Should Public Libraries do more to promote Audio Books to Children?

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By

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Abstract

Background
The literature examined the accusation that the promotion of an enjoyment of reading has been neglected by the education system. Research revealed that reading books to children is a vital way of encouraging pleasure in reading. It also revealed that audio books can provide children with a similar positive literary experience.

Aims
The aims of this study were to investigate children’s attitudes towards audio books and their listening habits to explore the link between listening and enjoyment of reading. It further aimed to use the information found to make practical recommendations to public libraries about the most effective use of audio books in a reader development context.

Methods
Interviews with children from a local independent school were conducted with questions structured around themes that emerged from the literature. Seventeen interviews were conducted, transcribed and then analyzed using discourse analysis. A survey was also distributed to children’s librarians in Sheffield and Wandsworth, London, in order to gauge the current opinion of practitioners about the use and purposes of audio books.

Results
Of the seventeen children interviewed approximately sixty percent of them had a positive attitude towards reading, with the remaining forty percent having an apathetic attitude at worst. A correlation was found to exist between the amounts the children were read to and how much they enjoyed reading; however, there was insufficient evidence to prove causation. Although many of the children enjoyed listening to stories, over half of them had a negative attitude towards audio books. Evidence from the interviews suggested that the children’s primary reader development need was for help selecting materials. The results from the librarian survey showed that the Summer Reading Scheme was felt to be the most effective form of reader development activity.
Conclusions

It was concluded that whilst audio books are valuable for providing children with positive experiences of literature, once they are aware of the potential enjoyment, additional incentives are required to encourage them to read, such as those offered by the Summer Reading Scheme or a personal recommendation of a particular title. As a result the most effective reader development strategy would focus on these issues, whilst utilizing audio books to help children with specific reading difficulties or to help avid readers attempt more challenging reads.
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1. Introduction

This study arose out of the researcher’s interest in reader development, and previous research for a project into the changing ways libraries are providing audio books through technological advances. This study was further fuelled by recent criticisms of the national curriculum, arguing that schools are failing to encourage a love of reading (Ashley et. al., 2005). Ashley et. al. (2005) argue that promoting a love of reading is easy if children are free to enjoy stories as the author intended. One of the overall objectives for children’s library services is the promotion of the love of reading and encouraging children to use and enjoy books, so fulfilling this objective should be a renewed priority for children’s libraries services. Research, described later, has shown that reading to children is a key method of helping them to enjoy stories and encouraging them to learn to read them by themselves. However, it is increasingly the case that neither teachers nor parents read to children. It was hoped that research into the value and use of audio books would be useful for the formation of more effective reader development strategies in public libraries.

1.1 Context

Two key themes fed into the motivation for this research. First, a growing concern about a decline in children’s enjoyment of reading, and secondly, the dramatic change in audio book listening habits as a result of the development of MP3 players.

Awareness of the first theme arose out of a recent BBC documentary, with Michael Rosen, looking at how current literacy practices are failing to encourage a love of reading in children (BBC 4, 2009). Rosen argues: "The literacy hour doesn't encourage the idea that books are for you, that they are yours. It says that they are texts which can be quizzed." (in Katbamna, 2005: Online). Rosen also suggested that hearing stories being read was a key strategy in remedying this problem. Whilst libraries should be promoting reading for pleasure, for its own sake, it also has a significant impact on literacy attainment; research has found that enjoyment of reading is a more significant factor of educational success than socio-economic status (Clark and Rumbold, 2006).

Secondly, recent advances in technology have changed audio book listening habits. Philips (2007) argues that creation of the MP3 player will boost the popularity of audio books in the same way the Sony Walkman did. However, she states that there is a “significant absence of any published research on the consumers or titles of audio books” (Philips,
2007, p.298). As a result, this research included an investigation into the listening habits of children and whether this has been affected by recent technological advances.

1.2 Aims

- To discover the value of audio books in developing the enjoyment of reading.

Part of this study involved an investigation into why reading to children promotes literacy and the enjoyment of reading, and whether these benefits are also gained by listening to audio books. This aim was largely fulfilled through compiling existing research into literacy development, but also through interviewing children about what encourages them to read and what they enjoy about being read to and listening to stories.

- To decide whether audio books should be promoted over other services as the most effective way to fulfill public library service objectives.

Public libraries are mandated to encourage a love of reading and to provide reader development services. Since public libraries have limited resources and are increasingly required to prove their value for money; efficiency in meeting objectives is key. The efficiency of audio books in relation to other reader development activities was measured by analyzing children’s opinions of audio books, considering the audience of an audio book promotion, and by surveying practitioners to discover which activities they thought were the most effective.

- To make recommendations for the appropriate promotion of audio books in public libraries.

By assessing the value of audio books in relation to reader development, and comparing their effectiveness with other reader development activities, then it was possible to ascertain the usefulness of audio books. By surveying librarians in the field it was also possible to gauge current opinions of audio books and the level of promotion. As a result, it was possible to make recommendations about their appropriate promotion within a children’s library context.
1.3 Objectives

In order to achieve the above research aims, the following objectives were formulated:

- To collate the research concerning audio books in order to establish their benefits to the reading process, the enjoyment of books, and their changing use in modern society. This was fulfilled through a detailed literature search.

The following objectives were achieved through interviews conducted with children from a local Sheffield school:

- To discover the listening habits of children, both to audio books and personal readings, and whether this has changed due to new technologies.
- To discover children’s opinions of whether audio books do encourage an enjoyment of reading.
- To explore the differences between children’s experiences of listening to audio books and having stories read to them.
- To explore children’s opinions of libraries services, especially with regard to the provision and borrowing of audio books, but also concerning their wider experiences of other reader development activities.
- To compare the difference between audio books and other reader development activities for effectiveness, feasibleness, popularity, and resource expenditure.

Finally, the last objective was fulfilled through a questionnaire survey of public librarians, which for the sake of practicality and convenience, were selected from public libraries in Sheffield and Wandsworth, London.

- To discover the current attitude of audio books in public libraries – promotions and staff attitudes.
2. Methodology

2.1 Approach

Due to the lack of research in this area, it was felt that an inductive approach should be taken in order to allow new themes and concepts to emerge from the data collected. Since this study focused on the value people place on audio books and their attitudes towards them, and was inductive in nature, the methodology used in this project was qualitative. Although some recommendations will be made from the results of the research, qualitative research focuses on gaining understanding of a phenomenon rather than predicting future behavior (Powell and Connaway, 2004).

The research was conducted from a constructionist grounded theory approach, which emphasizes the development of theory through analysis of data, rather than trying to fit data to an existing theory. This approach was the most suitable for this research since the experience of listening to stories is very personal and therefore does not necessarily relate to an external overarching reality. The grounded theory approach mandates that analysis of the data is carried out simultaneously to the data collection in order to identify emerging themes (Charmaz, 2003). Since there is a ‘significant absence’ of the research in this area (Philips, 2007), the grounded theory approach allowed the researcher to pursue emerging themes and concepts as they arose (Charmaz, 2003); although, general research into reader development activities, such as story times provided some insight into the initial themes to investigate. These themes were also gleaned from informal conversations regarding the research and from piloting the interview.

2.2 Methods

2.2.1 Literature Review

An in-depth literature review was conducted to gain insight into the use of audio books and the benefits of their usage within the reader development context. The review aimed to cover wider themes from research into literacy attainment and reader development so that this research reflected wider themes and concerns. This informed further research, particularly the concepts for exploration in the interviews and questionnaires. After an initial key word search, the key search strategy used was citation searching due to the variety of synonyms used to refer to audio books. The main sources used were ‘Web of Knowledge’, which allowed citations to be traced both backwards and forwards.
chronologically, and the ‘Google Scholar’ related articles function which used entire articles to extract keywords and find works of a similar nature. Since a large part of this study involved a comparison between reading to children and audio books, much of the literature was taken from research surrounding education and the literacy attainment.

2.2.2 Interviews

Interviews were conducted with seventeen children between the ages of eight to fourteen, in order to discover children’s attitudes towards listening to stories, audio books and possible links to the enjoyment and development of reading. Although a number of studies were found considering the usefulness of audio books as a reader development tool, there was a lack of research into children’s opinions of audio books and whether this had been affected by technological advances. It was decided that interviewing would be the most suitable research technique. Oppenhiem (1992) supports the use of this technique when asking numerous open ended questions and when attempting to reach less well-educated respondents, since it provides the opportunity to explain the purpose of the research face to face. Furthermore, due to the highly qualitative nature of the research, it was felt that the ability of the children to express what they thought with richness and spontaneity might have been hindered had they been required to write down their responses. Lastly, it was felt that requiring the children to fill out a lengthy questionnaire would be disruptive to the school and result in a lower response rate.

The participants were selected using a mixture of intensity sampling and convenience sampling. The purpose of intensity sampling was to identify participants who had a great deal of experience (Powell and Connaway, 2004). Thus, participants came from a local independent school which does not follow the national curriculum, and as a result the children were often read stories as part of the school day. Therefore, the participants had substantial experience of being read to and were able to easily compare their experience with that of listening to audio books and provided some valuable insights. The participants to be interviewed were further refined through opportunistic sampling; those who consented themselves and who had parental consent were interviewed.

Although this study is mainly focused on audio books, the children were asked a variety of questions covering a number of issues. It was felt to be essential that any comments made by the children about being read to and listening to audio books could be cross-examined and put into the perspective of their wider views about books and reading. Thus the children were first asked to describe what they enjoyed or disliked about books, and then
separately about their opinions about reading, as much of literature pointed towards a connection between reading ability and reading enjoyment. It was of particular interest to this study was to discover whether children who struggled with reading, but enjoyed stories and books, was linked to the frequency with which they listened to stories. Since this study is also focused on effective reader development, the children were also asked directly about their motivations for reading, and to test the assertion from the literature that it was largely dependent upon finding the right material (Ross et al., 2006). The following section of the interview covered questions about their experiences of being read to, audio books and their listening habits. They were also asked about their use of library services, their borrowing habits and whether they have been involved in any other reader development activities. The aim was to be able to draw comparisons between children’s attitudes to books and reading with their perceptions of the difficulty of reading and their enjoyment of stories when not encumbered with the act of decoding.

Although the interviews were based around a set number of questions (see appendix C.), in order to achieve ‘equivalence of stimulus’, the wording of the question was altered in an attempt to convey the same meaning to each participant (Oppenhiem, 1992). A likert scale was included with a number of questions; however, this was used as a prompt to encourage uncommunicative children to convey their opinions rather than as a tool to quantify responses. Wherever possible the children were encouraged to express their opinions in a way that was unstructured and free of the researcher’s preconceptions.

These issues highlight a number of disadvantages with the interview technique of research; allowing flexibility in the questions to encourage ‘equivalence of stimulus’ and to follow up on interesting points can result in a lack of consistency between interviews and in some instances made them difficult to compare directly. Also, the content revealed in the interview depended a lot upon the rapport between the interviewer and the child; this is an issue in normal interview circumstances, but was often compounded by the age of the interviewees who struggled in the awkward social situation that the interview presented.

2.2.3 Questionnaire

In order to discover the perceived place of audio books in libraries, research into librarian’s view of audio books was undertaken. Ideally, interviews would have been conducted with practitioners in order to gain greater insight into their opinions; however, this was unfeasible due to time constraints. The aim of the questionnaire was to gauge the current attitude towards audio books in libraries and the current level of promotion, as well as librarians’ perceptions of the most effective methods of reader development (appendix D.).
These questionnaires comprised of a series of open-ended questions allowing for an unlimited range of responses. The questions covered their opinions about audio books, their attitude towards reader development, and a section covering the current reader development activities covered in their library. As a result of some trends revealed in the interview analysis the questionnaire also included some questions examining the gender differences in attendance of activities. However, to encourage participation and to cut response times some questions had suggested answers, while others are initially closed questions with the option of developing the answer if answered in the positive. Due to the time constraints, of both the researcher and the practitioners, the questionnaire was kept fairly brief to encourage a high response rate. The questionnaire was initially emailed out to library staff in Sheffield. However, due to a low response rate to the email, a couple of questionnaires were also hand delivered to libraries in the Wandsworth area of London, with the location chosen for the convenience of the researcher.

2.3 Analysis
Analysis was conducted throughout the research process, with the result that the interviews conducted later on contained greater probing in particular areas as themes arose. The formal method of analysis followed the following pattern: interviews were transcribed and then coded to identify recurring themes and patterns, these themes formed the basis of the theory developed (Charmaz, 2003). These themes also informed the later research into librarian opinions. One of the weaknesses of this method was the danger that the researcher would force concepts onto the data according to their own, preconceived ideas. It was imperative that the theory was driven by the data and that the researcher was open to new theories and concepts emerging. The interviews were transcribed, as closely as possible word for word and including significant pauses and gestures. The concepts were then identified through discourse analysis of both the interviews and the questionnaires following the analysis procedure laid out by Rubin (2005). First, similar responses were grouped and coded with a label that reflected the common attitudes and prevailing opinions. Secondly, the themes that emerged from the coding were compared to identify correlations and patterns, the responses were also compared to the variable of age and gender, however, considering the sample size the trends were limited to the data set rather than revealing wider patterns. Lastly, the categories were compared to explore whether any synthesis could be made to suggest an overall culture; a set of beliefs that shapes attitudes and actions towards a phenomenon. Since variation within and between texts is an important aspect of discourse analysis any
response that deviates from the norm was considered in greater depth (Potter and Wetherell, 1994).

The questionnaires were analyzed using the same methods to identify trends in opinions and current practices. The responses from the questionnaires were then compared to the major trends that emerged from the interviews in order gauge whether current library practices are meeting the reader development needs expressed in the interviews, and whether library provision of audio books reflects the opinions of the children. Used together this data was used to make recommendations for future practices in order to improve reader development services. Overall, the results were compiled to answer to research objectives and to ultimately answer the question of whether scarce resources should be redirected to promote audio books and more effectively fulfill the public libraries’ service objectives.

2.4 Limitations
There are a number of limitations which affect the reliability of the conclusions drawn from this research. The first is a general danger for all research; Oppenhiem (1992) points out that there is a danger of reaching false conclusions by interpreting associations and correlations as causality. Therefore it was important to identify and take into account the variety of factors that lead to enjoyment of reading. Secondly, the time and resource constraints mean that the samples were necessarily limited, which prevents generalizations being made from the research results; the sample of children for interview is taken solely from a small, independent, Christian school, the sample is biased and will not be representative of children’s listening experiences. Furthermore, because it was opinions and beliefs that were being investigated, it was difficult to ensure ‘equivalence of stimulus’ resulting in different interpretations of the questions, some of the results lacked continuity making it difficult to draw up accurate interpretations. However, the research did offer a window of insight into current attitudes towards audio books and listening habits.

2.5 Ethical implications
Although the research was not concerned with any issues that might be considered ‘sensitive’, it did involve potentially vulnerable people, children under the age of 18, and is therefore classified as ‘high risk’. Before any interviews were conducted, permission was required from both the parent (written, see appendix B.) and the child (verbal). Interviews were conducted in a room set aside by the school, which did result in the interviewer being alone with the child, however, as part of the school’s child protection policy the interviewer
was required to produce a current CRB check before having contact with any of the children. Interviews were recorded digitally and then transcribed; all answers were anonymised, replacing the name of the child with a letter allocated in the order of the interviews, their age, and then a letter signifying their gender. For example: A13f was the first child interviewed who was aged thirteen and was female. The digital recordings were then destroyed. The replies to the questionnaires were also anonymised, simply numbering them in the order in which they responded. No one is identifiable in the results reported.
3. Literature review

3.1 Introduction
One of the basic premises that libraries hold to is the belief that books are worth reading, that the experience is valuable and pleasurable. Although promoting this belief has always been a part of library activities, this aspect of library work has gained increased importance in light of recent accusations that the education system is failing to encourage a love of books in children, by placing undue emphasis on measurable outcomes. This issue will be examined first, looking at these accusations in more depth. Secondly, the importance of reading pleasure will be discussed in terms of literacy attainment and the creation of life-long readers. Then the research discussing what encourages reading pleasure will be considered. Thirdly, a more detailed look will be taken at the benefits of reading aloud to children, promoting pleasure and literacy attainment. Finally, the research concerning audio books will be discussed: the boom in the market, encouraging literacy attainment, and their place in reader development strategies.

3.2 Basic library value
Much of the motivation for this research arises out of recent accusations that the current education system is failing to encourage a love of reading in children. The loudest complaints about the way literacy and literature are taught in schools has come, not from librarians, but from children’s authors. Rosen (2005) heads up the argument with a summary of their main complaint, that their stories are not being read or studied as a whole, rather they are being broken down into extracts for worksheets that fit the ‘literacy hour’ dictate. Rosen argues: "The literacy hour doesn’t encourage the idea that books are for you, that they are yours. It says that they are texts which can be quizzed." (in Katbamna, 2005: Online). As a result, children have lost the opportunity to experience the book as the author intended, they are no longer intriguing, entertaining, amusing, exciting, or challenging; they have simply become exercises (Rosen, 2005). Rosen concludes:

"Are books worth reading? We know it. For many children though, this is not self-apparent. We have to prove it to them." (2005:15)

Morpurgo (2005) argues that part of the reason for this approach to literature is an overemphasis on measurable deliverables; books have become merely educational tools for providing examples of similes and metaphors. The magic of reading has been lost, without
seeing that these literary devices are valuable because they can create a brilliant story it is not possible to motivate a child to learn or to read for pleasure.

Since the current education system is bound by these constraints of producing measurable outcomes it becomes all the more important that libraries are prepared to intervene. The first ‘key mission’ listed in the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (1970) is that of creating and supporting reading habits in children from a young age. The MLA also highlights the need for encouraging an enjoyment of reading, stating that one of the overall aims and objectives of public libraries should be the promotion of literacy and the love of reading (Blanshard, 1997). Considering these imperatives and the perceived failure of the education system in this area, fulfilling this mandate should be a renewed priority for public libraries. This research provides some of the justification for this study into the effectiveness of audio books as a reader development tool.

3.3 The importance of pleasure

Further motivation for this study results from the following research, supporting these authors’ claims, looking at the decline in reading pleasure and the effect this has on educational attainment. The complaints from Rosen et. al. (2005) have arisen out of the worry that, as a result of the literacy hour initiative, children enjoy reading less and read less for pleasure. Due to the lack of comprehensive longitudinal research in this area it is difficult to assert whether these worries are justified. However, a Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, conducted in 2003 (quoted in Clark & Rumbold, 2006), which compared ten year olds from thirty five countries, found that 13% of children in the UK disliked reading compared to an international average of 6%. There are also some significant studies that suggest that reading enjoyment is also in decline. Sainsbury & Schangen’s (2004) study of nine to eleven year olds found that in the last five years reading enjoyment has declined significantly in this age group, especially in the older age bracket. Worryingly, they argue that this trend is linked to the National Literacy Strategy and the introduction of literacy hour, that this strategy succeeds in creating more able readers but at the same time removes the pleasure from reading. Rather than simply effecting children’s book sales and library issues, the problem of the decline in reading pleasure has more pertinent effects. Research from the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, 2002) showed that reading for pleasure had a greater impact on children’s educational attainment than the socio-economic status of their families, something previously thought to be the largest factor in educational success. In short, by
failing to encourage a love of reading, schools are removing the most powerful counterbalance for those children whose circumstances act as a negative influence on their educational achievement, and limiting their social mobility. One of the main reasons why reading for pleasure has such a large impact is its involvement in becoming a proficient reader:

“the connection between voluntary reading and powerful literacy is that people learn to read by reading.” (Ross, et al., 2006: 4)

Anderson et.al. (1985) in the seminal work ‘Becoming a Nation of Readers’ argues that whilst enjoying reading will have a positive effect on reading ability, a dislike of reading creates a vicious cycle: those who are poor at reading dislike it, those who dislike it do not read often, and those who do not read often do not develop their skills and remain poor readers. Furthermore, evidence shows that reading for pleasure does not simply encourage reading proficiency but results in better general knowledge, greater understanding of other cultures, increased community participation and greater insight into human nature and decision making (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). A poor reading ability inevitably effects learning. Anderson et. al. (1985) describes poor readers as “frequently listless, and inattentive, and sometimes disruptive”. The effects of this problem are multiplied when the children enter the upper grades, where their skills are assumed to be sufficient to learn the content rich material presented to them, students without these skills fail to comprehend the content presented in the textbooks and their failure spreads across the spectrum of subject areas (Boyle, et. al., 2003).

Overall, numerous studies have shown that reading proficiency requires practice, and that motivation is required for emergent readers to put in the time required to become truly skilled (Anderson, et al.,1985; Clark and Rumbold, 2006; Ross et al., 2006). Without reading proficiency it is almost impossible to achieve educationally, but recent drives to improve educational attainment have ignored the need for motivation, creating readers who are able but may never be brilliant. For some children merely being capable readers may not be enough to overcome the socio-economic barriers they face to success.
3.4 What promotes pleasure?

3.4.1 The right material
Having seen the importance of pleasure, the question is raised ‘what is it that makes reading unpleasant?’ Early research into reluctant readers by Bardgett (1977) argued that reluctance was simply the result of the wrong material, the answer, he asserted was not to give them extracts, “the same only less” (1977: 3), but to embrace the material that did interest them although widely regarded as ephemera. This view is supported by more recent research by Ivey and Broaddus (2001) who found that 42% of nine to ten year olds were motivated to read by finding ‘good’ material and that ‘bad’ reading was often related to assigned texts.

3.4.2 The right ability
As Varley (2002) found, one of the greatest pleasures to be found in reading, cited by those she interviewed, is to be transported to another world and entirely absorbed in the story. Anderson et. al. (1985) measured the reading speed of the average eight to nine year old, and found it was that of a hundred words per minute on average, the rate of a poor reader was between fifty and seventy words per minute, a speed that is “so slow as to interfere with comprehension even of easy material” (1985: 24). If poor readers are struggling to even comprehend what they are reading, much less becoming absorbed in the story, than it is easy to see why they find reading less pleasurable and are reluctant to read.

Baskin and Harris (1995) also found that humour provides a key motivation to read and a hugely enjoyable part of the literary experience. However, they found that it presented particular problems for poor readers, requiring a certain amount of reading ability: knowledge of vocabulary and allusions, as well as accurate timing and emphasis. As a result, inexpert readers often miss out on the humour in the books they read and with that much of the pleasure it offers.

3.4.3 The right influence
“The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children.”

The above quote from Anderson et. al. (1985: 33), is the starting point for this study’s focus on audio books and the spoken word. Whilst Anderson et. al. argue in favour of reading to children in order to build the knowledge required for reading success, there is also research that suggests reading to children encourages enjoyment of reading and reading for
pleasure. Ross et. al. (2006) describe it as a “winning strategy” (p. 45) since the emergent reader is given the chance to experience all the pleasures of the story without being inhibited by their own inability and free of fear of failure. One aspect of this is that a child is able to listen to books of a comprehension level significantly above their reading ability opening them up to the possibility of more complex and involving stories and characters (Varely, 2002). Bishop and Kimball (2006) found that the pleasure children received from listening to stories helps them to associate books and reading with enjoyment, with many children being encouraged to read for themselves books stories they had listened to. Part of the effectiveness of reading to children comes from the positive role-model played by the parent. Clarke and Rumbold (2006) assert that children who know adults who regularly read for pleasure will take it for granted that reading is pleasurable and are more likely to become intrinsically motivated to read. Conversely, Beers’s (1998) research amongst middle school reluctant readers verified that children who were not read to regularly were unlikely to have a positive attitude towards reading. Overall, children can be motivated to read as long as they are presented with the right material by someone who believes they will enjoy it and the means for them to experience it. Given no encouragement and inappropriate material that the children cannot understand, it is unsurprising that some children are reluctant to read.

3.5 The benefits of reading to children

One of the key strategies to encourage children to read is to read to them (Anderson et al., 1985). This strategy will now be considered in greater detail. Apart from being an enjoyable experience, helping children to enjoy the humour in books and become absorbed in the story; reading to children provides a lot of other benefits which will help them to become avid readers. Leeson (1998) found that one benefit of reading to children is the opportunity to reach those who are reluctant to read: of all the reluctant readers he met, none of them refused to listen to a story. This has a number of benefits; greater general knowledge, understanding of other cultures and greater insight into human behaviour. Butler (1995) argues that children who are struggling and reluctant to read, need, more than anything else, to be read to, which will expand their view of the world and stir their emotions and curiosity. To be encouraged to read children need to be excited about literature. Meeks (1991) also argues that through exposure to literature in this way children will learn, from hearing stories above their reading level, how to fictionalize themselves in a way that helps them understand the world around them and to become emotionally literate. This is
particularly important, argues Meeks (1991), since children’s emotions are “full sized from the day of their birth” (p. 113).

3.5.1 Literacy Skills gained

Whilst it has been shown that reading for pleasure is influential in the development of literacy skills, many of those literacy skills can be gained through listening to stories since it also develops a familiarity with literary norms. First, reading to children helps them to make the link between text and speech (Ross et. al., 2006). Meeks (1991) asserts that the adult is a model of reading behaviour; the child learns that the story originates from the text, by reading and rereading a familiar story the child gradually takes over some of the storytelling and becomes the teller. She also argues that it familiarizes children with book language which differs significantly from conversational language. Butler (1995) supports this, affirming that listening to stories builds advanced vocabulary of a level above that which the child would be able to decode from the text. It also develops an awareness of literary concepts and patterns; children learn about story structure: beginnings and endings, the cumulative building of related episodes, and the flow of climaxes and resolutions (Meeks, 1991). Listening to stories allows children to understand the message of the book, to think critically about the content and to make connections within the story and to their own experiences. These aspects are central to being a reader and are what makes books enjoyable, through listening children can develop these skills and enjoy these experiences, rather than losing all meaning of the story through the burden of decoding (Johnson, 2003). That is not to argue that decoding is not a necessary skill but that solely focusing on developing it hinders the development of other literacy skills and robs reading of its many pleasures. Children need both decoding skills and knowledge of the pleasures afforded by books to become avid readers. However, as it has been shown, children are no longer read to in schools, literature having been replaced by literacy, and recent studies have shown that only half of all nought to four year olds are read to every night, with this figure dropping to 37% for the five to eight age range, and further dropping to 21% for the nine to twelve’s (Clark and Rumbold, 2006).

To summarize the literature examined so far, the research supporting recent concerns about the decline in reading enjoyment has been considered. It was found that there is support for the concern voiced by many children’s authors that the current National Literacy Strategy may be having a detrimental effect on the enjoyment of reading. The importance of the pleasure of reading was demonstrated through a number of studies revealing its effects on the attainment of literacy skills and educational success. The factors
contributing to encouraging pleasure were considered, focusing on how ability especially effects pleasure and how hearing stories provides many of the benefits of reading regularly without the fear of failure.

3.6 Audio books
This section will consider the research surrounding the use of audio books as an alternative way for children to listen to stories and experience the pleasures and benefits of being read to. Firstly, the growth in the sales of audio books will be examined to justify the timely nature of this study. Secondly, the research into the benefits of audio books over print format will be looked at. There is some debate as to whether listening is as good as reading and this debate is covered in section three. The fourth section looks at a variety of case studies from previous research where audio books have been successfully used in reader development.

3.6.1 Growth in the market
In recent years there has been a considerable rise in the sales and use of audio books. The Audio Publishers Association surveyed households in 2001, and found that in 22.5% households someone had listened to an audio book in the previous year, nearly double than in 1995 (Varley, 2002). According to the National Endowment for the Arts fewer Americans are reading books than a decade ago but almost one third of them are listening to audio books, although audio books still represent only three percent of book sales (Harmon, 2005). These trends provide the last motivation and justification for research into the effects of audio books in reader development. Should this rise in popularity continue, libraries need to be prepared for demand and be able to exploit their usefulness.

3.6.2 Benefits
There is a notable amount of research that argues that children gain many of the benefits of being read to by listening to audio books. Varley (2002) claims that audio books have proved a useful way to introduce the rhythms and structures of literary language to those children who had missed out on bedtime stories as young children. Wolfson (2008) asserts that listening to audio books supports the development of the areas needed for literacy: phonological, semantic, syntactic and pragmatic. Children experience the same exposure to new vocabulary, literary language and story structure. Wolfson’s (2008) research focused on the use of audio books in secondary schools to help adolescents with poor reading ability to keep up with the content required for the class and to enable fuller participation. She found that since audio books removed the word recognition and decoding barriers to
the text, students were able to focus on the author’s meaning and share their thoughts and opinions on an intellectual par with their fully literate peers. Baskin and Harris (1995) have also identified a number of other benefits of listening to audio books. Rather than simply being an educational aid for those with poor literacy skills, audio books can also be used effectively to help students studying books with unfamiliar proper nouns (such as books set in foreign countries) or written in dialects which can render text unintelligible even to competent readers (such as the Canterbury tales, or Irvine Welsh’s Train spotting). They also highlight the greater accessibility of humour when given the correct pause and stress by a professional narrator. In this way audio books can offer a bridge to a greater understanding of study books. Harmon (2005) quotes the novelist Sue Miller who stated that she prefers listening to texts such as novels by Henry James, since the narrator had already untangled the complex sentence structure, allowing her to simply enjoy the text.

3.6.3 As good as reading
Staunch supporters of audio books go as far as to argue that listening to audio books is actually reading. Johnson (2003) states that listening enables many of the processes at the heart of reading: understanding the message, thinking critically about the content and making connections within the text. Baskin and Harris (1995) argue that the format is irrelevant since the value of the book is to be found in the content, giving audio books a legitimacy equal to that of printed works. Cox Clark (2007) asserts that the heart of reading is to be able to intellectually engage with the content, what the reader’s mind and imagination does with the content whilst reading. She goes on to argue that listening may be better than reading, especially for those in the habit of skimming or skipping chunks of text, since audio books hold readers to the text word for word. Harmon (2005) states that most audio book lovers did not realize how much of the language they were missing when they read print until they started to listen to audio books. Critics argue that by presenting the content already decoded and interpreted it interferes with the imaginative process of reading. However, Varley (2002) is adamant that listeners are not passive but are just as actively involved in the imaginative process since listeners are often critical of narrators’ interpretations and inwardly correct them. Baskin and Harris (1995) stress that more than any other benefit, the central and essential attribute of audio books is the ability to recapture the delight of hearing stories, and their power to excite and captivate listeners. This sentiment is echoed by Varley (2002) who found that listeners often described audio books as having a heightened ability to mesmerize them. As previously stated one of the main delights of reading is to find one’ self entirely absorbed; Varley’s listeners reported
that audio books offered a greater intensity of absorption and a stronger emotional grip. Since the barrier of decoding has already been overcome the power, meaning and beauty of the text come forth uninterrupted to the listener, more completely and accurately than when read.

3.6.4 Reader Development
The accessibility and enjoyable nature of audio books has lead to some research into the use of audio books in a reader development context. Baskin and Harris (1995) argue that audio books can be used to entice reluctant readers into the world of literature; resistance to books and avoidance of reading often results from an expectation of encountering difficult words and experiencing failure, audio books remove the decoding barrier and offer the listener a positive literary experience. Varley (2002) relates the case study of Rosina, who as a small child showed all the signs of becoming a book lover but did not become an avid reader. She was later diagnosed with mild dyslexia and given audio books as a way for her to experience books. In this format, Rosina became a book lover, listening to as much as she could, and with enough passion to petition HarperCollins to stop abridging their children’s collection. Rosina’s story offers an example of what can be achieved by offering a different route into the love of literature. Beers (1998) also offers an example of the effect of audio books on attitudes towards reading. Orion, an eighth grader who read at a third grade level, described reading as “my most hated thing in the universe” (p.34), he was enrolled on an audio book program; in 6 months he listened to eighteen books. After four months he described reading as “okay if the stories are good” (p. 34). Orion read at a speed which would prevent him from comprehending the meaning of what he read and at a level which resulted in a continual fear of failure. Audio books allowed Orion to move past the barrier of decoding and experience the delights of the content. Furthermore, the increased exposure to texts also helped to improve his reading ability. In this way, we can see the way audio books can overcome resistance to books and texts.

Wolfson (2008) cites the case study of The Forest Grove School where audio books were used successfully to encourage recreational reading. The Monroe Middle School used audio books to immerse students in the texts and found it to be an influential method to help students get into the texts. One sixth grade teacher found that ninety percent of her students made a year on year improvement in their reading ability. Overall, the school found that listening to books helped the students by improving their listening skills, building vocabulary, aiding reading comprehension, and had a positive impact on students’ attitudes towards reading (Brown and Fisher, 2006). Although most of the research involving audio
books has involved their use with reluctant and emergent readers, evidence suggests that they can be used to encourage able readers to expand their literary horizons, Hipple (1995) suggests using audio books to encourage able students to try weighty classics like Hardy’s *Far from the Maddening Crowd* which may be too daunting when approached in the print format. As with reading to children, audio books act as a scaffold allowing readers to enjoy literature at their listening comprehension level which is significantly above their reading comprehension level (Cox Clark, 2007). Overall, these studies reveal that audio books can be used successfully to break down barriers to literature: enabling poor readers to have a positive experience with books (possibly for the first time), offering a bridge to literature by developing reading skills, offering the delights of absorption in the story, and pushing already capable readers to new heights of literature.

**3.6.5 Criticisms**

However, the research also reveals that audio books do not have universal appeal and will not provide a successful reader development strategy for all readers. Johnson (2003) highlights the fact that some students struggle with the pace of the audio book; some find it too fast and struggle to keep up, others may find it too slow and get bored. He also found that some of the students found the CD player cumbersome compared to the flexibility of the book; though this issue is largely overcome by the MP3 player revolution. Lastly, he found that the children had strong views about the narrator, and were easily put off listening if they did not like their voice. Cox Clark (2007) also draws attention to the fact that many children are used to experiencing the visual stimulation of the television and the internet and may find ‘pure listening’ a challenging experience, this is especially the case for visual learners who may struggle to engage with audio books.

**3.7 Summary**

Overall, it has been shown that there is a need for more effective reader development work within libraries, in order to intervene in the decline of reading enjoyment. Although it is debatable whether the literacy hour initiative is to blame there is evidence that points towards a steady decline in reading enjoyment. Research also showed that pleasure in reading is a major factor in encouraging literacy skills (since reading proficiency requires practice) and wider educational success (since reading proficiency is required to learn content and school participation). The factors that lead to reading enjoyment were considered revealing that children require material they enjoy, a confidence that will enable them to enjoy it considering their reading ability, and encouragement to persevere.
when they get stuck. In this respect libraries are much better placed to encourage a love of
reading through the choice of material, a judgment free environment concerning reading
ability, and the encouragement of staff that reading is a pleasurable and worthwhile
activity. Out of these factors it was also seen that reading to children was a hugely effective
way of encouraging a love of reading as well as providing many of the benefits of regular
reading, it also exposes the child to language it can comprehend but is above their reading
level thus expanding their vocabulary and exposing them to more complex themes and
concepts. It also enables them to experience literature free of the fear of failure and
promotes a more positive attitude towards books and reading.

These research results, combined with the recent rise in the sales of audio books prompted
this study’s focus on audio books as a reader development tool, providing the benefits of
reading to children in a format easily distributed through public libraries and thus fulfilling
many of the public library objectives. Although the format of audio books may not appeal
to all children, especially not visual learners, and some commentators feel that listening
cannot be compared to the skills required to decode and interpret a book; many
researchers argue that audio books provide a valuable reader development tool, allowing
children to access the content of the book, encounter new words and concepts, and enjoy
books at their comprehension level rather than be limited to books at their reading level. A
number of case studies supported this assertion revealing the power of audio books to
enable positive experiences with literature free of the fear of failure presented by poor
reading ability.
4. Analysis

In this chapter the data from the interviews and surveys is analyzed. Section A. covers the analysis of the interviews, whilst section B. covers the analysis of the survey. The analysis of the interviews is split into four sections reflecting the themes that emerged. Firstly, the attitudes of the children towards books and reading, covering: their reading frequency, motivation for reading, how difficult they perceive reading to be, and the impact of parental influence. Secondly, their listening habits and attitudes. Thirdly, the interviews are analyzed concerning the children’s attitudes towards audio books: how they compare to being read to, the format they listen in, and a case study of one girl’s situation which makes audio books particularly useful. Finally, the children’s attitudes towards the library are considered in order to inform any recommendations made about different reader development activities. The librarian survey is also analyzed observing their opinion of the factors that promote the enjoyment of reading, what they think about audio books and the most successful reader development activities.

A. Interviews

4.1 Attitude towards books and reading

These results were compiled from the children’s answers to questions about why they enjoyed their favorite type of book, what their opinion of books were as a whole, and how much they enjoyed reading. None of the seventeen children’s reactions were overtly negative, many of them expressing mixed reactions to books depending on the material. In order to make some distinction between the levels of enjoyment expressed by the children, responses that described an experience of being involved with the book were categorized as being ‘absorbing’ and taken to mean a greater level of enjoyment than those who merely stated they enjoyed it. For example:

The attitude of this child towards books was categorized as enjoyable:

“What do you think about books generally? Interesting and entertaining. If you could pick one on the scale what would it be? Fun

Why do you think books are interesting and entertaining? Because stuff like Captain Underpants are fun, comedy and that and serious stuff like that. “ (N11m)
The child is clearly aware of and enjoys a variety of books. Although their response is enthusiastic, it remains slightly detached, picking fun, 4 on the scale (ranging from 1 – very boring to 5 – very fun). Typically books were described as interesting, funny, or useful for information, the opinions were positive but were presented as objective truths rather than describing a personal enjoyment. When compared to the following response it is clear that there is another level of enjoyment that involves being more fully engaged with the story:

“**What do you think about books generally?** Good, very good.

**Why do you think books are good?** Cause when you read them you are like, you can get really excited and into it and you think you’re there.”

(E13m)

The double emphasis on ‘good’ in answer to the first question and the eagerness with which the child described being absorbed in the book shows clearly that the child is a ‘book lover’. These two quotes are typical of the responses in each category, the distinguishing feature being any account that described a personal involvement with the book; this commonly included the concepts of being taken to another place and getting to know the characters. It is very likely that some of the interviewees in the ‘enjoyable’ category also experienced being absorbed in novels in the same manner. However, since this research aims to discover the variety of ways children find enjoyment in books they were not probed for this information if they did not volunteer it.

Just fewer than forty percent of the seventeen interviewees had an indifferent or mixed attitude towards books. All apart from one of the seven interviewees in this category were boys; their views do not express a dislike of books rather they are characterized by apathy towards books and reading. For example:

“**What do you think about books generally?** I think they’re alright.

**Why do you think books are ‘alright’?** Well, I don’t necessarily, I wouldn’t say they were extremely fun but I don’t particularly find them boring.”  

(Q9m)

“**What do you think about books generally?** Erm, well I don’t read them too much cause I usually listen to CDs and stuff, but I usually think it’s quite relaxing when you go to the beach...**on this chart what would you pick?** ...4 probably.

*Can you explain why you think this?* I dunno...
Is it just because you prefer doing other things?.., well like during school times I don’t really have time to read and stuff.”

(H13m)

Although H13m picked 4 – fun on the scale (ranging from 1 – very boring to 5- very fun) his response is much less enthusiastic than N11m (quoted above) who also picked 4 on the scale. A number of the respondents felt that they enjoyed reading but mentioned that they preferred to do other things; a couple of them mentioned that their enjoyment was subject to the books they were reading, one respondent being particularly emphatic:

“If they are fascinating I like to read them, but if they’re not then I hate reading them.”

(C8m)

The following charts show the distribution of respondents in the different categories.

It can be seen that nearly sixty percent of the seventeen respondents were positive about book and reading, while just over forty percent were indifferent towards it (Fig. 1). It is also interesting to note the correlation between the gender and the level of involvement with books; with girls finding books equally absorbing and enjoyable, with only one girl being indifferent towards it. When considering boys there is a steady increase between each category as the involvement level decreases (Fig. 2).
4.1.1 Reading frequency
This gender trend is reflected in the reading frequency. All of the girls (including the one who was indifferent towards reading) read every day, whilst the boys’ reading frequency fluctuates with their attitude towards it. Fig. 4 also demonstrates an obvious point that the children who enjoyed reading more, chose to do it more often.

4.1.2 Motivation
Looking at the motivation for reading can help explain the reading frequency and hopefully provide some insight into ways of encouraging children to read more. The children were asked “what makes you want to read?” and their responses were categorized into four groups: parental encouragement, enjoyment, hearing about or seeing a particular book, or to fill time.

Just over half of the seventeen children actively choose to read books for their own amusement, either because they anticipated the enjoyment it would bring, or because they were excited by the prospect of a particular book. Those who were categorized as motivated by the prospect of a particular book often mentioned the process of selection and the importance of personal recommendations. Such as this comment from 114m:
“What makes you want to read? Er well, usually the front cover looks really nice or if a friend says it’s really good then I just want to read it.”

It is interesting to see from Fig. 4 that two of the children who had an indifferent attitude towards books still chose to read every day. One of the children was motivated to read by direct parental encouragement, the other read to fill time; however, it was clearly part of a daily routine. Of the five children who read to ‘fill time’, four of them had an indifferent attitude towards books and reading, however three of them read regularly (more than two times week, one of them read every day). Upon further analysis it is clear that routine plays a large part in motivating these children to read:

“What makes you want to read?

“Well I normally read in the morning.” (K9m)

“Yes, mostly in bed cause I can never sleep at night.” (Q9m)

“I read to myself, on my own in bed.” (J14m)

Table 1 Average age of interviewees by motivating factor

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<th>parents</th>
<th>fill time</th>
<th>the book</th>
<th>enjoyment</th>
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<td></td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>12.25</td>
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Table 2 Average age by attitude towards books

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<th>absorbing</th>
<th>enjoyable</th>
<th>indifferent</th>
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<td>12.25</td>
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Routine is also a clear theme in the responses of those who were motivated by parental encouragement, with all three of them reading regularly, usually in bed. These children appear to have developed ‘the reading habit’ despite their indifference towards reading. One of the children motivated to read suffered from some learning difficulties. It is interesting to note that the average age of the remaining five children motivated to read by routine (either self imposed to under parental guidance) is 8.6, compared to the average age of the group as a whole which is 10.9. This may reflect the greater amount of parental involvement and imposed structure upon the lives of younger children. Table 1 shows the average age of the interviewees in each category of motivation for reading. As the motivation to read becomes more positive, starting with being made to read by parents moving to actively seeking out reading for enjoyment, the average age of the children in each category increases. There appears to be a correlation between the
motivation for reading and the age of the child within the data set. However, table 2 shows the average age of the children in each category of attitude towards books and reading, and shows no correlation between age and reading enjoyment. Therefore it cannot be argued that children find books more enjoyable as they get older, rather they are more able to decide how they spend their free time. Fig. 6 shows there is a fairly clear correlation between motivation to read and relative enjoyment of reading. Affirming the fact that those with a positive attitude towards books are motivated to read for pleasure.

4.1.3 Reading Difficulty

The children were also asked about how difficult they found reading. It is important to note that the difficulty of reading described by the child does not reflect their actual reading ability, rather their perception of reading. As a result, it may also reflect the nature of the material they are reading, since challenging material may provide some difficult words, or some difficulty in understanding the text even to a proficient reader. It does demonstrate that the children’s perceived difficulty of reading is not directly proportional to their level of enjoyment, with some children finding it very easy but having an indifferent attitude towards books and reading and other children feeling that reading presents some difficulties but still having a positive attitude towards books and reading. Fig. 7 below compares the perceived difficulty of reading with the level of enjoyment.
It could be suggested that the children who have an indifferent attitude towards reading but find it easy or very easy, are in need of some more challenging material to capture their imagination. Some of the comments from the interviews suggest that the interviewees struggled to choose reading material. The following comment is from C8m who describes reading as very easy but is apathetic towards books:

“How often do you read books? Now and again, when I’m in bed though I’ve read every single Horrid Henry book about a thousand times.”

(C8m)

Further evidence that this apathy might be the result of a lack in variety of materials is the fact that C8m admits that he never goes to the library:

“I don’t borrow anything from libraries cause I never actually go.”

These comments do not only show that C8m struggles to pick reading material but is also reluctant, possibly even scared, of picking different, or more challenging material, preferring to stick to the familiar, if not boring. M11m also describes difficulties with selection, and admits seldom going to the library:

“We don’t borrow any [audio books], we don’t usually go to the library I think the last book I read from the library is um something about a potato from outer space, spuds from outer space it was quite scary, Mum chose it for me, cause I can’t chose things that easily, so mum just goes to the library and choose for me.”
Despite the fact that M11m professes difficulty in selecting reading material, he still finds reading enjoyable and describes facing some difficulties whilst reading, which suggests that he is tackling challenging material. The reason for this difference in attitude, between C8m and M11m, may be parental involvement and the active role M11m’s mother plays in finding material for her son. This demonstrates the value of reader development activities helping children discover new authors and genres. Further evidence that these children would benefit from such reader development activities can be seen in the fact that, when asked about their favorite type of book, six of them replied by naming an author rather than a genre. Finally, this is further seen in one child’s comment that they were motivated to read as a direct result of personal recommendations:

“What makes you want to read? Say like someone comes to school with a book and they read a bit to you and you think it’s funny it’s like an advertisement for you.”

(N11m)

This suggests that helping children to enjoy reading more may simply be a case of helping them to find books that they will enjoy, and encouraging them to branch out and try more challenging reads. Assisting parents to help their children may be a cost effective solution to reaching each child individually.

4.1.4 Parental influence

The powerful affect that M11m’s mother had on his reading choices and ultimately his enjoyment of reading is clear, and parental influence was a recurring theme throughout the interviews. It has already been demonstrated that, for younger children, parents can be a key in implementing a routine and encouraging a reading habit. Three of the seventeen children cited their parents in answer to the question ‘what makes you want to read?’ However, only one child described this in a negative way: “Because I have to” (C8m). The power of parental influence can be seen in the fact that C8m was discouraged from reading by his estimation of his father’s opinion of his reading ability:

“What makes you dislike reading? Because some words are really hard, and my Dad, well he says he doesn’t criticize me, but I think he does.”

The other two spoke of their parents’ encouragement as a motivation for reading, one child describing her mother as a positive reading role model:
“because I’m competing with my mum cause my mum reads very fast and I want to read as fast as her as well.”

This statement supports the findings of Clarke and Rumbold (2006) who argue that children can be greatly influenced by having an adult reading role model who openly displays pleasure in reading. This influence can also be seen in effecting children’s exposure to libraries; both B8f and C8m spoke of being taken to the library by their parents. In all, ten of the seventeen children mentioned their parents in the course of the interview.

### 4.1.5 Attitude towards books and reading: summary

In this section we have seen that the children interviewed were largely positive about reading, or at worst ambivalent (40%); none of them had strong negative feelings about books or reading. Reading frequency was affected largely by attitude, with those who enjoyed reading choosing to do so more often. However, it was also affected by parental influence and routine, with a significant number of children reading more often than typical of their enjoyment level, as part of a daily routine or under parental guidance. Those who were not encouraged to read by parents were motivated to either by the prospect of enjoyment, by the attraction of a particular book, or just to fill time. It was also shown that enjoyment was not affected by perceived difficulty and that evidence pointed towards a need to help children with selection so they are reading books that are challenging enough to be enjoyable, with many of the children having become stuck in a rut of a single author or series. Finally, extracts from the interviews pointed towards the importance of parents in developing a reading habit: helping with selection, encouraging routines, and providing positive reading role models.

### 4.2 Listening to stories

The children were asked ‘Do you like listening to stories?’; ten out of the seventeen said they enjoyed it a lot, four said they enjoyed it a bit, and only three said they preferred to do other things. When this is
compared to their attitude towards reading, it can be seen that listening to stories is
generally perceived to be a more enjoyable experience than reading, with more children
stating that they enjoyed listening a lot and much fewer stating that they would prefer to
do other things.

One area where parents were mentioned the most was in the discussion of listening to
stories. All the children were asked how often they listened to stories. Unfortunately this
question was open to misinterpretation, some children included the stories they were read
at school, some only including they stories they were read at home, and some including the
audio books they listened to, so the following results will be affected by this. However,
through further probing into their listening habits it was possible in most cases to interpret
what they had said, splitting the interviews into those who were read to regularly (more
than once a week) by their parents, and those who listened to regularly to stories either at
school, home or in audio book format.

Five of the children were read to regularly by their parents, and three others mentioned
that they used to be read to. Overall, twelve of the children listened to stories regularly
(more than once a week) either in school, at home, or in audio book format. Fig. 9
illustrates the overall percentage of children in category of enjoyment compared to the
percentage of children in each category who are regularly read to, and the percentage of
children in each category who regularly listened to stories. Overall 24% of the children
interviewed found reading absorbing, but out of those who were regularly read to by their
parents this percentage increases to 40%. Overall, 41% of the children were indifferent to
books and reading, but of those read to regularly this is halved (to 20%) and for those who listen to stories it drops to 33%.

4.2.1 Listening to stories: summary
On the whole, these results show a correlation between listening to stories and the enjoyment of reading, with children who are read to being more likely to find books absorbing and enjoyable. They are therefore less likely to have an indifferent attitude towards books and reading, with a similar, though slightly less pronounced effect occurring with those who regularly listen to stories. However, it does not prove causation, since it is also possible that the children who find greatest enjoyment in reading will ask to be read to, or make time to listen to stories, whilst those who are indifferent towards books will not seek out literary experiences in the same manner.

4.3 Audio books

The children were interviewed concerning their opinions of and attitudes towards audio books and their responses have been categorized into four groups: involving, useful, prefer to read in their head, and boring. The children who described audio books as involving often described the experience in a similar way to those who described books as absorbing, including images such as being taken to another place and meeting different characters. G12f’s response is typical of interviewees in this category:

“What do you think about audio books? I think they are quite good, I like the ones that have really good expressions in them cause it kind of brings the story to life and everything.” (G12f)
There were two typical responses that fell into the ‘useful’ category; the first was the convenience of audio books, mentioning the ability to listen to stories whilst doing other things and being able to hear a story read without inconveniencing their parents, the second described the usefulness for those who struggled to read by giving them access to stories. For example:

“I think that they are good because if you find reading hard but then you still like stories saves your mum having to read to you all the time, so you can listen to them whenever you like.”

(‘f11f)

“Do you prefer listening to someone read to you or to an audio book? Listening to a book on CD, er because you don’t have to, you can walk around when you’re listening to it and do stuff.”

(N11m)

Six of the children’s responses fell into the ‘prefer to read in their head’ category. Reasons for this included a feeling that they had grown out of being read to, that audio books were often abridged and so were an inferior experience of the book, and that the narration inhibited their ability to imagine the stories and characters as they would have liked to. Finally, three of the children were entirely negative about audio books, describing them as boring. D11m’s comment gives some insight into why this might be:

“Cause on tape it’s not very, well it’s just a tape you know, and I switch it off, cause its long and it’s a story it’s just kind of boring so I’d rather have the book and be able to see the words as well as the story on the tape.”

(D11m)

D11m’s desire to be able to see the words suggests that he is a visual learner and therefore struggles with the purely auditory experience offered by audio books. This concurs with Cox Clark’s (2007) research suggesting that visual learners will struggle to engage with books in the audio format.
Fig. 11 shows that there is some correlation between attitude towards books and audio books, but that it is not definitive. Those who found reading absorbing, in the sense that they enjoyed the experience of being somewhere else, also enjoyed audio books and found them equally if not more absorbing than books. However, those who said they enjoyed books, but did not enthuse about experiencing other worlds, had mixed reactions to audio books, the majority preferring to read to themselves. There was also a mixed reaction from those who were indifferent towards books, with 3 positive responses and 4 negative ones; some finding listening equally or more enjoyable than books, some finding it equally or more boring than books.

4.3.1 Person vs. audio book
To provide greater insight into the listening experience, all the children were asked whether they preferred listening to an audio book or being read to by an adult. This prompted mixed reactions from the children: 9 preferring to listen to a person, 6 preferring to listen to an audio book, and two liked both equally. As the graph below (Fig. 12) shows, those who found audio books boring preferred to be read to by a person and those who described audio books as involving preferred to listen in that format.
However, the children in the middle of these two extremes of opinion do not follow a pattern. The children had a variety of reasons why they preferred to be read to. Three of the children argued that adults read with more expression than audio books, although the children largely mentioned that they enjoyed the funny voices and accents provided by their parents, it could be argued that these experiences are felt to be more involving due to the added dimension of being able to see facial expressions.

The reasons given for preferring to listen to audio books are clearer cut and match exactly the children’s attitudes towards them. The children who found audio books involving cited the exciting voices and sound effects as reason for their preference. The child who preferred to read felt he was too old to be read to, and that an audio book was simply the lesser of two evils:
“Do you prefer to listen to someone reading to you or to a recording? Book on CD, I don’t want someone reading to me. Why not? Cause it makes me feel like a little kid, if I’m going to read a book I’m going to read it myself.” (I14m)

The children who described audio books as ‘useful’ simply restated their opinions when asked what they would prefer; that they enjoyed being able to do other things and listen whenever they liked:

“Do you prefer to listen to someone reading to you or to a recording? Book on CD. Why is that? Cause if you like doing something while someone’s reading to you it’s a bit rude but if it’s a CD you can just switch it off.” (H13m)

4.3.2 Format
Surprisingly, despite the recent advances in technology and growth in audio book sales, three of the seventeen children only listened to audio books on tape, four only listened to audio books on CD and 6 children listened in both formats. Only one child of the seventeen listened to audio books in MP3 format, downloaded from the internet. This may be because of the nature of audio books; tapes allow you to stop the story at any point and pick up exactly where you left off, whereas very few CD or MP3 players have this functionality. This makes tapes the most convenient format for audio books despite their cumbersome nature.
4.3.3 F11f case study

One child’s experience provides insight into the use of audio books as a reader development tool and the circumstances which make it successful. F11f readily described reading as a challenge and is a self professed dyslexic, but falls into the highest category of reading enjoyment:

“What is your favorite kind of book? Probably an adventure story, where something exciting happens or a mystery...because you don’t know what’s going to happen and they’re exciting.

Why do you think books are fun? Because there are loads of different characters in books and there’s different types of variety.

Why do you like reading? Because it’s kind of like films bit it lets you imagine the pictures yourself, cause with films you watch it but with books you read it, you get to imagine the pictures in your head.

What do you think about books generally? I think they are good, and I, I find reading a bit hard but I still really enjoy them.

Do you think reading is difficult? Er.. well I find it a bit difficult but I have dyslexia so I find English and stuff a bit harder but I still try and enjoy it.”

The difficulty that F11f experienced is not the difficulty described by many of the other children. She doesn’t complain that she occasionally faces an unknown word as presented by a challenging read, but made it clear in the interview that the entire reading process was difficult. The question highlighted by F11f is: if reading presents her with such a negative experience why does she still have such a positive attitude towards books? It could be argued that this question is partly argued by the following responses:

“So you listen to stories every day? Yeah every day.

Are they read to you or do you listen to a recording? Well they are normally like read to me, or like someone’s reading to me on the CD but sometimes I’ve got these books where they read it and you can read along with the book, which er they’re quite fun.
What do you think about books audio books? I think that they are good because if you do find reading hard but then you still like stories saves your mum having to read to you all the time, so you can listen to them whenever you like.”

F11f is clearly getting regular exposure to books in a format that she can enjoy – without the frustration of struggling to decode the words. The phrase ‘all the time’ implies that her mother read to her a lot and still does, and has also provides her with support by giving her with read-along books. Overall, F11f makes it clear that listening to stories provides her with a way to enjoy stories despite finding reading difficult. Her positive attitude towards books and her perseverance in reading are a direct result of the positive experiences of literature gained by listening to stories. Although she falls into the category that prefers to be read to than to listen to audio books, she is still very positive about audio books, and her preference for being read to is because she enjoys the intimacy of being read to by her mother. F11f’s experiences are reminiscent of the experience of Rosina related by Varley (2002). In both cases the child suffered from dyslexia but founded a love of literature on the experience of listening rather than reading. This suggests that audio books can be a powerful tool for those with specific reading difficulties to enjoy literature.

4.3.4 Audio books: summary
Overall, the interviews revealed very mixed attitudes towards audio books, making it clear that simply exposing children more to books being read to them will not automatically give them a positive experience of literature. Although only three of the seventeen children had a negative attitude towards listening to stories, just over half of the children had a negative attitude towards audio books. Although there is a correlation between the amounts the children listen to stories and their attitude towards books there is little evidence to suggest causation. If listening to stories does encourage a greater enjoyment of reading it is clear that reading to children personally would be a more effective way of encouraging a love of reading in a larger number of children. However, the case study above suggests one of the circumstances where audio books can be a successful reader development strategy. Audio books can be effective providing children like F11f and Rosina with positive literary experiences and there is a need for research into their use with reluctant readers. However, the greatest reader development need revealed in the interviews is a need for help with selection; none of these children have a negative attitude towards reading but several of them are struggling to find books they really enjoy. Lastly, it is worth noting that the children who found reading absorbing were also positive about audio books, suggesting
that audio books might be a way to encourage these keen readers to try new genres or more challenging reads, perhaps even a way to help them cross over into adult fiction.

4.4 Library Attitudes

The children were asked a number of questions about libraries: how often they went, what they enjoyed about the library, what they would change, and what they thought about library activities. Out of the seventeen children interviewed, twelve of them visited the library regularly, while four children only visited a couple of times a year (usually during school holidays) and one child only having been once in his life. The majority of children liked going to the library, with eight of them being very positive about the experience. Despite the general feeling that children have become more interested in computers than books, only two of the children mentioned computers as being an attraction at the library with one of them only describing it as useful when her computer was broken. When asked to name the best thing about the library eight of the children spoke about the choice of books, six enjoyed the peaceful atmosphere, and three of them thought the best thing about the library was that it was free. Nearly all of the children struggled to think of an answer to the question about the worst thing about the library. Seven of the children said they couldn’t think of anything they would change, three of the children thought the library should be noisier with either more talking or music (although one of these children thought the best thing about the library was that it was quiet), and two of the children said the library should be quieter (without talking or computer games). Three of the children had opinions about the stock: one asking for more books for eleven to thirteen year olds; however, this child had also expressed difficulties in selecting books suggesting that he simply needs more help finding the ones that are already there. It is also clear that children’s opinion of the book stock is immensely subjective, as seen in this response:
“What do you think is the worst thing about the library? Err.. boring books, lots of boring books.”

(I14m)

The final comment from the interviews about the library emphasizes the importance of the library environment, with the child stating that the brickwork was the worst thing about the library. On the whole, these comments suggest that children are fairly satisfied with the current library format.

Library Activities

Only eight of the seventeen children could remember going to any kind of activity at the library, and five of these children had been taken by the school. The remaining three had attended a Summer Reading Challenge (SRC), which they all enjoyed, one of them stating:

“it was quite interesting to read all the different types of books.”

(M11m)

Since so few of the children attended activities at the library it is difficult to assess the success of these activities. The quote above suggests that for this child the SRC was successful in encouraging him to try a wider variety of books. However, since so few of the children attended the SRC it does suggest it needs to be better advertised. But it is also necessary to remember that with such a small sample these attendance rates are unlikely to be reflective of attendance figures across Sheffield.

Attitude towards story time suggestion

The children were asked their opinions of the suggestion of holding regular story times for children their own age. If there is a link between hearing stories and enjoying reading than this would be one way to promote enjoyment and deliver reader development objectives. The results are striking in the division between the sexes. The girls were overwhelmingly positive about the suggestion and said they would find it enjoyable, the following response is typical of the girls’ reactions:

“Um yeah, that would be good because you don’t often get to sit with your friends and listen to stories and it would be a nice time to hang out.”

(O9f)
Only one of the girls qualified her statement arguing the success of the event would depend on the book choice. Whereas the boys were overwhelmingly negative, with the two who stated that it would depend on the book choice giving the impression that they thought it would be unlikely to be a success:

“Do you think they should have story times for children your age at the library? What age groups? Your age. hmm well it should be just 8’s 9’s 10’s, 8’s with one book, 9’s with one book, 10’s with another book, people have different varieties of books cause people might not like that book and other people might like it, some people think it’s ok some people think it’s boring some people thinks it’s very boring, some people might think it was fun, some people might think it was very fun.

If they did do you think you would go? Erm, it depends what I’ve got on that day. So it wouldn’t be your first choice? No.”

(C8m)

This was one of the most positive male responses to the suggestion with many of them feeling that it would be embarrassing, boring, and restrictive to have set story times. One boy’s comment suggests that a similar activity could be an effective way to advertise new books to children:

“something like that might seem quite embarrassing but I might see what they were reading and then find that book and go and read it myself cause I’d feel much more comfortable reading it myself”

(M11m)
Having someone reading short teasers from books might be a way of enticing the children to try something new; however, it is clear that the story time format would have to be changed to appeal to the male audience.

**Library attitudes: summary**

Overall, it can be seen that these children have a generally positive attitude towards the library and enjoy it, not because of gimmicks, but for its books and atmosphere. A large number of the regular attend the library but very few of them had been to any events. Although the story time suggestion was met with a positive response from the girls interviewed it is important to remember that the girls already had a positive attitude towards books and reading with all of them reading every day. As a result, reader development activities that focus on encouraging a love of reading, in children who are not avid readers already, needs to be attractive to boys.

**4.5 Summary of Interviews**

Reflecting on the evidence as a whole, it is possible to argue that the seventeen children interviewed do not require reader development activities to change their attitude towards books and reading; none of them showed negative attitudes towards books or were reluctant to read. The needs of these children are mainly to do with book selection: some of them articulated difficulties in choosing books at the library; others simply described boredom with the books they were already familiar with. Whilst listening to stories does provide positive experiences with literature, and audio books can be a useful reader development tool for reluctant readers or those with specific reading difficulties. The mixed opinions of audio books suggest that greater promotion in libraries would not attract greater usage or increase enjoyment of reading. Rather, activities that promote specific books and aid children in finding books they would really enjoy would be of greater use. Although, the popularity of audio books with the avid readers interviewed suggests that they could prove to be a useful tool in encouraging them to try new genres or more challenging reads, possibly recommending audio books from the adult section would be valuable in helping children make the transition to the adult book stock.
B. Librarian Survey

The purpose of the questionnaire was to gauge the current opinion of audio books and reader development in public libraries. Due to time constraints it was only possible to collect six responses to the questionnaire, so these results will only offer a window of insight rather than revealing larger trends.

4.6 The enjoyment of reading

The survey asked the librarians what they felt the main factors were in encouraging an enjoyment of reading. Four out of the six librarians felt that having a reading role model was one of the most important factors. These role models came in two forms, Lib1 felt that it was important that children saw their peers enjoying reading; Lib2 and Lib4 felt that this was one of the reasons why the Summer Reading Challenge is successful, because children participate with their peers:

“This event is ‘acceptable’ to all ages because ‘everyone else is doing it’” (Lib2)

The other form of role model was parents, and the importance of family attitudes towards books and reading in encouraging the children to enjoy it. This was clearly described by Lib6:

“I know that we find in the library that children, who have an interest and enthusiasm of reading, have parents who have the same interest. If the children are surrounded by books from a young age, it becomes a much more natural pasttime for them and this enthusiasm is often passed on through generations. We have a member of staff who has worked in this library for 20 year, and he is now starting to see children who came to the story times years ago, now bringing their own children to the library. This is itself is evidence if the importance of family attitudes to reading.” (Lib6)

As well as having strong reading influences Lib6 also highlighted the importance of choice of materials, a view expressed by four of the six librarians:
“I think one of the main factors in encouraging an enjoyment of reading is having a variety of stories covering different subjects to reach children whatever their interests may be. I’ve found that even the most reluctant reader will be enthused by a book covering a subject they love such as space or dinosaurs.”

(Lib6)

While many of the librarians focused on the importance of giving children the choice of reading materials, free of judgment, the above quote also reveals the importance of helping children choose and find material that interests them, as discovered in the interviews with the children themselves. Two of the librarians also highlighted the importance of library activities and reading promotion to build confidence. They felt that promotions were necessary to bring books to children’s attention and by offering reward schemes (such as the Summer Reading Challenge) children’s confidence in their own ability is increased and adds an extra element of enjoyment, since:

“If a child enjoys reading they will read more.”

(Lib2)

4.7 Audio books

The librarians were also asked what they thought the purposes of audio books were. Five of the six described audio books as a resource for children with reading difficulties (including poor reading ability, dyslexia, and visual impairment). These comments are typical of the comments made:

“As a medium for children who struggle with the written word”

(Lib1)

“To allow children who in particular do not feel confident enough to read to enjoy stories.”

(Lib3)
Five of the six also described audio books as a useful way to keep children entertained on long car journeys. Four of the six librarians mentioned at least one aspect relating to reader development. For instance one librarian described audio books as for:

“children who are turned off books and feel they are “un-cool” may well prefer new technology as a medium” (Lib1)

Two of the librarians mentioned them as a way to encourage children to try different authors and genres. However, only one librarian was aware of the literacy benefits of audio books highlighted in the literature, and all the comments made concerning reader development took the form of an afterthought. Overall, it is clear from their comments that the librarians surveyed largely viewed audio books as resources for those with special reading difficulties. The librarians were also asked whether they felt that audio books were useful for encouraging reluctant readers. Three of the librarians felt that audio books were a useful way of making books more accessible for those whose interest is not matched by their reading ability, with one mentioning that audio books do allow children to enjoy books without the pressure of decoding the words. The responses of the librarians to this question very closely mirrored their opinions about the purpose of audio books: that their primary use was for children with particular reading difficulties.

This is reflected in their response to the question regarding the recommendation of audio books. Two of the librarians had recommended them to children who had particular reading difficulties. One librarian had recommended audio books to a parent as an alternative to bedtime stories and two had recommended them to parents for car journeys. Two others had specifically recommended the Harry Potter audio books to children who were too young to read it for themselves. It was particularly interesting to note that, in speaking to one librarian as she filled out the questionnaire, she commented that she rarely recommended particular titles to children, of books or audio books, due to their varying tastes, making the following comment in the questionnaire:

“Children have the option of borrowing 15 items, this gives them choice.” (Lib3)

Without further study it is impossible to tell whether this attitude is one that is prevalent among librarians or only reflects the opinions of the individual quoted here. However, considering that one of the issues highlighted from the interviews was the need for greater help with selection, this opinion is particularly unhelpful.
4.8 Reader Development Activities

Of the five librarians who answered the section on reader development activities, four of them felt that the Summer Reading Challenge was the most effective. The first reason given for this was the influence of peer reading role models. The survey has highlighted already the importance of peer influence in the success of activities and encouraging an enjoyment of reading, the feeling that ‘everyone else is doing it’ encourages more children to join in, as evidenced in the continually high numbers the librarians reported as attending. The second reason given for the success of the Summer Reading Challenge was the use of incentives such as medals and certificates. The incentives are important for a number of reasons, it provides a reason for children to get involved with the challenge, gives them something to aim towards, and the rewards give the child a sense of pride in their achievement and boosts their confidence as readers. Lastly, the challenge also has a competitive element, which can prove a powerful incentive to children to finish the challenge. One of the librarians responded that they felt that story times were the most successful activity they ran since they offered the incentive of a fun activity and was very easy for the parents. All of the libraries surveyed ran story times although the children who attended were generally aged five and under.

The librarians were also asked about gender differences they had noticed attending the activities as a result of the clear divide of opinion between the boys and the girls interviewed concerning the suggestion that libraries run story times aimed at children aged eight to fourteen. The librarians responded that attendance at most events was about equal, however, both Lib6 and Lib3 (in conversation) mentioned that they occasionally had more boys attending some events due to parents’ concerns that they are not reading. As a result of this concern, three of the librarians mentioned events run specifically to encourage boys to use the library and enjoy reading. Lib3 commenting that separate events are not necessary for girls since they appear to be more naturally inclined to read.

4.9 Survey: summary

Overall, the librarians surveyed felt that external influences (such as parental encouragement, or prizes) were the most effective influences in encouraging a love of reading, rather than attempting to engage each child in a story. Whilst some of the librarians viewed audio books as fun and a way to engage children with new authors or genres, they were primarily viewed as useful tools for those with specific reading difficulties and for car journeys, and were recommended as such. By far the most effective reader
development activity was considered to be the Summer Reading Challenge, due to its appeal to a wide range of children, and the elements of competition and reward. As a result of the concern about boys’ reading habits, some of the libraries had been involved in activities aimed towards encouraging boys to read and use the library. Although, the interviews with the children revealed that girls would be more receptive towards, and would enjoy, a story time aimed at older children, some of the librarians’ comments made it clear that it was felt to be unnecessary to offer girls extra encouragement to enjoy reading. The final issue that emerged from the survey was the need to help children to choose and find material that interests them, and conversely one librarian’s reluctance to recommend particular titles to children.
5. Conclusions

5.1 Objectives:

- To collate the research concerning audio books in order to establish their benefits to the reading process, the enjoyment of books, and their changing use in modern society.

From the wider literature concerning literacy and reader development, the factors that lead to reading enjoyment were: that children require material they enjoy, a confidence that they will be able to enjoy it considering their reading ability, and encouragement to persevere when they get stuck. It was also seen that reading to children was a hugely effective way of encouraging a love of reading. Reading to children was shown to have many benefits in terms encouraging literacy development: by exposing the child to complex language, themes, concepts, and expanding their vocabulary. It also enables them to experience literature free of the fear of failure and promotes a more positive attitude towards books and reading. These benefits were also shown to be gained from listening to audio books, many researchers argue that audio books provide a valuable reader development tool, allowing children to access the content of the book, encounter new words and concepts, and enjoy books at their comprehension level rather than being limited to books at their reading level. A number of case studies supported this assertion revealing the power of audio books to enable positive experiences with literature, free of the fear of failure presented by poor reading ability. Research also revealed a rise in the sales of audio books, although little research had been done into the changes in listening habits. It is also noteworthy that some research also revealed that the audio book experience may not appeal to all children, especially not visual learners who struggle with the purely auditory experience.

- To discover the listening habits of children, both to audio books and personal readings, and whether this has changed due to new technologies.

Whilst more of the children said they enjoyed listening to stories than said they enjoyed reading, only five of the seventeen were read to on a regular basis by their parents. Overall, twelve of the children listened to stories regularly (more than once a week) either in school, at home, or in audio book format. Only one child listened to audio books in MP3 format (downloaded from the internet) whilst three of the children only listened to audio books on
tape, four only listened to audio books on CD and 6 children listened in both formats. It was suggested that this was down to the frequent use of audio books in cars (where the facilities are usually for tape or CD) and the ease with which tapes can be stopped and started again from the same place.

- To discover children’s opinions of whether audio books do encourage an enjoyment of reading.

On the whole, results from the interviews showed a correlation between listening to stories and the enjoyment of reading, with children who were read to being more likely to find books enjoyable and less likely to have an indifferent attitude, with a similar, though slightly less pronounced effect occurring with those who regularly listen to stories. However, this cannot be interpreted as causation, since it is also possible that the children who find greatest enjoyment in reading will ask to be read to, or make time to listen to stories. Overall, the interviews revealed some very mixed attitudes towards audio books; although only three of the seventeen children had a negative attitude towards listening to stories, just over half of the children had a negative attitude towards audio books. If listening to stories does encourage a greater enjoyment of reading than reading to children would be a more acceptable method and a more effective method of encouraging a love of reading. However, in one instance audio books were felt to be an effective way of helping children to enjoy reading; F11f found that audio books helped her to enjoy books she would have struggled to read due to her dyslexia. Lastly, it is worth noting that the children who found reading absorbing were also positive about audio books, suggesting that audio books might be a way to encourage these keen readers to try new genres or more challenging reads, perhaps even a way to help them cross over into adult fiction.

- To explore the differences between children’s experiences of listening to audio books and having stories read to them.

The children also gave mixed responses when asked to compare their listening experiences, 9 preferred listening to a person, 6 preferred listening to an audio book, and two liked both equally. The reasons included: that being read to by an adult was more personal and that the adult was more expressive than an audio book, whilst audio books were described as more absorbing, convenient, and less embarrassing than being read to.
To explore children’s opinions of libraries services, especially with regard to the provision and borrowing of audio books, but also concerning their wider experiences of other reader development activities.

Overall, it can be seen that these children have a generally positive attitude towards the library and enjoy it for its books and atmosphere. A large number of them regularly attended the library but very few of them had been to any events. Although the story time suggestion was met with a positive response from the girls interviewed, it is important to remember that the girls interviewed already had a positive attitude towards books and reading and all of them read every day. As a result, reader development activities that focus on encouraging a love of reading in children who are not avid readers already, needs to be attractive to boys.

To compare the difference between audio books and other reader development activities for effectiveness, popularity, feasibleness, and resource expenditure.

Despite the fact that the promotion of audio books would take advantage of a resource already available at most libraries, the results from this study suggest that resources would be more efficiently spent on other reader development activities. The literature showed that the strength of audio books were in providing children with a positive experience of literature (possibly for the first time) and introducing them to the enjoyment found in books. However, the children interviewed were largely positive about reading, or at worst ambivalent (40%); none of them had strong negative feelings about books or reading, and were aware that reading had the potential to be enjoyable. Furthermore, since the opinions of audio books, in this sample, were so mixed, the promotion of audio books would not be the most effective or popular.

The interviews revealed that the children would benefit more from reader development activities that helped them with selecting appropriate reading material. The children were motivated to read for a number of reasons: parental encouragement, by the prospect of enjoyment, just to fill time or by the attraction of a particular book. The evidence suggests that children are struggling with selection, with many of the children having become stuck in a rut of a single author or series, and not finding material that was challenging enough to be enjoyable. Thus promotion of single titles to individual children would encourage many of them to read more. Finally, extracts from the interviews also pointed towards the importance of parents in developing a reading habit: helping with selection, encouraging
routines, and providing positive reading role models. Helping parents to make selection choices for their children and establish routines would also be effective in encouraging children to read more.

- To discover the current attitude of audio books in public libraries – promotions and staff attitudes.

Librarians primarily viewed audio books as useful tools for those with specific reading difficulties and for car journeys, and recommended them as such, although some did view audio books as a fun way to engage children with new authors or genres. The most effective reader development strategy was felt to be the Summer Reading Challenge due to the incentives offered to children to participate. These incentives along with parental encouragement and choice of material were described as the strongest influences in encouraging children to enjoy reading.

5.2 Aims:

- To discover the value of audio books in developing the enjoyment of reading.

Overall, audio books have been revealed to be valuable in a number of ways relating to the development of enjoyment of reading. As with reading to children, audio books encourage literacy development, making reading easier and more appealing. Some children find them more absorbing than print format due to sound effects and the range of voices, while others appreciate the flexibility of being able to listen whilst doing other things. Their greatest value was seen to be for those who struggle with reading (especially those with dyslexia), allowing them to experience the content of a book without the barrier of decoding and the fear of failure.

- To decide whether audio books should be promoted over other services as the most effective way to fulfill public library service objectives.

The data from the interviews and the surveys suggested that although audio books can be valuable in developing an enjoyment of reading, the promotion of audio books should not be prioritized over other reader development activities. This is because they have mixed appeal, with some children describing them as more boring than print. The interviews also revealed that, in this sample, children did not struggle with a negative view of books and reading, but those with an apathetic attitude need extra incentives, or the appeal of a particular title, to motivate them to read. As a result the Summer Reading Challenge is a
very effective method of reader development. However, the children would also benefit from more day-to-day advice about what they might enjoy reading, either directly from the librarians or through their parents.
6. Recommendations

Recommendations for the appropriate promotion of audio books in public libraries:

- To raise librarians’ awareness about the particular benefits of audio books to those with dyslexia.
- Raise librarians’ awareness of the literacy benefits of audio books so that they will encourage those who enjoy listening to carry on and listen to more.
- Consider taking advantage of their popularity with avid readers making them a useful tool in introducing them to new genres, authors, and possibly more challenging reads such as adult fiction or classics.

Recommendations for more effective reader development:

- Continue to run activities that offer extra incentives to read, such as goals to beat, competition with peers, and prizes for achievement.
- Run promotions that create excitement about specific titles since many children were motivated to read by hearing about a particular book.
- Offer parents and children help with selection and be willing to recommend specific titles.

Recommendations for future research:

- Complete more widespread research into the browsing and selection habits of children, investigating how extensively selection difficulties are preventing reader development.
- Conduct more research into the benefits of audio books to those with specific reading difficulties, such as dyslexia and reluctant readers.
- Carry out research into the effects of audio books on younger children who are in the process of acquiring basic literacy skills.
- Investigate the use of audio books to help children make the transition into adult fiction.
- Research their value to adult emergent readers.
- Develop ‘book marking’ technology for audio books in MP3 format giving them the accessibility of audio books on tape.

Word count: 18,109
Appendices

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PAA314,M1


[Accessed 23 June 2009].


Appendix A: Information Letter

The University of Sheffield
Western Bank
Sheffield
S10 2TN

28 June 2009

Dear Parent / Guardian,

Should Public Libraries do more to promote audio books to children?

Your child is being invited to take part in a research project examining the link between listening to stories and developing an enjoyment of reading. I am undertaking this project as the final part of my MA Librarianship course. Before filling out the attached consent form, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please feel free to contact us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

One of the purposes of Public Libraries is to promote the enjoyment of reading. It has been suggested that listening to stories can be a major factor in helping children to enjoy reading. The aim of this research is to explore this link between hearing stories and enjoying reading and to examine the impact of audio books in this process. The overall aim of the project is to produce some practical recommendations for public libraries to help them promote audio books appropriately. Bethany School has kindly agreed to allow us to conduct our research between now and the end of term and this letter has been sent out with every child at the school. We aim to interview approximately twenty of the children who have permission to participate in the research. If no consent form is returned, it will be assumed that you do not consent to your child participating in the research. Participation is entirely voluntary and your child’s consent will also be confirmed prior to their participation, and they will be at liberty to leave the interview at any point. We will not have access to your child without your permission.

During the interview we will talk to them about their experiences of listening to stories, (being read to personally and audio books), and what makes these experiences enjoyable. We will discuss how much they enjoy reading and whether listening to a story helps them to enjoy reading. The interviews will be conducted by myself, Philippa Evans, in a quiet area selected by the school, however, no teacher will be present during the interview. I have an up to date CRB check for volunteering at Wycliffe Evangelical Church youth activities. The interviews will be fairly informal as any part of their reading and listening experiences may provide valuable information for our research. They will only be required to participate in one interview which will last approximately twenty minutes. The interviews will be digitally recorded and then written out for analysis, once transcribed, the names of the participants will be changed and the recordings destroyed. No-one will be identifiable in any of the publications or reports produced about this research.
The results from this research will form the basis of a MA in Librarianship dissertation for the University of Sheffield, which will be completed by the start of the new school year, a copy of which will be presented to Bethany school on its completion. The University of Sheffield is funding and overseeing this research and it has been approved by Information Studies Department’s ethics review procedure.

If you have any questions or complaints during or following the research please feel free to contact the research supervisor, Sheila Webber. If you have any opinions or information that you feel would add to the research, or for more information, or do not hesitate to contact either Sheila or myself.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Kind regards

Philippa Evans
Lip08po@shef.ac.uk
0798 0181 483
Flat 1, 11 Beech Hill Road, S10 2SA

cc
Sheila Webber (Research Supervisor), Senior Lecturer, Department of Information Studies
s.webber@sheffield.ac.uk,
(+44/0) 114 222 2641
Appendix B: Parental Consent form

Parental / Guardian Consent Form

Should Public Libraries do more to promote audio books to children?

Name of Researcher: Philippa Evans

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<td>1.</td>
<td>I confirm that I have read and understand the attached information letter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I understand that my child’s participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>I understand that their responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to their anonymised responses. I understand that their name will not be linked with the research materials, and they will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>I agree for the data collected from my child to be used in future research</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>I consent to my child taking part in the above research project.</td>
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________________________   ________________   ____________________
Name of child              Date               Parent/Guardian Signature

Participant Identification Number for this project:
Appendix C: Interview questions

Hi,

How are you?

I am writing a book about making libraries better for children and I would like your help, do you mind if I ask you some questions about books, reading and listening to stories?

To help me remember what you have said, I have a microphone with me, is it ok to record you?

How old are you?

Books

What is your favourite kind of book? Why do you like them?

What do you think about books generally? Boring 1 – 5 fun

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1- Very boring</th>
<th>2- boring</th>
<th>3 - ok</th>
<th>4- fun</th>
<th>5- Very fun</th>
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Why do you think books are fun/boring?

Reading

How often do you read books?

Every day? Once a week? Since half term holidays? Since Christmas?

How much do you like reading?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1- Not at all</th>
<th>2- not a lot</th>
<th>3 - ok</th>
<th>4- a bit</th>
<th>5- A lot</th>
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<td>😊</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why do you like/dislike reading?
Do you think reading is difficult?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1- Very difficult</th>
<th>2- difficult</th>
<th>3 - ok</th>
<th>4- easy</th>
<th>5- Very easy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>😞</td>
<td>😞</td>
<td>😞</td>
<td>😊</td>
<td>😊</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What makes you want to read?

**Listening to stories**

Do you like listening to stories?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1- Not at all</th>
<th>2- not a lot</th>
<th>3 - ok</th>
<th>4- a bit</th>
<th>5- A lot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>😞</td>
<td>😞</td>
<td>😞</td>
<td>😊</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When was the last time you listened to a story?

(in the last week? Since the half term holidays? Since Christmas?)

How often do you listen to stories?

Are they read to you or do you listen to a recording, (or does someone make them up for you)?

If it was a recording –what did you listen to it on? Was on a tape/CD/ MP3 player (iPod)/Radio/internet?

How often do you listen to a story on (CD/tape etc.)?

(In the last week? Since the half term holidays? Since Christmas?)

Where did you listen to the story on (CD/tape etc.)?

What do you think about books on CD/ audio books/recorded stories?

Do you prefer to listen to someone reading to you or to a recording?

Why is that?

Do you have stories on CD at home? Do you get any from the library?
Libraries

How often do you go to the library?
(in the last week? Since the half term holidays? Since Christmas?)

What do you do at the library?

Do you like going to the library?

Can you tell me why?

What do you think the best thing is about the library?

What do you think the worst thing is about the library?

Have you been to any activities at the library? (SRC? Story times? Author visits? Arty thing?)

Do you think they should have story times for children your age at the library?

If they did do you think you would go?
Appendix D: survey questions

Librarian Questionnaire

This questionnaire is for research about audio books for children in libraries, and whether they can be used to encourage an enjoyment of reading, for a MA Librarianship dissertation for the University of Sheffield. If you have any questions about my research please feel free to contact Philippa Evans, at lip08po@shef.ac.uk or 0798 0181 483. All responses will be anonymised.

This questionnaire is about your opinions rather than for specific answers, so the questions are more to give you a starting point for discussion, feel free to ramble/ go off on a tangent/ not answer a question etc.

Your Opinions

What do you think the purpose of audio books for children are?

Have you ever recommended an audio book to a child or parent? If yes, why did you recommend it?

Do you think they can be useful in encouraging reluctant readers? If yes, why?

What do you think are the main factors in encouraging an enjoyment of reading?

Reader Development activities

What activities do you run to encourage children to enjoy books? (Please mark with an x)

- Summer Reading Challenge
- Story times
- Author (or special guest) visits
- Book groups
- Reading lists
- Book prizes (like carnegie shadowing etc.)
- Other (please specify):
What is the most successful reader development activity you run? Why do you think that is?

What percentage of girls and boys usually attend activities?

Do you/have you considered running activities separately for girls and boys?

What is the oldest age for which you run story times?

Thank you so much for your time.