconsciously become familiar with the rhythms and structures of the written language (Greene, 1996). Wells (1985) writes that

“of the various pre-school activities related to reading, only listening to stories was significantly associated with [all three] later language measures ... [of] knowledge about literacy on entry to school; reading comprehension at seven years and the oral language section of the teacher assessments at five” (p.133).

Blanshard (1998) believes that storytelling also “develops children’s listening and visual skills, as well as the important social skills of group involvement” (p.144).

Of the eighteen children whose parents/carers were interviewed, only one child had never been read to (the same child whose parents do not read a lot themselves). Sixteen of the children had been read to from a very early age for a variety of reasons. Some had older siblings who were read to and so they were also included in the storytelling sessions; some parents/carers said that “it just seemed the obvious thing to do”; others read to them to get them interested in reading; and others simply because the parents/carers themselves loved reading. The other child was read to from age three or four, which was when his mother said he was interested in listening to stories and when she thought he would understand.

Twelve of these children were in Year 5 (aged nine or ten) and eight of them are no longer ever read to by their parents. The main reason given was that the child him/herself would not allow the parents/carers to read to him/her now that s/he can read well enough. The other four children were read to occasionally but not frequently. It was more common now for the Year 5 children to be reading to their parents. All of the Year 1 children were read to on a daily basis.

Storytelling was also a big feature in the classroom and all the teachers were enthusiastic about its potential for helping children's education. The majority said that the children loved hearing stories, especially the younger ones and that it often acted as a guide for them in their choice of books. For example, if they had read a story during the Literacy Hour and it was then placed in the book browser they will actively seek it out. They are drawn to a story that they have heard, even the poorer readers, because it is familiar and therefore easier to read.

Storytelling also has a considerable impact on the children's re-telling skills, according to the teachers, who say that the more stories they hear the better their own storytelling skills. One teacher said that some children, generally those who have a lot of access to books outside of school, really stand out in their ability in this area. Teachers also believe that storytelling has a good effect on the poorer readers because it helps them get to hear things being read.

Despite the importance of storytelling, only five of the eighty-one children whose parents/carers responded to the questionnaire participated in storytelling sessions at the public library. However, several respondents mentioned that their children used to go to these sessions before they had started school. During the interviews it transpired that many of the storytelling sessions in public libraries take place in the daytime when children are at school and so many children who would like to attend are unable to. Another problem that was mentioned was the stories themselves. Some of the Year 5 children would still like to attend the sessions during the school holidays but feel that the stories that are read are appropriate only for children much younger than themselves.

6.1 The Summer Reading Games

The Summer Reading Games take place every summer holiday and are an attempt both to encourage more children to join the public library, as well as helping children to maintain the same level of literacy they had achieved at the end of the summer term over the long summer holiday. Each year the children's librarians visit

the schools to promote the scheme to the children and it would seem that children are eager to participate. According to Laura Hawarth, the numbers participating in the scheme have risen from 2-3000 in 1996 to around 12,000 in 1998 and this year has seen the launch of the first national Game.

The follow-up research carried out by Leeds Library and Information Services after the 1997 Game provided some surprising results for many teachers and parents who were sceptical about how successful such a scheme would be in maintaining children's reading level. According to the research, 81.4% of teachers felt that children were reading at the same level or above.⁵

Despite these figures, however, only twenty-two of the questionnaire respondents participated in the Summer Reading Games and their response to how successful it had been was very varied. Many of the children had thoroughly enjoyed the scheme and it had had an impact on their reading habits:

- "Very encouraging making them want to read more"
- "Encourages wide range of reading materials"
- "Encourages him to read to get badges etc"
- "Has encouraged him to try different types of books, and to make sure he finishes books (so he can get the token/stamp for it)"
- "Always reading, so perhaps more focused and wider range covered"
- "Encourages them to read books they wouldn't normally choose"
- "Teaches them reading doesn't stop in July and start again in September"

Some of the respondents claimed that the scheme had had no impact at all on their child's reading habits and some were quite disparaging of the scheme:

- "Not much use because he reads a lot anyway. It's designed to encourage kids to read but he doesn't need that sort of encouragement – badges, prizes, certificates. He doesn't need enticing"

⁵ From a Leeds Library and Information Services internal document, Sept. 1997

A lot of the respondents said that it had been fun but some of the older children thought that they were now too old for the scheme and, therefore, would no longer participate. Many of these children, however, were already “readers”, but for children who find reading boring or a chore, the Summer Reading Games can encourage them to suddenly blossom as reading is taken outside of the school context (Blanshard, 1998).

6.2 Other Activities

Author visits, puppeteers, book-related activities and drama work, both in the public library and in schools, can all help children to develop listening, observation and re-telling skills. Many of the schools have organised such activities on National Book Day or during their Book Week and have found them to be quite successful. Author visits especially brought stories alive to the children and also had a big impact on encouraging them to write their own stories. The downside to the visits, however, is the expense and few schools can afford them on a regular basis.

6.3 Summary and Conclusions

- ◆ Storytelling aids children’s listening, visual and re-telling skills
- ◆ Storytelling helps poorer readers to enjoy stories because they are already familiar and therefore easier to understand
- ◆ Children who have access to a lot of books and stories often develop good re-telling skills
- ◆ Public libraries should have storytelling sessions at times that would be appropriate for school-age children and also have sessions where books for older children are read
- ◆ Summer Reading Games help many children to maintain their reading level over the long summer holiday
- ◆ The Summer Reading Games encourage many children to read a wider range of books and to read books that they would not normally have chosen
- ◆ Many children who are already “readers” do not find the Summer Reading Games stimulating
- ◆ Author visits and other book-related activities encourage children to read more and to write more

Chapter Seven: Children's Reading Habits

7.0 Public Library Use

As has already been shown, the public library has much to offer young children and it is evident, judging by the use of the library by households with children, that many parents/carers are fully aware of this. A BLRIC funded report in 1998 which looked into library use by "households as a whole" for the first time found that households with children visit the library one and a half times as much compared with households overall (Library Association Record, 1999b). Of the respondents to the questionnaire conducted for the current investigation eighty-three percent were library users, with the largest number claiming to visit once a fortnight. During the interviews, some parents/carers stated that their children were not such frequent library visitors anymore because the books that they borrowed were more sophisticated and taking longer to read.

Almost all of the children whose parents/carers were interviewed had been library users at some time. Only the girl whose parents were not great readers and who was not read to had not used the public library. The ages at which the children had joined the library varied from before the first birthday to school age, although the majority first went at age three or four. The reasons given by parents/carers for joining the public library were also very varied, however, the main motivation was that some members of the family (parents/carers or grandparents usually) were library members and so it was just natural for the children to become members too. Other reasons for joining the library were:

- "to get books a lot, for education, getting different books out"
- "books are expensive. It gives access to a wide-range of books freely. For the experience of going to the library, getting a book and taking it back"
- "we couldn't afford to buy books so we used to go to read them"
- "just do. It's normal to join the public library"
- "nice to go choose and get to know the system of the library. Go to get more information than can be provided at home"
- "I used to go as a child, it's a habit you get used to, to take children"

The main reasons cited by those whose children no longer use the library was a lack of time and the amount of books that they had at home. Many preferred to buy their own books because they did not consider them to be too expensive and just found it easier and less time consuming to buy. All the children who do not use the library are bought books and several parents/carers stated that they thought libraries were mainly good for children who do not have access to books at home.

Some of the parents/carers did feel that their children were missing out by not using the public library, however, not enough to encourage them to start to use it. One parent said that they had tried to use the public library but had found it a nuisance because they continually forgot when books were due back and it just did not work out. Although she felt her daughter was missing out and that it was due to “laziness on my part” she did not feel that “at the moment ... it’s important enough to make that effort”.

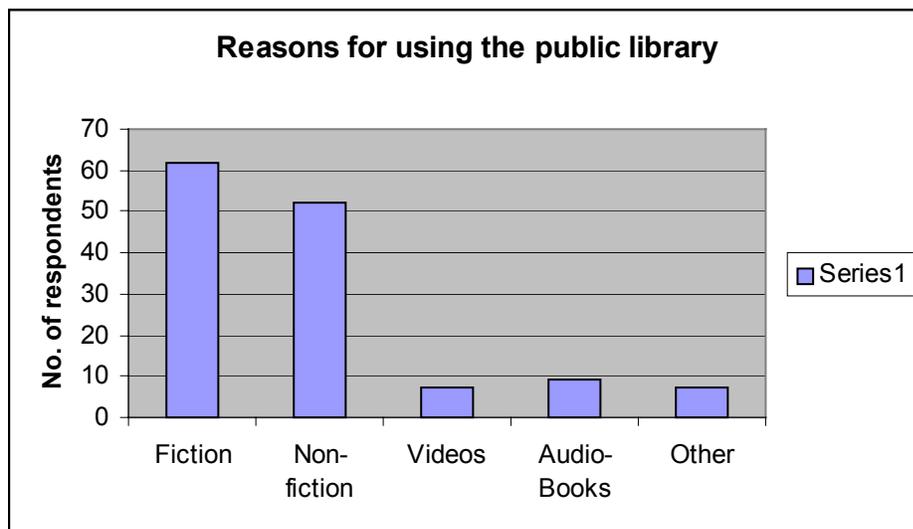


Fig. 6

Sadly, although many parents/carers saw the benefits of using the public library and were sure that their children’s education could only benefit from its use, they were not willing to make time to fit the library into their normal routine. Other parents/carers, however, were more positive about using the library and one parent said that her daughter would hopefully begin to go when she has access to a car, while another stated that they used to go to the library but the reduction in the opening hours

meant that they could no longer do so. Thus, on occasion it is circumstance that prevents both adults and children from having access to the public library.

As can be seen in figure 6, the majority of questionnaire respondents used the public library for borrowing either fiction or non-fiction books. Proctor et al (1998) found that one of the consequences of public library closures was that many children were no longer getting access to a good, wide range of reading materials and that school libraries did not have the funding to compensate for this. The breadth of materials that are available at the public library is something that many of the parents/carers and teachers in this study also commented on and was often cited as one of the reasons for using the public library:

- “because there’s such a wide range he can try new authors, find out new things”
- “nice to try to find something new without having to go out and buy it”
- “get to read a lot more at the public library than they would at home”
- “it’s a wealth, it’s free, it’s amazing!”
- “more access to different books, different environment, more understanding. Can go back and forth and get any kinds of books you want”
- “much wider access. Can’t buy that. Try things out much more, find out what they like or don’t like”

7.1 Children’s Reading Habits

The Department of National Heritage (1995) cites research carried out by WH Smith and Harper Collins into children’s books purchasing that indicates a clear difference between what adults think children should read and what they themselves want to. One of the children’s librarians mentioned a mother who chooses for her daughter aged twelve or thirteen, who feels that “she *is* going to read worthy books” and will not allow her to take mainstream teenage books. The librarian has made suggestions of books that she could read and she could see that the daughter wants to take them but that her mother will not allow it. The librarian continually talks to the

mother about good quality mainstream books in the hope that she will let the child choose for herself, which she feels is an essential part of the library experience. Several parents/carers commented that choosing books was one of the most important factors in their child's reading.

- "if you buy it he sees it once and that's it. He likes to choose his own"
- "if she gets books as presents she doesn't like them as much as ones she's chosen herself"
- "it's important that it's what they choose and it's fun"

The debate about what children read, and the extent to which their childhood innocence should be 'protected' has raged for many years. The Children's Literature Research Centre (1994) in its study of young people's reading patterns, claims that there has been a lot of media attention given to

"ideological pressure groups anxious to control attitudes to ... sex, race, gender, religion, violence and the occult contained in books for young readers. While some lobbies are attempting to restrict the kinds of books with which young people come into contact, other influential groups are advocating child-choice on the grounds that only the reader can know what books are psychologically and emotionally useful to him or her" (p.2).

It is likely that this debate will continue for the foreseeable future, however, many people recognise that educating and informing people is the best way to combat ignorance and anti-social behaviour. What has been found by the aforementioned study is that young people like to read books about topics that affect them in their daily lives and have a general interest in reading books about the world around them: "81% of young people say reading helps them understand other people's feelings. It seems that books have the potential to affect social behaviour" (p.105).

However, in order for such books to be able to help young people, they, of course, have to be reading them. Over the course of the last thirty years children's reading habits have been carefully examined by several surveys, which have consistently found:

- ◆ a clear pattern of decline in the amount of book reading as children grow older

- ◆ television and computers to be a major challenge to reading as a leisure time pursuit
- ◆ that more girls than boys read books regularly (Coles and Hall, 1997; DNH, 1995).

As has already been discussed, introducing children to books and the pleasure of reading at a young age can help to instil the reading habit and encourage young people to continue reading as new leisure pursuits vie for their attention.

From the questionnaires it was found that the majority of children choose their own reading material and many of the parents/carers were quite happy for them to read whatever they chose. Some of the parents/carers interviewed claimed that they would censor the material that their children read, however, these were the minority. One parent commented that her father banned them from having books he did not like and so she allows her children to read anything. Another parent commented that:

- “books now have genuine stories behind them. They discuss things like divorce etc, which is a good way to introduce children to that side of life. They meet people like that at school and it can help them to understand how others feel and what others lives are like”

While most parents/carers said that their children read “anything and everything”, the majority seemed to think that, in general, their children were reading good quality books. Some commented that their children were reading such a wide range of materials that the quality of them varied, and although many found the *Goosebumps* books “hideous” they were happy for the children to read them because that was only one sort of book and “things have different styles for reading”.

Coles and Hall (1997) note that “the media has a strong influence on children’s choices” and that “children enjoy reading series of books” (p.18). The interviews with parents/carers seemed to confirm this. When asked where their child got the ideas from for books that s/he wanted to read the answers included:

- “television, especially Blue Peter”
- “there was a lot in the paper about Harry Potter”
- “talks about books with friends”

- “browsing, picks things off shelves”

Most of the children had a favourite author, but quite often it was a ‘favourite author at the moment’. Many of the parents/carers commented that the children enjoyed reading series of books, but moved on once they were bored with the formula. *Goosebumps*, *Point Horror*, *Demon Headmaster*, the *Babysitter* books, Lucy Daniels books, *the Worst Witch* and *Harry Potter* books were just some of the sets that were mentioned. Several of the parents/carers mentioned that the children tended to read several books by the same author and then move on to someone else, “a bit like adults in the way they tend to read a certain author until they get fed up of them”. Unlike adults, however, many of the children tended to go back to reading the same books again and again, which is, according to Meek (1988) “when they pay attention to the words – after they’ve discovered what’s happened. Adults, generally, go on to the next book, so that *how* we read isn’t part of the consciousness we bring to texts” (p.36). Some children, however, were reluctant to re-read books and would simply give them to their friends after reading them. While some children were happy to pass books on to friends, for others ownership of books was very important and was part of the reason why they were not frequent library users:

- “he likes to buy books rather than borrow, so they’re his. He has them on his bookshelf”

7.2 Children’s Reading Material

From the book lists that were included in the questionnaires and the reading records it was possible to begin to build up a picture of the material that was being read by both library users and non-users. Figure 7 gives an indication of the broad categories of children’s reading, from which it is possible to see that while all the children were book readers only half were readers of comics.

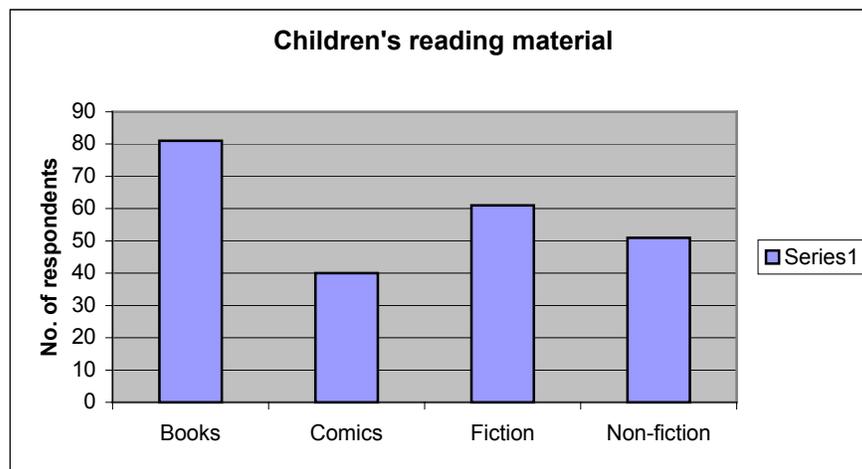


Fig. 7

Unfortunately it was not possible to discover the reason why so few children read comics, but from several conversations it was implied that comics were not ‘quality’ reading material. This, however, is disputed by Meek (1988) who claims that comics are invaluable because they demand “that two interpretations be made together, of pictures and text” (p.25), which is a more sophisticated process than simply reading text alone.

Author	No. of library user citations	No. of non-user citations
J. Wilson	24	4
R. Dahl	23	3
R.L. Stine	20	5
C.S. Lewis	22	1
D. King-Smith	13	3
A. and J. Ahlberg	10	4
E. Blyton	13	0
J. Murphy	10	1
T. Deary	9	2
J.K. Rowling	9	1

Fig. 8 Top ten authors cited

The most recent library figures that I was able to obtain relating to children’s borrowing were Sheffield Library and Information Services 1997 figures. The top ten is dominated by Martin Handford’s *Where’s Wally?* series and by Roald Dahl. Of the ten authors who were cited most often by the questionnaire respondents, only the authors Roald Dahl and R.L. Stine also featured in the Sheffield list. This, however, is not entirely surprising as new books, for example, J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, have

since been published, which have been hugely popular. Figure 8 shows the top ten authors most cited by the respondents, from which it is possible to see that all the authors, except for Enid Blyton have been read by at least one library user and non-user.

Because so few respondents were non-library users, it is difficult to draw conclusions from these figures alone. Therefore, the decision was taken to examine how many of the different authors the respondents had read. From figure 9, it is possible to see that although none of the respondents had read books by more than five of the authors, the non-library users had read no more than just two of the authors. It would therefore seem that the library users were reading a wider variety of authors than the non-users. It is interesting to note the fact that so many of the respondents did not cite any of the top ten authors.

No. of authors cited	By library users	By non-library users
0	27	3
1	14	6
2	14	3
3	10	0
4	3	0
5	3	0

Fig. 9 No. of top ten authors read

462 individual titles were mentioned by the respondents, as well as thirty-two authors to whom no book titles had been associated. Of these, only seventeen titles were mentioned by three or more respondents. Figure 10 shows these titles and the number of children who had read them.

It is interesting to note that while thirteen of the titles are by authors who feature in the top ten and were mentioned by both library users and non-users, only six of these titles have been read by non-library users. Although the majority of the books are by mainstream, popular authors, it would seem that the library users are reading a wider range of books by these authors than the non-library users. Of the *Narnia* books by C.S. Lewis, for example, only *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, which is the most well-known title and has been televised, has been read by a non-library user.

Seemingly, the library users have access to a wider range of material by authors who they discover they enjoy and therefore, can more easily read more titles by the same author than non-library users. It would, therefore, seem from these figures that non-library users are not reading as wide a variety of titles as the library users.

Title and Author	No. of library users read by	No. of non-library users read by
The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe – C.S. Lewis	6	1
Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone – J.K. Rowling	5	1
The Magician's Nephew – C.S. Lewis	5	0
Double Act – Jacqueline Wilson	4	1
The Demon Headmaster – Gillian Cross	5	0
The Hobbit – J.R.R. Tolkien	5	0
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets – J.K. Rowling	4	0
The Bed and Breakfast Star – Jacqueline Wilson	3	1
The Children's Book of Books	2	2
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory – Roald Dahl	3	0
The Worst Witch – Jill Murphy	3	0
The BFG – Roald Dahl	3	0
The Witches – Roald Dahl	3	0
Prince Caspian – C.S. Lewis	3	0
The Last Battle – C.S. Lewis	3	0
Bart Simpson's Guide to Life – Matt Groening	2	1
The Suitcase Kid – Jacqueline Wilson	3	0

Fig. 10

Spink (1989) claims that “a ‘good’ book is basically and essentially a good story ... it must be structured and it must be entertaining” (p.75). As has already been mentioned, what adults perceive to be a ‘good’ book may not correspond with children’s opinions. This explains, therefore, why *Goosebumps* are so popular with many children, while many adults believe them to be formulaic nonsense. Spink goes on to say that defining some children’s books as ‘classics’ gives them the recognition that they are works of merit in their own right, yet by encouraging children to read only such books “places emphasis on the book, on the literary work, and not on the needs and tastes of the individual reader. It places emphasis on external evaluation and it undervalues the individual young reader’s assessment” (pp.77-78).

It is therefore essential that young readers have access to as many books, and as many different sorts of books as is possible, because not everybody approaches reading in the same way. One teacher commented that when children are asked to bring in a book from home, some children bring in football programmes. While these are unlikely to be defined as ‘quality’ reading material, the teacher stated that “for a child who’s not reading it might be a way in.” There is a lot of discussion as to the ‘quality’ of children’s books, yet like adults, many children read a variety of books, some of which are of good quality and some not so good. How many of us turn to ‘trashy’ novels when we want something light and easy to read? What is important is that children have access to a wide range of material from which they can determine their own likes and dislikes and their own criteria for what determines the ‘quality’ of a book.

7.3 Summary and Conclusions

These conclusions are based on comments made by parents/carers, teachers and children’s librarians who were interviewed during this study and on the lists of books that were made by parents/carers and children that they claimed to have read. Due to the small-scale of the study, the conclusions are not concrete findings but more tendencies and patterns that have arisen from the data.

- ◆ Public library use is very common among households with school-age children

- ◆ Motivation for children joining the public library often comes from the fact that the parents/carers are already library members
- ◆ Although all the parents/carers felt that the public library can only be beneficial to their children's education, many are not willing to find time to fit a library visit into their normal routine
- ◆ Parents/carers who can afford to buy their children books and whose children are not public library users believe that their children are doing fine without using the public library
- ◆ Parents/carers who can afford to buy their children books and whose children are not public library users believe that the public library is more useful for children who do not have access to books at home
- ◆ Both library users and non-users prefer to choose their own reading material
- ◆ The majority of parents/carers do not mind what their children read as long as they are reading
- ◆ Both library users and non-users like to read series of books rather than individual ones
- ◆ Both library users and non-users read many of the same authors
- ◆ Library users read a wider range of books by the authors than non-users
- ◆ Library users read a wider range of authors
- ◆ Library users read a wider range of titles
- ◆ Library users do not appear to read better quality books than non-users as the range that children are reading varies so much that the quality also varies
- ◆ The number of books that children read is not determined by whether they are library users or non-users

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

8.0 The Impact of Public Library Use

Many of the benefits that children can obtain from library use have been discussed during this study, all of which are included in *Children and Young People's* (Blanshard, 1997) list of the values that libraries should be able to provide to children. The fact that so many of the issues included in the list have been raised by parents/carers or teachers indicates the awareness that library users (and the occasional non-user) have of the services that are being offered to them. The Library Association guidelines list these as:

- ◆ enjoyment of the story experience, of language and of associated art
- ◆ knowledge of the wider world through both fiction and non-fiction
- ◆ understanding of other people, their behaviour, cultures, situations
- ◆ self-knowledge, identity (both individual and cultural) and security
- ◆ information, through both problem-solving and unguided discovery
- ◆ confidence in the acquisition of vocabulary, speech and language skills
- ◆ shared experiences between adult and child
- ◆ support for both formal and informal education
- ◆ assistance, guidance, interpretation, enthusiasm and encouragement from trained staff
- ◆ a wider range of materials than home or school can generally provide
- ◆ resources for every child, regardless of background or culture
- ◆ access to locally based services at a choice of times and places
- ◆ free loan and use of the majority of materials
- ◆ a gateway to the greater library network
- ◆ neutral ground between home and school for independent and unhindered discovery
- ◆ skills development in information handling
- ◆ experience of the library as an inviting and social place, with activities and events
- ◆ community facilities that have potential lifelong relevance
- ◆ objective information
- ◆ literacy support (p.14)

Despite this awareness, it is evident that public library use cannot be cited in isolation as being a major factor in children's development, and that it is part and parcel of the whole educational and developmental package. As one teacher so clearly stated:

- "Going to the public library helps and offers them a range of books, but for children who are struggling with word recognition it's not the be all and end all, it's starting them off with reading. Some children find it hard to get their foot onto the reading ladder and take off but some of them have homes where there are lots of books and do go to the library. So you can't just say, "yes, those that go to the library will be really good readers and the poor readers aren't going." All we can say is that the libraries are wonderful and they really help and we like to encourage all the children to go but it isn't the magical answer to everything, that if you go you're going to be a wonderful reader"

8.1 Summary of the Main Conclusions

The following conclusions are drawn from comments and remarks made by teachers, children's librarians and parents/carers and from the lists of books that it was claimed were read during the course of the study.

- ◆ Parental support and home influence are among the most important factors in children's educational attainment
- ◆ Early access to books and stories aids children's educational development and can help to establish the reading habit in children
- ◆ Storytelling aids the development of children's listening, visual and re-telling skills and helps to improve the reading levels of poor readers
- ◆ Young children are highly dependent on adults to gain access to a public library
- ◆ Schools have a responsibility to encourage children to use the public library
- ◆ For many children, especially in the deprived areas of the city, the public library is the only way to bring books into the home. The varying degrees of library use by schools has a great affect on this
- ◆ School libraries cannot provide the same breadth and range of materials that the public library can offer children
- ◆ The public library offers children a unique experience that even the best school libraries cannot compensate for

- ◆ There is little noticeable difference between the reading habits of library users and non-users in terms of their preferences, the number of books that they read and the amount that they read
- ◆ Although library users and non-users are reading the same authors, the library users are reading a greater number of titles by these authors and library users are reading a wider variety of books
- ◆ Library users have access to a far wider range of material that has encouraged them to expand their reading interests
- ◆ Parents/carers who could afford to provide their children with reading materials and who were not library users did not feel that it was worth the effort to use the public library and that the public library was for those children who were not getting access to books elsewhere
- ◆ All parents/carers and teachers felt that the public library had an educational value, although the parents/carers whose children were non-users believed that the public library would aid their children's education only in the most fundamental way – through the use of textbooks and reference books
- ◆ Parents/carers and teachers were divided over the impact that the public library had on children's development and educational attainment. Some felt that it was difficult to separate public library use from home influence
- ◆ Parents/carers whose children were public library users believed that the public library was not only about books but had influenced their children's overall development
- ◆ Opinion was divided about the impact of the public library on children's attitude towards reading and learning. Some parents believed that the public library was a major influence on their child's attitude while others were unsure
- ◆ The impact of the public library on educational attainment varies according to other influencing factors, yet all parents/carers agreed that it can be influential

8.2 Afterword

Several issues arose during the course of the investigation that were beyond the scope of the present study, or that were only briefly discussed, yet which may merit further examination. These include:

- ◆ The use of the public library by first-generation British citizens in the teaching of English to parents and grandparents
- ◆ Problems of encouraging affluent and/or indifferent parents/carers to use the public library
- ◆ An improvement in the current situation in the relationship between schools and public libraries
- ◆ The relationship between the public library and educational attainment in secondary school children
- ◆ The relationship between the public library and educational attainment in deprived areas
- ◆ The gender issue and the public library

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The National Literacy Trust:

<http://www.literacytrust.org.uk> Accessed: 14/4/99

The National Year of Reading:

<http://www.yearofreading.gov.uk> Accessed: 14/4/99

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am undertaking some research at the Department of Information Studies, University of Sheffield examining the relationship between public library use and educational attainment in primary school children. As part of this research I am investigating the reading habits of children in Year 1 and Year 5 and the quality range of reading material that they have access to. I would be very grateful if you could spare 10 minutes of your time to fill in this questionnaire. All answers will be confidential and used solely for the purposes of this research.

Thank you very much,

Esther Stone

1. From what sources does your child obtain books? (Tick all that apply)

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Public Libraries | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. School Library | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Book Clubs | <input type="checkbox"/> | d. Friends | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. As Presents | <input type="checkbox"/> | f. Already at Home | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g. Other. Please Specify _____ | | | |

From the above list please identify the most common source of books for your child:

2. Does your child read:

- | | | | |
|------------|--------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| a. Books | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. Comics | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Fiction | <input type="checkbox"/> | d. Non-Fiction | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3. Who usually chooses the books that your child reads?

- a. Child b. Parent/Carer
c. Other. Please Specify _____

4. Approximately how many books does your child read in a month?

- a. 0 b. 1-4 c. 5-9 d. 10 or more

5. Does your child use a public library?

YES NO

If YES, which library does your child use?

If NO, please go to Question 10.

6. Please tick your reason(s) for using the public library. (Tick all that apply)

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| a. Borrowing children's fictional story-books | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Borrowing children's non-fiction or educational books | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Borrowing children's videos | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Borrowing children's books on cassette | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. Other. Please specify _____ | |

7. How often does your child visit the public library?

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| a. More than once a week | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. Once a week | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Once a fortnight | <input type="checkbox"/> | d. Once a month | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. Occasionally | <input type="checkbox"/> | g. Never | <input type="checkbox"/> |

8. Does your child participate in public library summer reading schemes?

YES NO

If YES, what affect has this had on your child's reading habits?

9. Does your child participate in storytelling sessions and other activities at the public library?

YES NO

If YES, what affect has this had on your child's reading habits?

10. Please list the author and/or title of the most recent books your child has read
(maximum of 10)

1. _____	2. _____
3. _____	4. _____
5. _____	6. _____
7. _____	8. _____
9. _____	10. _____

It would be very helpful in analysing this questionnaire if you could fill in the following information:

1. What is your child's full name? _____

2. Is your child in: Year 1 Year 5

3. What age is your child? _____

4. Is your child: Male Female

I am very interested in your comments and opinions. If you would be willing to talk to me further about your child's reading interests please fill in your name and telephone number in the space provided:

Name:

Telephone Number:

Thank you very much for your time and effort. Please return the questionnaire to your child's school by Wednesday 26th May 1999.

