

Powerful picture books: understanding disability in nursery schools

Chapter One

Introduction

All Early Years (EY) practitioners play a significant role in shaping the attitudes of the children they work with and, in doing so, help them to understand and make sense of a range of complex or abstract concepts and issues. One of the issues that they need to help children comprehend is the notion of exclusion – how some groups, because of their particular characteristics, are marginalised by society and its institutions. However, practitioners also need to go beyond this process of identification and description and begin to encourage children to engage with the reasons why this happens. In doing this they are themselves influenced by their own values and priorities that are based on a range of individual personal and professional experiences. Their views about a subject like the exclusion/ inclusion debate will be varied even though they have been working within a cultural and policy climate that has, for some time (and particularly during the period of the last Labour government), promoted this as good educational practice in England (Borsay, 2005; Hodgkinson, Vickerman, 2009; Rose, 2010; Terzi, 2010).

The focus of this study mainly concentrates on one of these marginalised and excluded groups. It will explore the issue of how the inclusion of children with a range of disabilities within EY settings can be improved if practitioners are provided with better resources for this task and, in particular, if they are made aware of the key role that picture books can play in this. The practitioner in an EY setting faces a number of challenges: apart from the need to ensure that all children are able to access the learning environment and the curriculum, there are additional difficulties around how this curriculum is presented and what it contains. The way in which disability is defined, described and accommodated or, alternatively ignored and made invisible, depends to some degree on the knowledge, skills and awareness of the practitioner. It also relies on whether the resources they have to work with are powerful enough to carry these complex messages about the inclusion or exclusion of people with disabilities. This thesis is concerned with exploring the way in which children's picture books, which reproduce and transmit key cultural and political messages about the world, are selected and used by practitioners in EY educational settings. In particular it focuses on the way picture books depicting disability are

selected because the images in these books reflect, both implicitly and explicitly, the way in which society sees its minority groups (Reiser, 1992; Butts, 1992; Watkins, 1999; Pinsent, 1997; Reynolds, 2007). In an EY educational setting, such texts are regarded as reliable sources of information as they are provided by practitioners as part of the curriculum. Their value is endorsed by their location and use in these settings and as such may go unchallenged in terms of content (Stephens, 1992; Knowles, Malmkjaer, 1996; Hollindale, 1998).

Despite their importance as educational and cultural artefacts, some children in England do not see many picture books until they experience them outside the home in various educational settings (Goodwin, 2008; Whitehead, 2010). When they do encounter them they are usually selected by adults, whether at home or in EY settings, to provide an accessible first encounter with the experience of literature. They are often read and re-read with the support of these adults, providing the child with a gateway through which they can make links to their personal experiences and giving them new ways of looking at the world. They require the child to pay close attention to what is conveyed by the pictures and how these are 'explained' by the adult, but also with what lies behind the picture in terms of the subtext - and it is the adult who needs to help develop these complex perceptual and semantic interpretive skills (Meek, 1982; Chambers, 1991; Baddeley, Eddershaw, 1994).

When children begin to experience EY education outside the home, it would be a widely held expectation that they will be provided with a wide range of picture books that have been carefully selected to stimulate imagination, a love of story, aesthetic appreciation and, to some extent, a representation of social reality. However, this is not, of course, automatically the case and the range of books presented is dependent on the choices made by the individual practitioners who work in particular educational settings. The extent to which these choices are shaped by the practitioner's own personal and professional experiences is important to understand, as is the fact that their initial and ongoing training will have helped to determine their view of the role books should play in the child's educational experience. These factors have a significant influence both on the way picture books are selected and the value they are given beyond their instrumental purpose in providing a stepping stone to books that rely on written text (Great Britain. Department of Education and Skills (DES), 2007a). Central to these choices are questions about the personal and professional values practitioners operate with and whether, as

they progress in their careers, they are encouraged to see picture books as tools that can be used for conveying complex ideas to young children about difference, inequality and social justice and as resources that can be used to challenge stereotypes about gender, ethnicity, social class and disability. The initial selection and use of picture books in an EY setting conveys powerful messages about what is valued and normal within that setting and if the range of views and opinions that challenge accepted social norms are not available then it is likely that children will not develop what the art critic John Berger (1972) calls different ‘ways of seeing’. This, of course, has significant implications around the child’s perception of disability. If all they encounter in their picture books are images of the non-disabled as ‘normal’ the task of encouraging them to see disability as just another version of normality gets harder. This is an issue that will be explored in more detail later in this study.

What are picture books?

Given that picture books will be frequently referred to in this thesis as a suggested tool to aid inclusive practice, it is necessary to provide a brief definition of this category of children’s literature (which will be explored more extensively in chapter two). Graham (2008:95) explains how the original purpose of illustrated books was ‘illumination’; which remains a useful description given that the illustrations in any book should enhance the meaning for a reader. She defines an ‘illustrated’ book as one that can be read and understood without the illustrations, which will, in some cases, have been added subsequently. These books are often illustrated in different versions by a variety of illustrators who are interpreting and choosing to amplify different parts of the text in particular ways.

Picture books are, however, different to illustrated books because the pictures are an integral and essential part of the overall experience and understanding of the text. It is generally considered that this category of children’s literature covers a range of books from those that are completely wordless or with relatively little written text to those that have at least half pictorial content in relation to the actual words (Nodleman, 1988; Doonan, 1993; Serafini, 2009; Whitehead, 2010). Most importantly, the pictures are not merely decorative but are essential to the meaning of the book ‘they are part of the discourse, part of the telling of the story; the story would be

incomplete without both elements.’ (Ross Johnston, 2011:86). Sometimes, the pictures themselves convey the narrative, whilst in other examples; pictures may add an alternative or parallel narrative or include mood and atmosphere through the use of colour, perspective and detail that cannot easily be expressed in the written text. The way that the words and the pictures are placed in relationship to each-other also varies; for example, they may be on every facing page, at the foot of each page or in a more integral and dynamic relationship where words and pictures are intertwined. All of these different formats are likely to be referred to by practitioners in this research.

Evans (2009: 7) claims that the most sophisticated picture books will have layers of meaning that may include pictorial references to other stories, twists and turns, use of irony and humour and points out that the ‘complexity of picture books should not be underestimated’. Whitehead (2010:129) neatly captures their unique quality when she says that ‘the very lack of written text means that a picture book is rich in narrative spaces that must be filled by the reader.’

What is meant by disability?

The term disability is used in this study to describe a wide range of congenital, developmental and medical difficulties including those that result from severe physical conditions such as deafness, blindness, polio, cystic fibrosis, sickle cell anaemia and cerebral palsy. It also includes the various communication and learning difficulties such as Down syndrome (DS), autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). This approach accords with The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (Great Britain, 1995:1) which states that: ‘A person has a disability if he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial long-term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day- to -day activities.’

Not all of the above disabilities will result in a child being defined as having a Special Educational Need (SEN), although most will require considerable adjustments to the learning environment, including the need for training of staff to meet individual needs.

However, the study recognises that this legal definition is a contested one reflecting the ongoing debate between advocates of the medical model of disability that has historically located

‘problems’ in the individual and those who champion the social model of disability which places the responsibility on society to remove barriers to full participation (Oliver, 1996). In many ways this has become a rather dated argument which has become highly complex and continues to be debated. Much of the current thinking about these models has been influenced by the disability rights movement since it sought to highlight the way in which the popular terminology used to describe disability often led to social exclusion and discrimination. However, despite their efforts, subsequent additions and amendments to the original DDA legislation continue to ignore the reservations expressed by some disability organisations who feel that it ‘still observes disability as an individual tragedy’ (Hodgkinson, Vickerman, 2009:43). This ongoing debate over definitions has been supplemented by the growth of the academic discipline of disability studies and Goodley (2011: xi) suggests that this ‘broad area of theory, research and practice ... are antagonistic to the popular view that disability equates with personal tragedy.’

Rationale for the research

Using a social constructionist framework, this thesis argues the case for recognising and analysing the relevance of powerful individual and structural influences on EY practitioners when they select picture books to use with young children. Roberts-Holmes (2005) discusses the way in which the interpretive tradition of social research is built on recognising that an understanding of the world involves a complex mix of shared cultural and personal experiences. Robson (1993:24) refers to the importance of understanding ‘underlying ideas, meanings and motivations’ whilst Strauss and Corbin (2005:10) emphasise that ‘the understanding of meaning is defined and redefined by interaction’. Individuals are influenced by what they already know and also by the consequences of new and ongoing experiences, including that of being a participant in research. Indeed, the participants in this study may themselves have to accommodate a new set of issues and concerns they had not previously been conscious of, such as the concept that picture books could be used to help children understand disability. This study, therefore, takes a critical theory approach in terms of recognising the potentially transformative purpose of educational research and includes an examination of how the curriculum can perpetuate existing social norms and explores ways in which these norms might be challenged in order to promote ideas like equality (Habermas, 1984; Cohen et al, 2005; Penn, 2005).

Apple (2004:5) points out that educational settings ‘act as agents of cultural and ideological hegemony’ and, given their role, EY practitioners play a potentially influential part in determining the ways in which these hegemonic ideas are first transmitted to children. He suggests that this early phase of education is crucial to the way that children learn how to define meaning through understanding what is given value in society by way of both the overt and hidden curriculum. This can sometimes be a challenge for those working with young children because it requires them to commit to the notion that ‘knowledge, at its roots, is ideological and political, inextricably tied to human interests and norms’ (Giroux, 1981:131). This may conflict with views that they have previously never needed to challenge and which present the statutory curriculum as the best and only way for children to learn. This different approach will help them to be aware of the limited nature of schooling and to instead see education as a vehicle for social change by ‘unveiling a world of oppression and then developing a pedagogy for liberation’ (Goodley, 2011:154).

Mac Naughton et al (2007:167) talk about the impact of the concept of a critically self-reflective practitioner and say that this may depend on the extent to which the role is perceived as what Gramsci, called the split between a ‘traditional’ intellectual or an ‘organic’ intellectual undertaking. They interpret Gramsci’s view of the intellectual as ‘someone who undertakes cultural, social and educational activities that either sustain or challenge particular world views or paradigms.’ Those that conform to and reinforce existing interpretations of knowledge are described as ‘traditional’ intellectuals and thus ‘support political and social *stability*’ in contrast to ‘organic’ intellectuals who ‘support political and social *change* [italics in original]. These writers suggest that concepts such as rights and diversity are not necessarily recognised or given prominence by the more conformist ‘traditional’ intellectuals that work in EY settings and that for such ideas to gain leverage in an organisation it is necessary for the ‘organic’ intellectuals to gain a degree of influence and status. However, the emergence of the ‘organic’ intellectual is by no means assured or given and it is always possible that their views will be resisted because they represent change and uncertainty in environments that have traditionally tended to be conservative and risk averse.

The underlying rationale for the subject of this study draws on the work of Barry Troyna as an example of an ‘organic’ intellectual and researcher who was committed to achieving social

justice in the educational debate. Although Troyna was not writing directly about disability, his work in the field of race and racism can be used to inform the debate, especially in the way he argued that all those working in education have a responsibility to ‘challenge racist vocabulary, social practices and organizations,’ (Sikes, Rizvi, 1997: 11). He also states that researchers have an important part to play in terms of committing to what he believes to be ‘fundamental principles of social justice, equality and participatory democracy’ (Troyna, Carrington, 1989:208). Part of this involves critically examining how a negative dominant discourse may be transmitted and perpetuated through curriculum resources, including picture books. This concern is supported by other research and writing around the issues of race, gender and class (Dixon, 1978; Browne, 1998; Pinsent, 2005 b). Although the issue of disability, however, appears to have been less fully explored (Barnes, 1991; Saunders, 2000) and has been described by Reiser (2000 b: 118) as ‘the final frontier’ in terms of discrimination, the need to understand how negative dominant discourses are reproduced remains the same.

The premise for this study is that the picture book, like any educational text, can contribute to alternative constructions of disability that can challenge existing discriminatory dominant discourses within EY settings and that this can, ultimately, bring about a wider change in social attitudes. Lewis (1995:63) expresses the concern that the ‘prevalence of adults’ and young adults’ misunderstandings about disability makes it imperative that such views are not passed on to younger children’. In discussing the influence of sectarianism in Northern Ireland, research by Connolly and Kelly (2002) demonstrates that children aged 3-6 years can form cultural and political preferences which can influence values and consequent behaviour. A strong argument can be made that EY practitioners need to develop a greater awareness of the ways in which young children notice the differences between people and that these need to be emphasized in a positive rather than negative way (Nutbrown, Clough, 2009). In turn this can lead to an understanding that the way in which the curriculum is presented is never neutral and that an educational setting ‘is not a passive mirror, but an *active* force’ [italics in original] (Apple, 2004: 39).

Giroux (1981: 130) acknowledges the work of Freire (1921-1997) who suggests that individuals need to develop this level of understanding themselves in the first instance in order to ‘perform a critical reading of reality so that they can act on that reality’ in terms of initiating change rather

than reacting to changes that are externally imposed. This is further supported by Moss (2006; 36) who suggests that EY practitioners in the United Kingdom (UK) are defined increasingly ‘by a set of technologies which specify practice and outcomes and value conformity to both.’ He reflects that they need to develop another dimension to their professionalism in terms of their role as researchers who ‘engage with politics and ethics, who can think for themselves and practice democratically’ (Moss, 2006: 38).

In this way, EY practitioners can become aware of the strengths and limitations of what is currently available in picture books with a disability related theme and can use that understanding to lobby for an improved selection (Saunders, 2000, Matthew, Clow 2007). In doing this, they would take a big step towards becoming ‘organic’ intellectuals. However, the ability to explore and challenge the discourses found in the limited range of children’s picture books featuring disability currently available to EY practitioners requires them to appreciate the value of these resources in the first place. Some part of the impetus for undertaking this research has arisen as a result of a longstanding personal professional concern that some EY practitioners appear to have an ambivalent attitude to the significance and potential power of images presented in picture books.

All children’s literature is culturally located and therefore communicates particular values (Inglis, 1981; Reynolds, 2007; Montgomery, Watson, 2009) and part of its function has always been to socialise as well as to entertain; thereby playing its part in ‘constructing a child that is on its way to adulthood’ (Nodleman, 2008:250). Defining, understanding and implementing what may be viewed as unproblematic shared values has been discussed by Smith (2005:44) who explains that such ideas are subject to structural influences which mean ‘it is not possible to develop a localised set of professional principles and ethics in a social and cultural vacuum.’ Like everybody else, EY practitioners are subject to a hegemonic discourse which operates through the machinery of the media and other powerful influences to give value and prominence to particular groups and their interests.

Ensuring an understanding of the human rights agenda and challenging discrimination are, by definition, a political act (Shor, 1992; Pinsent, 1997) which can conflict with some popular stereotypical perceptions that those working in the EY sector do not need to be concerned with politics (Hargreaves, Hopper 2006;McGillivray, 2008). By contrast, this research intends to

explore an alternative view which holds that settings can be ‘a locus for ethical and political practice’ (Dahlberg, Moss, 2005:2). Through selecting, or not selecting, particular picture books to use with young children in order to address issues of diversity, practitioners are expressing acceptance of a particular ideology, although they may not always be aware of this (Hollindale, 1988; Stephens, 1992; Sarland, 1999). Nodleman (2008: 162) believes that this unconscious embracing of ideology is absorbed by the practitioner and rationalised within a world view which holds that young children have a limited understanding of complex issues and therefore require a version of information presented to them in a way that is deemed appropriate to their perceived developmental needs. He states: ‘Adults produce and distribute literature exactly in order to teach children to know less and exactly in order to suit their own adult wants and needs’.

Issues relating to the reproduction of cultural and political ideas are not the only reason to undertake research in this field. Helping children understand disability from a human rights perspective links directly with current political priorities and policy developments. The Disability Equality Duty (DED) (Disability Rights Commission) that came into force in 2006 places a clear responsibility on all educational settings to have an anticipatory role in promoting inclusive, non discriminatory practice in terms of curriculum and resources. The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (Great Britain. Department for Education and Science (DfES), 2007a:9) which is now used as curriculum guidance by all practitioners in EY settings can be interpreted as attaching importance to the issue through its stated commitment to diversity:

Providers have a responsibility to ensure positive attitudes to diversity and difference- not only so that every child is included and not disadvantaged, but also so that they learn from the earliest age to value diversity in others and grow up making a positive contribution to society.

Picture books are recommended as a vehicle for providing what is described as an ‘Enabling Environment’ which includes ‘positive images that challenge children’s thinking and help them to embrace differences in gender, ethnicity, language, religion, culture, special educational needs and disabilities’ (Great Britain. DfES, 2007b:23). There appears to be an assumption that these recommendations are unproblematic and relatively easy to achieve but this research aims to explore the idea that it is much more of a challenge to achieve in reality and that the choices

made by individual practitioners in terms of providing books are subject to a wide range of variables.

The EY practitioner is likely to bring with them to their job a range of views and attitudes that will influence how they value the use of picture books as a learning resource. They will, for example, have ideas about the way a child is likely to develop and consequently what young children are capable of understanding (Martin, 1989; Meek, 1992). They will also have the influence of their training on the use of picture books and an understanding of how such resources can be used to teach about diversity (Siraj- Blatchford; 1993, Lane, 2008). Equally, they are likely to have developed views about what the nature of 'childhood' is and how ideas about the purpose of education and the role of children's rights in that context. All of these are important issues that the research will need to consider in more detail and which are explored more fully later in the study.

At a micro level, the decisions about which picture books are used by practitioners may also be influenced by pragmatic factors such as how the day in a setting is organised, the physical environmental layout and the financial constraints involved in providing a variety of up to date resources. In line with what is widely regarded as approved EY pedagogy, children may be actively encouraged to look at a chosen selection of picture books at regular intervals or the books may be provided as part of a wider repertoire of activities that the children are able to select or not (Sylva et al, 2003). This can be problematic in the sense that, by encouraging freedom of choice, a notion fundamentally embedded in a Western liberal view of childhood, the transmission of what is perceived as desirable knowledge is not necessarily guaranteed (Penn, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss, 2005). The ways in which EY settings are organised may therefore encourage a randomness of knowledge acquisition.

Other influences acting to regulate this situation may be the result of factors such as legislation, guidance, and policies on inclusion, SEN and equal opportunities developed at international, national, Local Authority (LA), and individual setting levels. The extent to which these are effective may depend on initial and ongoing training as well as personal interest and commitment to these agendas (Siraj-Blatchford, Clarke, 2000; Mohamed, 2006; Nutbrown, Clough, 2006). It may be that resources are provided reactively to reflect the particular population of the school at

any one time so that, for instance, the imminent arrival of a child with cerebral palsy may provoke the purchase of books that include portrayal of this disability.

It is not only professional and educational issues that are influencing the decisions made directly by the practitioners that determine whether picture books depicting disability get used in EY settings. In addition, initial economic or market-driven decisions made by publishers about what will sell at a particular time may also influence what is available to practitioners (Sampson, 2000; Matthew, Clow, 2007; Salisbury, 2007). Technological developments, constraints in publishing and printing techniques and the ways in which these books are publicised and distributed also play their part in determining what is made available (Reynolds, 1998; Powers, 2005). In turn, the picture books presented for publication are partly determined by choices of subject and style made by individual illustrators which are themselves influenced by personal experiences of childhood, training and artistic influences as well as particular motivation for illustration in the first place (Tucker, 1981; British Council and Library, 2003).

This study, in many ways, develops a theme initially explored by John Quicke (1985) in his book *Disability in Modern Children's Fiction*. He was concerned that legislation should act as a driver for the production of literature as an important element in moving towards what was then described as 'integrated' educational practice (the term 'inclusive' came at a later stage). Quicke (1985:7) explored the need for practitioners to critically analyze books with a theme of disability because of his belief in the power of fiction in developing social awareness. At the same time he recognized the possibly contradictory premise of his project: 'Maybe even to separate out a body of literature dealing with disability is itself a discriminatory act and counterproductive in terms of furthering integrationist ideals?'

Quicke's work was specifically driven by policy proposals in The Warnock Report (Great Britain. DES, 1978) and the subsequent Education Act (Great Britain, 1981) and was concerned with meeting the needs of a wider range of children with disabilities in mainstream education. This research will further examine and add to Quicke's belief in the potential of fiction to raise awareness of the concept of human rights for children. He chose to explore children's fiction in general but recommended the need for more detailed investigation into the importance of illustrated children's books which he acknowledged as an under-researched area at the time. Quicke usefully suggested four broad themes that could be considered when thinking about the

structure of children's books and these can provide a way into thinking about the content of children's literature that deals with disability: his four themes were bias and accuracy of information, perceptions of different characters, plot and characterization. Whilst he writes about the narrative structure and content used by writers of books for older children, these themes provide a useful framework for beginning to consider how illustrators may also be challenged in conveying accurate and sensitive portrayals that can be used effectively by practitioners as a vehicle for inclusive practice.

Quicke (1985: 135) was concerned that much of the literature available about this subject at the time was limited to what he described as 'quasi fiction'; 'books written in story form, but where the main aim is to convey factual information about the disability or difficulty. The plot of such books is usually very thin, sometimes almost non-existent ...'. He felt that this did little to convey the ordinariness of individual lives of children with disabilities and emphasized differences at the expense of similarities. The extent to which text and illustrations in a children's book may perpetuate and reinforce 'medical model' perceptions of disability was later highlighted by Leicester (1992) who developed a checklist in line with a 'social model' approach which was intended to help education practitioners be aware of bias and to thereby inform their book selection. This focuses on the extent to which disabled characters were portrayed in a positive manner and the extent of agency and power they were given. This is highlighted in relation to whether the able bodied characters are more prominent and the extent to which the story is told from an able bodied perspective (see appendix 6). This may also relate to what is included and omitted from a picture and whether disability is portrayed in a negative, problematic sense as opposed to a positive representation where the characters have agency and power. As James and James (2004:23) point out: 'acknowledgement has to be made of the diversity of children's childhoods and of children's own part in shaping their childhood experiences.'

It is also the case that picture books have to be created in the first place and this process too has issues associated with it that need some exploration. The research will also look at what books are available, the extent to which illustrators portray disabilities with sensitivity, and to what extent individual differences are presented with some degree of understanding or simply given a stereotypical portrayal. Artists may also be influenced by their own experience and

understanding of the subject and consequently lack confidence in their ability to deal with what might be an unfamiliar subject for illustration (Ray, 2006). Many disabilities have recognisable characteristics; for example, the distinctive facial features of many people with DS, or the use of support devices like wheelchairs, hearing aids or guide dogs (which may be why they are sometimes represented in picture books). The less visible disabilities like dyslexia and ASD are more challenging to depict with accuracy, although it is precisely these high incidence disabilities that are most likely to be within the experience of children attending mainstream educational settings.

Saunders (2000), from an 'insider' perspective as a mother with a disability, has produced a useful framework for analysis that evaluates books in terms of their accuracy of representation, diversity of images and variety of perspectives. In order to achieve a better critical analysis she suggests that practitioners apply what is known as the 'DICSEY' code when selecting books to raise disability awareness in children and to explore the theme of difference. This acronym proposes that adults need to be aware of how almost any picture book conveys both overt and subliminal messages about disability, appropriate images, control, society, enabling environments and the important role of young carers. In this way she believes that it is possible to broaden the range of books that can be used to address this issue given the relatively small numbers of books of high literary quality that deal specifically with disability. Her approach reinforces the view that 'images come from pictures and stories which only tell us part of the truth' (Saunders, 2000:32) and she provides a wide number of examples of ways in which the DICSEY code can be applied by practitioners in order that they can explore notions of difference and inequality with young children.

In terms of achieving a degree of social realism, it is also relevant to consider the importance of portraying up-to-date support equipment. For instance, wheelchairs are now often customized in bright colours and bear little resemblance to the traditional image of institutionalized versions. There are now many new aids and devices that illustrators may need to research in order to portray realistic social environments (Matthew, Clow, 2007). Nodleman (2008: 221) suggests that this is in itself a challenge because most representations of childhood in children's literature emphasize a 'pastoral, non technological age' in line with a romantic and nostalgic discourse. Montgomery and Watson(2009:8) point out that 'books published since 1990s now ask children

to engage with complex social issues' subjects that have no place in an idealized view of childhood as a protected and privileged space, separate from adults and their concerns.'

At an early stage in this research it emerged that a complementary project addressing similar themes relating to the relative absence of picture books featuring disability was being undertaken by the charity Scope. Earlier data from a small scale study they commissioned (Argent, 2006) confirmed the need, expressed by children with disabilities and their families, for more picture books relating to disability. The focus of their three year lottery funded project, 'In the Picture', was to promote awareness of the issue and to encourage further publication of good quality picture books. It was agreed with the project manager (Argent, 2006) that the field research with EY practitioners for this thesis would enable further dissemination of the Scope project and that they would share contacts with publishers, distributors and illustrators where possible to inform this new study.

In practical terms, the research written up in this thesis looks at how picture books with a disability related theme are selected by a sample of EY practitioners in statutory sector Nursery Schools (NS) in one Local Authority (LA) during the period 2007-2008. The following four key research questions are explored throughout:

1. What individual and structural factors influence picture book choices by practitioners in nursery schools?
2. How do picture books transmit ideology and culture?
3. What are the perceived circumstances affecting availability of picture books with a disability related theme for use in nursery schools?
4. Can picture books be seen as contributing to alternative constructions of disability?

Each of these research questions contains a number of inter-related themes that have to be addressed in order to begin to answer them adequately and it is necessary to spend a little time taking a preliminary look at how those issues present themselves.

What individual and structural factors influence picture book choices by practitioners in nursery schools?

The first research question considers the influence of discourse development on the way in which childhood has been visually represented and interpreted. It will be argued that the development of these discourses has affected the kind of literature that has been produced and ‘offers windows onto what various societies at different times consider as desirable for children and distinctive about them’ (Hall, 2003:139). There is substantial evidence suggesting that the dominant discourse in England in the twenty first century presents childhood as a time of innocence that needs to be protected from the incursion of inappropriate ‘adult’ concerns (Sarland, 1999; Mills, 2000; Penn, 2005; Nodleman, 2008). It is suggested that the hegemonic status of this discourse represents a powerful influence on practitioners deterring them from engaging with a wider and more diverse set of alternative discourses (Moss, 2006).

The power of this discourse may encourage a view that the subject of disability is not appropriate for picture books because it interrupts the ‘autonomy of the felicitous space’ (Nikolajeva 2002:306). In other words, there is a pressure to present childhood as a special, happy domain that exists beyond the reality of a world characterised by imperfection, difference or disability. There are also many individual constraints that may influence picture book selection. For example, the aesthetic response on the part of the adult reader may vary considerably according to personal taste (Doonan, 1993; Evans, 2009). Responses to these factors may override the content of a story and the representative accuracy of the illustrations when a selection is made. The extent to which these drive choices will be discussed later in some detail.

How do picture books transmit ideology and culture?

The second research question explores how social attitudes are shaped through the kinds of picture books that are provided, or not provided. Language, as experienced by children through books, is described by Hunt (1990:2) as a powerful social agent that is ‘culturally formative, and of massive importance educationally, intellectually and socially’. Reynolds (2007:1) draws attention to the transformative purpose of children’s literature as ‘encouraging readers to approach ideas, issues and objects from new perspectives and so prepare the way for change’ and

as such ‘replete with radical potential’. Picture books exert a particularly powerful influence partly because they are usually first experienced by children when they are at an early stage of understanding the principles and conventions of narrative and has to be set alongside their developing aesthetic taste, visual awareness and a love of literature (Graham, 2008; Browne, 2009).

Zipes (2002: xiii) says that it is important to acknowledge the impact of language and literature on young children because this is a significant part of their socialization. Although his focus is on books for older children, he confirms the underlying concern of this thesis that, although children are active participants in making sense of a cultural artefact such as a picture book, this participation remains limited because ‘adults ultimately shape and determine the children’s private and public spheres’.

Another consideration may be the concern that children need to be protected from uncomfortable truths, or at least those truths that adults feel are inappropriate (Pinsent, 1997). Nodleman (2008:161) explores a paradox that he believes lies at the heart of children’s literature when he says ‘Its key lesson might be to teach children how not to know’. In this way childhood is controlled and defined more effectively by adults who are likely to characterise such interventions as wholly benign.

Stephens (1992:158) points out that the pictures included in a text for young children represent ‘some version of consensus reality and use conventional codes of representation’. In other words, the chosen images are selected by illustrators from a particular cultural repository that will be necessarily shaped by the particular perspective of the writer/ illustrator. He believes strongly that ‘ideological positions are usually quite overt’ in terms of the desire to ‘perpetuate certain values or to resist socially dominant values’ (Stephens, 1992:3). Individual adults play a significant role in making particular picture books available and giving those that are provided a status that may convey ‘current hegemonic values that limit freedom as well as allow it’ (Nodleman, 2008:178).

What are the perceived circumstances affecting availability of picture books with a disability related theme for use in nursery schools?

The third research question addresses the issues around how these books are produced and marketed for use by practitioners. The idea that there is a prevailing dominant discourse of childhood seems to be confirmed by the lack of books available to practitioners dealing with this aspect of diversity. Publishers and distributors are clearly in a strong position to change this by making a wider selection of picture books available but are themselves influenced in what they commission by the power of the dominant hegemony. It is probable that in order for there to be change EY practitioners need to be aware of, comment on and potentially influence this limited range of available resources.

There are other structural constraints and opportunities to be considered here. What gets published is partly due to practical and logistical possibilities in terms of technical processes. In the past what publishers and printers have been able to achieve has been relatively restricted and only since the 1960s has it been possible to experiment with colour and layouts that enable more complex representations by artists (Darling, 1999). This in itself contributed to the boom in the range, scope and scale of children's picture book publishing and this phenomenon may have had an influence on potential illustrators who are now able to see picture books having artistic status as well as enhanced educational possibilities (Hunt, 2009)

Can picture books be seen as contributing to alternative constructions of disability?

The fourth research question assumes some links to the wider debate around inequality and a human rights based approach to practice. Given that EY practitioners should be able to use picture books as one way of addressing the individual needs of children, it is necessary to consider to what extent they might need training to support knowledge and understanding of equality issues in general (Nutbrown, Clough, 2006; Golder et al, 2009).

Hollindale (1988:11) strongly believes that training needs to equip future practitioners with the ability to recognize covert and overt messages in any text. He is particularly concerned that they are also able to recognize a passive ideology which, by omitting important content, remains

powerful in terms of shaping attitudes in the reader whereby ‘unexamined, passive values are widely shared values, and we should not underestimate the powers of reinforcement vested in quiescent and unconscious ideology’.

In terms of methodology, this research uses a case study approach (Yin, 1984; Bassey, 1999; Stake, 2000) that aims to discover how twelve EY practitioners in a sample of NS in one LA select picture books to be used with young children aged 3-5 years. This includes whether books with a disability related theme are included in this selection and how and why these particular books are accessed by practitioners. The focus is on the practitioners because of the significant role that they play in providing education and the relative power that they hold in either confirming or challenging images of normality as a foundation for the understanding of difference. In terms of picture book selection, they represent influential ‘gatekeepers’ as they, like other adults, are likely to purchase on behalf of younger children (Squires, 2009). It also investigates how a sample of ten training providers prepare EY practitioners for working in inclusive educational settings and whether this includes using picture books as a curriculum resource to inform children about disability. To aid this process it examines in some detail a sample of four picture books with a disability related theme in order to further explore and extend the themes first suggested by the work of Quicke (1985). It also makes reference to relevant documents that are used in all EY settings to demonstrate how practitioners work within a policy and statutory curriculum framework.

The next chapter reviews a range of relevant literature from the subject areas of childhood studies, children’s literature, illustration and disability studies, all of which contribute to an understanding of the research questions. Reynolds (2011:123) points out how researchers can benefit from ‘drawing on and combining multiple approaches to construct particular lenses through which to look at the material they have identified. Shor (1992), Saunders (2000) and Dahlberg and Moss (2005:23) all recognise the need for academics from particular subject areas to go beyond narrow boundaries and emphasise the benefits of what they refer to as ‘border crossing’ because unfamiliar but related subject perspectives can be intellectually invigorating and beneficial for both research and practice and thereby inform new and exciting debate.

Chapter two

Literature review

Introduction

The subject matter of this thesis necessarily requires a multi-disciplinary approach and, as a result, required the consideration of a wide range of literature from within very different academic traditions. Initially this entailed reviewing a range of literature from **education** textbooks and bibliographic data bases with an emphasis on *early years, practitioner, inclusion, disability* and *SEN* as key search terms. Due to the nature of the research questions, a parallel but equally important search was undertaken from a range of **children's literature** sources with an emphasis on *picture books, ideology, equality, diversity, disability* and *social justice*. To begin with the structure of this chapter was clearly organised under these two broad areas of enquiry, but, as a result of further reading, it seemed more appropriate to interweave these in addition to several emerging and related key search terms in relation to **disability studies** and **childhood studies** to reflect the complex social constructivist framework of the study.

Although there is a wealth of literature about picture books for young children, written from a range of different perspectives, relatively little of this focuses on how they can play a part in influencing attitudes to disability. There is also little written about the powerful role played by the various adults - illustrators, publishers, reviewers, distributors, trainers and practitioners - in determining what books are made available to young children. This chapter aims to provide an overview of some major areas of academic research on the subject of picture books, described by Reynolds (2007: 3) as 'a curious and paradoxical cultural space: a space that is simultaneously highly regulated and overlooked, orthodox and radical, didactic and subversive.' It reflects on how using pictures to help children learn about disability can be related to wider perceptions about how literature is 'composed of ideological and educational assumptions that have a great deal to do with power and privilege' (Watson, 1992:1).

In order to set the context for the later field research, which looks at how EY practitioners make decisions about the picture books they choose to make available to children aged 3-5 years, it is helpful to undertake a critical review of existing theory and research relating to current debates

about what is meant and understood by the term ‘childhood.’ This is relevant to the social constructionist framework since it may shed light on the way professionals make their choice of books for children to read. This will also enable an exploration of how these discourses are captured by their visual representation in children’s literature through the use of illustration. Because these debates about the nature of childhood do not take place in a policy or political vacuum, it will then be important and appropriate to look at the historical context that has informed the development of inclusive practice in education and how definitions of inclusion remain contested. Finally, there is a discussion about the role that EY practitioners play in the selection of picture books that can contribute to achieving a better understanding of disability and this makes reference to training, wider structural and individual influences that may influence these decisions.

The relationship between the development of the picture book and changing perceptions of childhood

The ways in which adults perceive children and their beliefs about what children need from education are strongly influenced by different and changing discourses of childhood (Postman, 1994; Prout, 2005; Wyness, 2006 and Gabriel, 2007). James and James (2004:7) identify the way in which childhood is constructed by key cultural determinants and discourses that are not necessarily immediately obvious to us and Jones (2009:108) believes we should not be surprised by this because all adults are ‘informed by cultural attitudes that we are not alert to, because we are so deeply enmeshed in the culture we live in and cannot easily see them.’

Rowe Townsend (1965) was one of the first writers to examine the emergence of children’s books alongside changing perceptions of childhood that were happening in the eighteenth century. Prior to this shift in the way childhood was conceived of, texts available for children were largely overtly didactic and religious in nature and focused on the notion of moral improvement and correct behaviour. However, by the beginning of the nineteenth century there had been a change towards providing a greater range of books that focussed on the role reading could have as recreation and enjoyment. By this time children (of the wealthier classes at least) were more often regarded as autonomous individuals with a range of social and emotional needs reflecting their age and maturity. It is important to acknowledge that these changes in attitudes came about as a result of a combination of historical, social, political economic and cultural

changes and that these had a direct impact on children and their families. At the same time, Butts (1992: xiii) reminds us that seeing 'literature as a straightforward response to social conditions is too deterministic and reductive'. He points out that some of the best writers of literature do not just reflect and reinforce society's norms but question and contradict dominant values and bring about change through exposing social injustice, citing *The Water Babies* (1862-3) by Charles Kingsley as an example of this.

In writing about concepts of childhood and 'emphasising its malleable, changeable and ultimately contested nature', Wyness (2006:8) identifies three very different forms these discourses have taken. He describes the first of these as 'the sentiments school [which] concentrates on the power of attitudes, moral dispositions and expectations' (Wyness, 2006:16). This approach is influenced by the groundbreaking work of the medieval historian Phillipe Aries (1962) who suggests that childhood as a concept did not exist in the way we currently understand it prior to the sixteenth century and that children were viewed very differently at that time. Having survived the physical vulnerability of their earliest years, they were expected to behave, and were treated, as miniature adults and afforded no special privileges. Aries developed the idea that the modern concept of childhood only gradually emerged later in the eighteenth century when adults started to believe children needed to be separated from adult society because they were essentially immature and in need of training and education in order that they could be 'harnessed and moulded in preparation for adulthood' (Wyness, 2006:13). Aries also believed that the increased privatization of family life led to children being ascribed a particular special value that became linked to the need to preserve their innocence and protect them from the cares and responsibilities of adult life. Aries' work focussed on the way the concept of childhood had developed in wealthier, more privileged families but later work by Shorter (1976) brought the wider experiences of peasant and working class families into this picture. Shorter argued that the changing attitudes towards childhood Aries had noted in the wealthier and aristocratic families had gradually trickled down to the wider population. Until that point, less affluent sections of society had been forced by very high child mortality rates to see the state of motherhood in a somewhat pragmatic way. This resulted in a seeming indifference towards the child that stemmed 'from an inability to view their children as any different from any other aspect of their lives'. He argues that this gradual change in attitudes to children, resulting in a more sentimental view of childhood, came about in the middle of the eighteenth century among the more affluent

members of society and gradually influenced attitudes in the working classes by the beginning of the twentieth century (Wyness, 2006:15).

This interpretation of childhood as a special time which has to be defended has been influential in terms of the production of literature that confirms and reproduces this version of childhood. Williams (1977: 188) recognises that the repeated variation on this theme across literature serves an important purpose in reinforcing a message when he says that: 'Most stable forms, of the kind properly recognized as collective, belong to social systems which can also be recognized as relatively collective and stable'. Therefore, the production of a large number of picture books that repeat the message that certain kinds of childhoods are 'normal' plays an important part in continuing the impression that those that do not conform to this model may be regarded as unconventional, eccentric and even suspicious. Nodleman (2008: 238) suggests that children's literature is particularly powerful in this respect because it is controlled by adults whose interests lie in perpetuating a specific interpretation of childhood and he suggests that this makes the genre inherently conservative 'not only nostalgic for the past but determined to resist change in the present'. He goes on to propose that the process of replicating a particular view of childhood and children through literature gradually closes off the possibility of any diversion from what is expected and further confirms the one that has been endorsed, thus contributing to cultural hegemony. This has implications for the publication of picture books with non- traditional themes or ones that are regarded as 'off message' even if it might be supposed that the message is a desirable one in terms of raising awareness about a subject such as disability.

Wyness (2006) goes on to describe the second influential version of childhood as 'a materialist approach' that concentrates on how children have been required to become subordinated and conform to the needs of adults who want to separate and organize them. He cites the work of Postman (1982) who sees the development of the concept of childhood as having its origins in the early sixteenth century and being directly linked to the invention of the printing press and the subsequent rise in adult literacy and the opportunities for education this opened up. Postman argues that wider adult literacy made it easier for adults to become the gatekeepers of essential knowledge about the world – knowledge that demarcated the world of the adult from the world of the child. So, through the control of literacy adults also effectively controlled the transition from childhood ignorance to grown-up knowledge. Wyness explains that Postman's view differs

from the ‘sentiments approach’ because it includes an analysis of how this separateness between childhood and adulthood continues to change because the impact of more recent technologies on children has resulted in ‘flattening the boundaries between adults and children...[who].are exposed to the same images, ideas and risks as their parents... thus lose their special qualities as vulnerable, innocent and dependent.’ (Wyness, 2006:16).

The third version of childhood described by Wyness is that of ‘radical social constructionism’. This differs from the sentiments and materialist versions which describe how adults have subordinated children in different ways for different purposes and instead recognises that a definition of childhood ‘ is almost entirely composed of myths, accounts and visual representations’ (Wyness, 2006:17). This position argues that there is no single, reliable definition of childhood but instead multiple versions constructed through the complex influences of history, politics, economics and the environment acting on professional practice and includes the views of children themselves (Dahlberg, Moss, 2005).

However, the very idea that we should be trying to define the state of ‘childhood’ is contested by Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (1992:7) who argue that it is not a definitive definition of childhood we should be interested in but more an awareness of which of the different concepts of childhood that we favour: ‘Childhood is a product of discourse: we do not ask what is childhood but from what standpoint and for what purposes do we talk about childhood’.

Although it is important to recognize the contribution of the sentiments and materialist versions of understanding childhood, this thesis will be concerned predominantly with this social constructionist discourse, focussing on why and how the concept of childhood has been socially constructed and the potential impact this has on individual practitioners in terms of how they make judgements about picture book selection.

Factors influencing practitioner picture book choices

Postman (1994:59) described the search for an understanding of what the concept of childhood means in terms of two influential and enduring philosophical perspectives. He cites the influence of Rousseau (1712 – 1778) in creating a view that formal education is ‘essentially a subtraction process’ whereby the innocence and naive wisdom of children is systematically corrupted as they are taught how to conform to narrow adult expectations; and he places this in contrast to the influence of Locke (1632-1704) who had seen education as ‘an addition process’ that builds on a blank canvas and guides children towards a more in depth and accurate understanding of the world.

The ways in which our social structures and institutions have evolved in the light of these competing views contribute to how individual attitudes and beliefs are shaped. If an EY practitioner is directly or indirectly influenced by the views of Rousseau, for example, they may be reluctant to choose picture books that present social issues that disturb a more conventional, Romantic view of childhood. This view may be further reinforced by the popular media that perceives and portrays a child as essentially natural, innocent and needing to be protected from disturbing truths (Higgonet, 1998; Mills, 2000)). For instance, a practitioner may take the view that a book that shows a character with a physical disability disturbs the more traditional and comfortable world of childhood that is depicted in the majority of picture books (Montgomery, Watson, 2009). Indeed, Reiser (2000b) makes the point that children’s literature has traditionally used disability as a literary device to portray a mixture of evil, menace, danger and social exclusion; Captain Hook in *Peter Pan* (Barrie, 1928) being an excellent example of evil and menace whilst social exclusion, is exemplified by the boy who is left outside the magic mountain in *The Pied Piper* (Browning, 1888). He believes that continuing to use conventional portrayals of disability in this way may contribute to perpetuating negative stereotypes that do not reflect the real experiences of modern children.

Hollindale (1988:5) explores the notion that presenting children with safe and unthreatening storylines may be the predominant view of many practitioners. He suggests that this is because they are essentially more concerned with providing for the perceived needs of an idealised child rather than seeing the potential role of books in conveying a particular version of childhood, a specific ideology or a particular social message. He highlights a schism between what he

describes as ‘book people’ who recognise the cultural and potentially transformative power of literature and ‘child people’ who may see the use of picture books as principally a mechanism to facilitate the early stages of literacy and which act to confirm the status quo by providing unchallenging content. It may be, he argues, that they are simply unaware of the extent to which this status quo is socially, economically and culturally constructed (Gittens, 2004).

Despite its prevalence as a discourse in the late twentieth and twenty first centuries, Montgomery and Watson (2009:7) believe ‘the universal, innocent, protected child’ to be an ‘ideal that has always been well out of reach of many, perhaps the majority of children.’ The image of the innocent, dependent child as part of the ‘normal’, often nuclear, family continues to influence both policy and practice with concerns about ‘lost’ and ‘stolen’ childhoods claiming considerable public attention (Kehily, 2004:3; Odell, 2008). This is despite evidence that demonstrates ‘our ways of thinking about contemporary childhoods need to take account of the more fluid and ‘atypical’ family situations that are increasingly common in contemporary society’ (Cline et al, 2009: 36).

However, it is possible for the EY practitioner to see these issues from another perspective – one which has also been explored to some extent in the media and in the UK through some recent social policy initiatives. Locke sees the child as needing to be nurtured and socialized by education so that they become a potential citizen with ‘sound attitudes’ (Postman, 1994:57). Loreman (2009) points out that Locke’s view of how children learn best still underpins aspects of current educational pedagogy in terms of how the curriculum is packaged and delivered and how classrooms are managed. Such an approach might also allow space for the practitioner to express their own values and to introduce books that depict important social issues that can influence how the child develops and becomes an adult. For instance, Anderson (2005) promotes the use of fictional texts in helping children to understand issues of participation, citizenship and responsibility from a young age.

In reality, it is likely that many practitioners will be influenced by aspects of both of the philosophies mentioned above as they are both culturally embedded in terms of how childhood can be defined as a time of both ‘being and becoming’. The concept of ‘being’ refers to the Romantic view of the child as a social actor in their own right from birth and Uprichard (2008:305) describes this as the ‘emergent paradigm’ in the sociology of childhood. ‘Becoming’

corresponds with Locke's deficit model of childhood which focuses on the future-orientated adult in the making. Uprichard believes that neither position can be seen as exclusive of the other and her research demonstrates that 'looking forward to what a child 'becomes' is arguably an important part of 'being' a child' (Uprichard, 2008: 306).

The central importance of the views expressed by the followers of Rousseau or Locke is clear but practitioners may also be influenced by the developmental discourse of childhood, which has its origins in the nineteenth century, and which Barron (2005: 196) describes as the 'maturational unfolding of latent abilities' in conjunction with interactions with the environment. This is significant in terms of the influence that this set of ideas has had on definitions of a 'normal' childhood (Stainton Rogers, Stainton Rogers, 1992). As Penn (2005:7) explains, this ability to describe and define what is normal underpins legislation, policy, curricula and practice and acts as a 'device that enables those in control or in charge to define, classify and treat those who do not seem to fit in'. Rose (1990:142) points out that the pedagogy in EY settings has historically provided the perfect endorsement for a developmental approach as 'they simultaneously allowed for standardization and normalization- the collection of comparable information on a large number of subjects and its analysis in such a way as to construct norms'.

Moss (2006:35) explains that this developmental approach contributes to the restricted technical aspect of professional identity as it provides 'certainty, through outcomes that are known and measurable and prescribed methods to achieve them'. In this way conformity and compliance are encouraged by ensuring that the curriculum is planned in order to achieve the required learning goals. However, Nutbrown and Carter (2010:109) suggest that this 'assessment for management and accountability' is only one purpose of assessment and needs to be balanced with 'assessment for teaching and learning' and 'assessment for research'.

Duffy (2010:101)) points out that the requirements of The Childcare Act (Great Britain, 2006) which 'places an outcomes duty on local authorities' in order to address inequalities and target the disadvantaged may lead to 'a narrowing of the curriculum and a focus on the goals at the end of EYFS rather than what is best for children at an earlier stage of development'. Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (1992:39-40) are similarly concerned that an over emphasis on measurable outcomes can significantly affect how practitioners perceive children: 'It has become

a story with such compelling plausibility it has overwhelmingly acquired the status of incontrovertible truth- this is the way things really are’.

Many writers discuss the importance of recognising the influence of social and personal constructs of childhood on adults and the way in which this may result in unreliable and often romanticised memories (Inglis, 1981; Gabriel, 2007; Goodwin, 2008; Hunt, 2009). Nodleman (2008) discusses how romantic notions of childhood, alongside protective discourses about what children need, make the literature that we allow children to consume very powerful.

All EY practitioners will be influenced by their own childhood experiences and these may be very different to those of the children that they work with (Kehily, 2004; James, James, 2004). In terms of inclusion, older practitioners will be unlikely to have experience of being a child in an inclusive school and rarely have had the opportunity to socialise with peers with disabilities who would have been educated in segregated, often residential schools. It may be the case that this is what they perceive as a more ‘normal’ school experience and so would not be surprised that children with disabilities are similarly invisible in most children’s picture books. On the other hand, it is recognised that literature can open up new worlds to both children and adults that they have not directly experienced (Hollindale, 1997) and this in itself may prompt practitioners to provide particular books for children.

Picture books and diversity

A good deal of the writing about children’s picture books considers the chronological development of the genre and this can be very useful in terms of recognising the impact of important historical influences and the wider social context (Watson, 1996; Grenby, 2009; Montgomery, Watson, 2009). This approach to the critical analysis of literature is described as New Historicism which ‘treats literary texts as a space where power relations are made visible (Brannigan, 1998:6). Rudd (2011:17) points out that this is a relevant perspective to apply to the study of children’s literature because ‘ history itself is always storied, always related from a partial viewpoint.’ From a social constructivist perspective, it is worth noting that these theoretical influences in themselves have generally been identified, selected and given status by English Literature academics and (to a lesser extent) History of Art academics. The study of children’s literature has been slow to gain status in literary academia and the specific study of

picture books is even more recent and has been largely due to an influential group of people who have played their part in ensuring that the separate academic study of these books has been accorded legitimacy and status (Sampson, 2000; Nodleman, 2008; Hunt, 2009; Evans, 2009; Grenby, Reynolds, 2011).

The increasing number of picture books published that relate to issues of diversity and equality has also been due to some other important external influences that are part of a changing set of social attitudes. Rudd (2011:118) explains the need to consider ‘everything about how power operates in texts from the way such issues as class, gender, ethnicity, nationality, colonialism and disability are formulated and resolved.’ As an example of this, Pinsent (2005b:193) discusses how the political focus in the 1970s on addressing social inequalities relating to gender, race and class through legislation and policy appeared to have an impact on the kind of children’s books that were written and published from that time. She describes how writers of socially realistic children’s books were thus more likely to address issues of diversity in direct response to the changing social landscape, particularly in terms of more sensitive representation. The subject of disability has taken much longer to influence children’s books in terms of text and illustrative content despite the everyday experiences of children who are being educated in more inclusive environments (Saunders, 2000). It may be that this is partly due to a lack of lobbying from interested parties because of the relatively higher priority they have given to more tangible challenges like access and entitlement to services. It may also be the case that authors and illustrators lack knowledge and familiarity with the subject matter and are not confident in their portrayal of individuals in an appropriate and sensitive manner.

The child, the book and changing cultural influences

Nodleman (2008:85) argues that adults assume childhood is experienced as a set of overarching commonalities and these views act to confirm the need for particular kinds of books:

If adults can ever in any small or general way define childlike thinking, I am convinced it is only because the adults have imposed their own theoretical assumptions about children on children- constructed them as limited creatures the adults have imagined them to be simply by interacting with them as if the imaginings were true.

However, social constructionism challenges this and recognises different kinds of childhoods. Nodleman believes that this view is problematic for everyone concerned with working with children and providing resources to help them learn because it threatens the notion of absolute control by adults. If children do not conform to the adult's expectation that they should be innocent and in need of protection from exposure to difficult situations, for example, then this represents a challenge.

James and James (2004: 123) also suggest that the belief in a universal experience of childhood justifies a central curriculum as well as other social policies which, when taken together, ensure that all children are working towards a socially sanctioned and acceptable version of adult citizenship. In order to achieve this, children need to be kept separate from adults and seen to be different because if allowed more of a voice they may use this to challenge the status quo. The notion of childhood is crucial to maintaining social order: 'It is only through instructing children how to be 'proper children' and thereby effectively denying them those very rights of participatory citizenship that a vision of national childhood has been able to be constructed and maintained'.

Kehily(2004:5) suggests that adults do, however, have an important role to play in ensuring that 'appropriate education' is provided in order to develop mature, well developed and responsible citizens. The importance of producing and selecting the kind of children's literature that will play a role in this is clear and Stephens (1992:8) refers to the importance of literature in helping a child to 'master the signifying codes used by society to order itself.' The picture books that are selected by practitioners and then read by young children will help them to make sense of their social world: 'narrative without an ideology is unthinkable: ideology is formulated in and by language, meanings within language are socially determined, and narratives are constructed out of language'.

Styles and Bearne (2003:x) reflect that, until recently, adults have been responsible for writing, producing and purchasing books that confirm a view of childhood 'coloured by remembrance'. However, they argue, modern children have been encouraged to be more active and demanding consumers themselves, particularly due to the impact of electronic media which diminishes the adult role in mediating children's reading. In addition, the electronic media has facilitated the

link between children's books and the marketing of goods based on them. Zipes (2002: 3-4) describes this as a process of 'cultural homogenization' and warns that it is a trend that will spread rapidly as a result of global markets. He debates whether this shift towards viewing the child as a consumer gives them more agency over what they demand or whether it confirms them as victims of a system that regards them more like commodities than human beings'. Zipes (2002: 9) quotes Denby (1996:48):

The danger is not mere exposure to occasional violent or prurient images but the acceptance of a degraded environment that devalues everything- a shadow world in which our kids are breathing an awful lot of poison without knowing that there is clean air and sunshine elsewhere. They are shaped by the media as consumers before they have had a chance to develop their souls.

Denby (1996) believes that the media has, to some extent, replaced the influence of parents and teachers in transmitting culture and is thus contributing more powerfully to socialization. He blames this on both the promotion of deregulated markets and the Western liberal emphasis on freedom of expression and choice. Nodleman (2008) suggests that capitalism needs children to see themselves as consumers with choices and that the growth in products aimed specifically at children (including books) is a way of socializing them in this respect. This concern is supported by Moss (2007:7) who points out that this 'Anglo American discourse' is 'inscribed with certain values, individual choice and competitiveness, certainty and universality'.

In his further discussion of how schools in America are becoming complicit in making children into competitive consumers through an emphasis on 'functional literacy, tests and canonical learning', Zipes (2002: 21), suggests that schools need to become places where children learn to recognize manipulative discourse and become critical of conformity. In order to do this, EY practitioners themselves need to be aware of the importance of this approach to learning (Apple, 2004; Moss, 2006; Fler, Robbins, 2007).

James and Prout (1997) are amongst those who emphasise that children's social relationships and cultures are important in their own right, and that they are not merely the passive subjects of social structures and processes. James and James (2004) highlight this more active role for the child when they speak of the way in which the interplay between individual adults and individual

children contributes to the definition of what childhood is and they emphasise the way in which children themselves have a powerful voice in the construction and reconstruction of these ideas. This has been considered by Cunningham (2006:16) who seeks to revisit the history of childhood from the child's perspective in order to 'show children doing things as well as having things done to them'. This emphasis on listening to children's views has had some limited impact on recent social policy in terms of challenging the passive nature of childhood and we find it acknowledged in the EYFS (Great Britain. DfES, 2007b) guidance in terms of involving children in decision making (Lancaster, 2010).

However, the limitations of the social constructionist model must be recognized in terms of who is telling the story of childhood, what is being emphasised and why it is being told (Nutbrown, Clough, 2010). In this sense, there is a measure of selectivity in terms of what is emphasised or what is given comparatively little prominence and many stories are never told because they are not perceived as important at a particular time. MacNaughton (2005: 4) makes the point that: 'Consequently, identifying the stories (of individuals and societies) that are silenced or marginalised and then sharing them is a political act'.

Adult control of the written content of children's books is also mirrored in how children are represented in illustrations. Nodleman (2008:212) points out that many modern picture books appear to be less didactic in tone and are often written in the narrative voice of the child. However, he warns that this does not mean that they represent an authentic voice. In fact, he suggests that this adds to the power of the adult precisely because it is covert 'The adult storyteller is hidden, masked within what claims to be not only a child's thoughts but also the child's world'.

The social context within which childhood is experienced is also influential. The increased institutionalization of children in educational settings at a relatively early age in England presents challenges about what is defined as 'normal' child development with an emphasis on measuring growth and development through the lens of 'ages and stages'. The scientific discourse of developmental psychology has come to have an important role in what constitutes a normal childhood and how it is defined and understood (Barron, 2005; Penn, 2005; Cline et al, 2009). This particular discourse legitimizes a linear approach to curriculum provision that emphasizes a child's age-related readiness to encounter particular pieces of knowledge; what

James and James (2004:124) describe as ‘the national curriculum for a national childhood’ that encourages a view of education described by Fler and Robbins (2007:105) as ‘a static border crossing process rather than as transformation.’ The prominence of measurable outcomes expressed largely through summative testing at various regular stages of schooling is an example and this and, in turn, has some impact on picture books that are recommended in initial training, Continuing Professional Development (CPD), professional publications and then provided by publishers and distributors to be used with children at any particular stage. Children’s knowledge and understanding, it is argued, can be measured against an expected standard.

In this way, developmentalists may claim, a particular picture book may be regarded as instrumental in teaching children about concepts they would otherwise find difficult to grasp. For instance, *Where the Wild Things are* (1963) by Maurice Sendak may be used by an EY practitioner as a stimulus to discuss feelings like anger as part of the Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSE) area of EYFS. This might then be extended to include creative art and music work in order to facilitate self expression. This particular picture book is now perceived as an appropriate text to use with young children who are encouraged to explore feelings and to learn self control through fantasy but when it was first published, it was decried as subversive and dangerous because it did not conform to the view of childhood that was prevalent at the time. Nodleman (2008:120) suggests that in relation to the controversial depiction of monsters in this book, Sendak had ‘taken a position that was not actually there to be taken in the field of children’s literature as it existed at that time’. Nodleman suggests that the eventual recognition and subsequent commendation of this picture book only happened because of an educational climate heavily influenced by the developmental theorist Piaget which demonstrated that ‘children teach themselves everything they come to know’. Nodleman (2008: 121) proposes that this view legitimises the central storyline in which the main character is in control of the monstrosity and adult authority: ‘Max fills all three roles available in the tradition within which the story positions itself: the threatened child, the force that threatens the child, the force that saves the child from the threat’.

Children in England spend a large part of their early childhood in education settings compared to many other countries and what they experience there in terms of the curriculum is largely shaped by the discourses that have influenced the practitioners who work there. Those EY practitioners who trained prior to 1980 are less likely to be conversant with the social constructionist theories

of Vygotsky (1896-1934) and Bruner (1915-) than those who trained more recently. Instead, their pedagogical practice may be more influenced by the views of Piaget (1896-1980) whose theories remain influential on how schools are organized and how the curriculum is organized at all levels of education (Brooker, 2002; Penn, 2005; Nodleman, 2008).

Dahlberg and Moss (2005) recognise that the instrumental approach to learning based on a developmental discourse of childhood might present limitations in terms of how childhood is experienced within a tightly defined set of standards, curricula, guidelines and audits. Research by Cline et al (2009:37) explores the prevalence of children's involvement in language-brokering tasks and caring for disabled family members as examples of how schools need to take better account of complex and diverse childhoods that require a level of complex skills knowledge and maturity that challenges 'the recognized boundaries of normality'.

Pinsent (1997:162) suggests that those working with children need to 'confront their own unchallenged assumptions' that have been acquired through childhood and beyond and to recognise that 'nothing is value free' and 'no one is without prejudices' (Pinsent, 1997:142). MacNaughton (2005:3) points out that 'knowledge is inseparable from politics' and she suggests that all those who work with very young children need to take an activist stance in challenging the discourse of developmentalism because not to do this is in itself a political act that has consequences for children's learning. Like Apple (2004) and Moss (2006), she is concerned that all practitioners have a responsibility to be critical, reflective researchers in order to become more 'organic' professionals. The notion of critical reflection is a familiar one in EY policy and CPD in terms of encouraging improvements to provision and being aware of developing responsibilities in line with legislation. However, much of the terminology needs to be deconstructed and discussed before it is applied and practitioners need to be more critical of terms like 'quality', for example, that are increasingly used by regulatory bodies to describe and measure effective practice. The absence of such scrutiny can imply that structural causes relating to the inequality experienced by many children can be easily fixed by using the correct, approved intervention techniques that conform to quality standards endorsed by national government and the increased use of external 'expert' interventions. MacNaughton (2005:17) suggests that this may lead to professional complacency that discourages critical debate: 'Dominant discourses make assumptions and values invisible, turn subjective perspectives and understandings into

apparently objective truths, and determine that some things are self-evident and realistic while others are dubious and impractical’.

How is childhood represented by authors and illustrators?

If the books selected for the use of children in educational settings are heavily influenced by prevailing notions of what childhood should look like, then it is also true that the picture books that are made available for practitioners to select are also influenced by these competing childhood discourses. The way in which childhood is perceived by those who write and illustrate books for children is explored by Hollindale (1997:22) who emphasised the relationship between adult writer and intended child reader as particularly challenging because ‘he or she can never inhabit the ‘presentness’ of childhood’. There will always be a mismatch between the version of childhood that is being presented by one who has moved beyond childhood and the one that is currently being experienced which will inevitably be effecting how a text is being received and interpreted by the child. This is further complicated by the interpretation of the adult reader who selects books on behalf of children in their role as a publisher, reviewer, bookseller, librarian, parent or practitioner and who may conform unknowingly to the acceptance of the dominant discourse (Watson, 1996; Nodleman, 2008).

There have been many external factors that have driven trends in both the quantity and quality of writing for children. For instance, the changing structure of the family in the early nineteenth century is cited as influential on the subjects explored through children’s literature (Avery, 1992; Reynolds, 2005). Hunt (1994) describes this as a complex result of reduced child mortality, smaller families and economic growth that saw the rise of an affluent middle class which spent more time with their children in the home. He points to the way in which the popularity of stories with a family theme increased and encouraged authors such as E. Nesbit to exploit this market. Amongst many other examples, he also discusses the polarization between the ‘popular’ authors such as Enid Blyton and the ‘prestigious’ authors such as A.A.Milne in the 1920s and 1930s. He believes this to be indicative of the division between books written with a nostalgic adult audience in mind that are approved as classics and therefore continue to be published and promoted, and those that are of less literary merit but more accessible and popular with children. In other words, the demand for the less worthy (and usually much cheaper) books and comics

have been partly driven by the demands of children despite the lack of enthusiasm by adults who are concerned at the limitations of style, plot and characterization (Hunt, 1994: 116). He reflects that writers such as Blyton remain popular choices for children because they focus on the present and are not approved of by adults precisely because they focus on ‘being’ and not on ‘becoming’.

The impact of the Sunday School Movement and later the Education Act of 1870 which legislated for free elementary education improved access to reading for more children. For the first time, compulsory schooling replaced wage earning and children were entitled to be segregated from the adult world described by Hendrick (1997:120) as ‘a pivotal role in legitimizing the reconstruction’ of childhood. Hunt (1994: 61) describes the establishment of specialist Juvenile departments by several publishing houses in the 1860s in response to the need for more books. Zipes (2002: 43) refers to this as ‘the institution of children’s literature governed by market conditions and educational systems’.

Reynolds (2005) describes how the rapid growth in children’s literature between 1920 and 1960 was directly influenced by changing social constructions of family life and its relationship to capitalism. She argues that the family prior to World War Two (WW2) could be seen as primarily a unit of economic production usually controlled and organized by a patriarchal figure. This was an essentially Functionalist model of the family that has specific characteristics in that it is seen as predominantly white, middle class and semi-rural and has been reflected in this way in the majority of books for children, conveying an ideology of the family that demonstrated its importance for providing emotional stability, preparing children for life as responsible citizens.

Nodleman (2008:251) suggests that the increasing separation of childhood from the adult world, supported by specialist professionals and with a distinct literature describing it, made it a distinct market to be exploited. He explains that children now occupy a place that is entirely removed from mainstream adult society and that this has led to them being treated as ‘colonizable others’ and it is this willingness of the adult to invade the social, emotional and intellectual space of the child that has contributed to the way in which children’s literature often remains conservative and unchallenging in its subject matter. This, he believes, is due to an adult-imposed view that children are ‘less evolved and so can only cope with a narrower set of concerns.’ He feels that it is inevitable that this concentration on what he describes as ‘lacks and absences’ confirms and

reinforces adult control. He uses the metaphor of music to describe the powerfully negative effects of increasing regulation and structure around childhood and literature for children: ‘By transforming unstructured “noise” into coherent pre-existing patterns, music closes off the liberating possibilities of the noise that remains outside its particular order- as perhaps does the conventional plotting of a characteristic text’.

The increasing control of the child and their environment

Hendrick (1997) makes reference to an increasing reliance on an expanding cohort of experts in childcare and developments in science and medicine around the virtues of trained, responsible parenting. He suggests that the creation of an efficient and emotionally well balanced individual is not necessarily about the interests of the child but about what would benefit society through the creation of a citizen who was self-reliant and independent and able to cope with the demands of the modern day. Dahlberg and Moss (2005:21) suggest that this emphasis continues to be part of establishing a revised definition of normality that is designed to produce a child who needs to be flexible and ready for the challenges of the twenty first century: ‘The liberal subject is an active consumer, facing a vast array of material goods and services.... she or he is a fluid, flexible being, ready to respond to and adapt to conditions of constant change’.

As childhood began to be regarded as an important stage to be carefully supervised and provided for, Reynolds (2005) explains how this in turn led to an increased focus on what children needed in order to experience what was considered to be a well-balanced childhood. She uses the example of the children’s book *My Naughty Little Sister* (Edwards, 1952) to illustrate the view that young children are not perfect and that their un-cooperative behaviour is normal and forgivable. The overriding message is that they need to be loved, despite their behaviour, and nurtured within the family. She believes that this emphasis has characterized children’s literature as a direct result of the influence of child psychology and psychoanalysis in the post WW2 period.

James and James (2004:7) explain that the legislative process that may emerge from particular historical circumstances ‘surround the child and shape childhood for children’. They cite the Soham murders of 2002 as an example of how the discourse of childhood in the UK relating to

protection and surveillance and endorsed through legislation is seeking to become dominant. These wider societal concerns alongside anxieties about vulnerability may contribute to how picture books are selected by EY practitioners and may even lead them to prefer more idealised or nostalgic views of childhood (Sampson, 2000).

Palmer (2006:48) describes how public concerns about a perceived increased danger of paedophilia, alongside increasing road traffic, lack of safe community spaces and the increase in home-based entertainment for children has had a dramatic impact on how childhood is viewed. Within a single generation, it has become unusual to see groups of children playing outside and this has led to 'restrictions on children's physical activity, their play and their freedom to roam beyond the confines of home, school and other supervised environments.' Despite this, most children's picture books still reflect a world where adults are generally kind and trustworthy and where children have adventures beyond the confines of their gardens. However, traditional visual signifiers of 'evil' persist through the representation of physical deformity and grotesquely strange behaviour by adults. This is a concern for the promotion of children's picture books that explore difference in a more positive light.

This acknowledgement of wider social influences is by no means a new phenomenon, although Holland (2004:3) would argue that adults are increasingly influenced by the wealth of visual images of childhood that surround us in the twenty first century in terms of 'something that is made up not of singular, precious pictures, but of multiples in time and space'. The murder of Jamie Bulger 1993 is an example of how discourse can be powerfully shaped. This rare instance of children murdering another child challenges the belief in childhood innocence and Kehily (2004:16) suggests that those children who contradict this preferred version of childhood 'are vilified' and that their aberrant behaviour 'places them beyond the realm of 'proper' children and normal childhood. Interestingly, Wyse (2004:208) points out how the powerful image of the video footage of the child's abduction that was used repeatedly by the media was an example of how 'visual images are often at the centre of society's understanding of an issue.'

Holland (2004) argues that these images contribute very powerfully to specific views about childhood, and that as modern concerns rage about the vulnerability of children and their need to be protected, we revert increasingly to a romantic image of childhood. However this is unlikely to include representations of disability and Medworth (2004:22) suggests that 'childhood

continues to be depicted from a white, middle class, romanticized and *cosy* perspective' [italics in original].

Despite having a range of different personal experiences of diversity, adults are still highly influenced by the images of the 'normal' conveyed by the mass market. Higgonet (1998) explains how this has always been the case in relation to the visual portrayal of childhood. She describes how the images of childhood that have survived, and still remain very popular, conformed to a dominant ideology of the time in which they were created. In terms of the nineteenth century, this meant perpetuating an ideal of innocence as expressed in the genre paintings like *Cherry Ripe* (1879) and *Bubbles* (1886) by Millais. Frequently, literature and art portrayed children as physically attractive and invite viewers and readers to make the link between good looks and moral 'goodness' (Mills, 2000: 17). Images are products of their times and thus provide useful clues as to the ways in which children and childhood were perceived. For instance, Higgonet (1998) talks about the popularity of the illustrator Kate Greenaway to the Victorians who were keen on seeing children romanticised in pre-industrial rural landscapes because it confirmed their nostalgia for a vanishing agrarian society. Greenaway was influential in terms of how children and childhood were represented by other artists, and this was further reinforced by the reproduction of her images at the time on commercial products such as china and linen - an early example of branding. Higgonet (1998:77) believes that the nineteenth century retains a powerful influence on what sells well today. She maintains that most popular images of childhood conform to the same categories of portrayal: 'Angels are not real; toddlers are like domestic pets; a mother's love is sacred; babies are like flowers. Most of all, these children belong to forever, not to real time, but to a timeless place (no place').

Picture book readership

The extent to which picture books are produced to appeal to an adult or child readership is interesting to consider. Chambers (1985:47) discusses the idea of the ‘implied reader’ in some depth and argues that the relationship between the writer and his audience is dynamic and relies on both what is explicit and the gaps that the writer leaves for the reader. These important gaps might be what the author thinks he knows about the reader with regard to ‘beliefs, politics, social customs and the like’. It could be argued that illustrators and their publishers are knowingly aiming their books at the implied adult reader ; predominantly parents and family members in terms of fictional texts or practitioners if the books are produced by educational publishers who clearly market their books as functional tools (Sampson, 2000; Goodwin, 2008; Squires, 2009).

There appears to be an ongoing tension with regard to the purpose of different strands of research in the field of children’s literature. This is related to the priorities associated with different academic subject areas within which it is broadly located, eg English, cultural studies, or education (Grenby, Reynolds, 2011). For instance, Hunt (1990) identifies as potentially problematic the way in which the audience for research about children’s books has moved away from being predominantly for practitioner and parents and become more focussed on an academic audience. He advocates that all audiences need to be considered when writing about the subject if the research is to have any impact on educational practice. Hollindale (1997:30) also comments on the contentious ‘belief of many adults, including most of those who write and read children’s books, that their childhood is still alive in themselves’. Although some children’s authors claim that they do not have a particular audience in mind when they write, others may be specifically writing for academics, parents, critics or practitioners in response to a perceived need or a gap in the market. Salisbury (2007) points out that many illustrators do not work exclusively on books for children and do not necessarily consider their intended audience when they are creating their pictures. In this respect, they are considered as artistic literary artefacts which rely on adults to purchase on behalf of children in much the same way as expensively packaged gift books were popular in the past (Hunt, 1994 and Browne, Evans, 2009).

Whether the appeal to an adult audience is intended or acknowledged, it is clearly very significant in allowing or facilitating young children to access particular books. In a later work Chambers (1991) goes on to emphasise the potential power of what he describes as ‘the enabling

adult' in conveying a passion for books to children and strongly emphasises the need for an up-to-date, enthusiastic working knowledge of children's literature in order to make informed choices and recommendations. Lurie (2003) believes that British and American adults have difficulty in making the transition into adulthood and that as part of this, they may be strongly influenced by what they have read as children themselves. She suggests that adults underestimate what children can cope with in terms of realistic pictures in stories. In the original illustrations to traditional tales, artists like Gustav Dore conveyed fear and horror (partly perhaps because they were not primarily aimed at children) but, Lurie argues, these have been increasingly sanitised by using conventions like distant historical contexts, humour and anthropomorphism which make difficult themes more palatable.

This idealised notion of a childhood that fails to move beyond conventional stereotypes has been challenged in more recent times by illustrators such as Anthony Browne, who convey difficult and complex subject matter through socially realistic characters with integral elements of fantasy that do allow 'gaps' for the child reader to enter. Increasingly, children's literature contains complex social themes that 'have no place in an idealized view of childhood as a protected and privileged space, separate from adults and their concerns' (Montgomery, Watson, 2009:8).

The issue may be whether such books that are praised in academic circles and that win prestigious awards are necessarily the ones that are chosen by practitioners to use with children in NS (Barker, 1998, Kidd, 2009, Tucker, 2009). Indeed research which collected responses from 1,200 primary teachers from eleven LAs in England (Cremin et al, 2008) indicates that teachers' knowledge of children's literature is severely limited. Collins and Safford (2008:419) point out that few teacher training institutions provide any courses about children's literature and that an interest in this 'now depends on the individual interests of teachers and policies of schools.'

Cremin et al (2008) interestingly indicates that the work of someone like Quentin Blake, who has a long history of illustration which includes a close collaboration with Roald Dahl, is very well known whilst more recent illustrators of picture books are rarely mentioned in the survey responses. However, the survey did demonstrate that a small number of illustrators did have a popular profile; for instance, the illustrator, Lauren Child, has come to prominence more recently because of a television series and many associated commercial products aimed at children. It could be argued that both Blake and Child are now as ubiquitous in modern day settings as Kate

Greenaway was previously. It is reasonable to assume that EY practitioners are themselves more likely to choose books by these prominent illustrators in response to successful marketing. Graham (2008:71) reflects that ‘Publishers know that an illustrator’s personal and identifiable style helps establish the public identification and loyalty which is important for sales.’

Importantly, Serafini (2009:11) sees the reading of picture books as a skill that needs to be learned and suggests that teachers must ‘familiarize themselves with various approaches for analysing and understanding visual images’ alongside comprehending written language and Goodwin (2008:7) highlights the need for all those working with children to ‘read the books rather than be at the mercy of others’ opinions.’

Individual aesthetic response

Setting to one side the content of a story and the representative accuracy of the illustrations, the aesthetic response on the part of the adult reader may vary considerably according to personal taste. An exploration of books from different countries of origin and different eras provides an indication of the wide range of style, composition, use of colour and choice of image available in picture books (Doonan, 1993; Nodleman, 2008; Evans, 2009). The criteria for selection by an individual may be heavily influenced by these aesthetic factors despite any perceived worth in terms of content. Many practitioners may have preferences for familiar illustrators and formats due to positive personal and, or, professional experiences and which may be, to some extent, informed by successful advertising, endorsements from professionally reputable sources or personal recommendations (Graham, 1998). There may also be financial considerations in terms of whether individuals choose to, or are able to, buy their own picture books and the constraints of budgets in settings.

The purpose of picture books

It has been argued so far in this study that adults need to give careful thought to the books that they select for children to read but Kiefer (1985:706) suggests that the key question to ask may be ‘how is it that children come to love the books that are good for them. The answer may lie in how they are presented and given value’. Personal taste may also play some part in the selection

of books that seek to convey a 'message' to the reader and they may shy away from those that are seen as either over- didactic, stereotypical or sentimental. Equally, they may embrace those they see as promoting those characteristics they think of as positive or progressive. Thus, individual preferences, partly based on value positions, may play a part in actively encouraging or discouraging a practitioner from using a particular book with children (Nodleman, 2008).

If practitioners want to use picture books as a vehicle for conveying a particular message, Naidoo (1992) offers a note of caution. Her research suggests that there were a complex range of variables that influenced the responses of white secondary aged readers to texts that explored the theme of racism; these included the immediate context in which the texts were read as well as who introduced them and how they were conveyed. She concludes that an over didactic 'add on' approach with regard to influencing the reader can sometimes be harmful.

There is also a danger in assuming that the token representation of a particular group in a narrative will have any significant impact on the adult or child reader. In discussing the work of Marianne Hirsch (1994), Johnson (2005:163) describes the importance of the 'looker' being guided to interpret central meanings in the work of visual culture. His work discusses the impact of 'multicultural' toys that claim to 'bolster one's attempt to be a culturally sensitive practitioner'. He warns against the complacency of assuming that mere provision of a particular resource is significant in promoting social justice. The strategic use of such artefacts is obviously a consideration here, and in relation to the provision of picture books, an EY practitioner may play an important part in encouraging a particular interpretation by an individual child

How do picture books transmit ideology and culture?

The underlying premise of this research is that all literature has a part to play in both representing and transmitting ideology and culture and consequently in helping to shape social attitudes around an issue such as disability. Williams (1948:107) describes the enduring importance of literature in society 'as a record of detailed individual experience which has been coherently stated and valued'. Hoggart (1970:23) talks of how literature 'can give us a sense of the formative but largely submerged currents in an age's life' whilst Dixon (1978: xv) believes that the influence of children's books has to be given proper weight: 'Anyone interested in how

ideas - political ideas in the broadest sense - are fostered and grow up in a society cannot afford to neglect what children read’.

Picture books represent an important early experience of literature and, from the 1950s onwards, they have been recognized as a genre in their own right and have been a growing area of research in children’s literature (Hunt, 1994; Lewis, 2001; Evans, 2009; Reynolds, 2011). As indicated in the introduction to this study, there are many definitions of picture books and these continue to change as the genre develops. Some include no written text and convey meaning through such artistic devices as layout, style, perspective, colour and form (Nikolajeva, Scott, 2006). They can also offer a challenge to older children and adults on a range of levels as a demanding and informative medium (Meek, 1982; Kress, Van Leeuwen, 1996; Serafini, 2007). Pictorial literature in the form of comics and graphic novels convey complex narrative in a multimodal way that cannot be conveyed by written text alone. Books with a combination of text and pictures require considerable interaction and reflection on the part of the reader and often provide alternative simultaneous visual narrative. Lewis (2001:48) concisely explains this dynamic inter relationship: ‘The words are pulled through the pictures and the pictures are brought into focus by the words.’

There is a danger in underestimating the power and challenge of picture books to ‘shape aesthetic tastes’ and ‘introduce principles and conventions of narrative...’ (Graham, 2008:206). Nodleman (2008:9) explains that this includes those that may appear at a surface level to be uncomplicated: ‘The simpler it is, then the more obviously will it be that child readers who can make sense of it will understand more than is actually said’.

It is possible that given the influence of the current discourse relating to the need to protect children (Parton, 2006; Parton et al. 2008), EY practitioners will be tempted to select those books that offer an unthreatening view of the world in the belief that this will be comforting to the children in their care. However, author and illustrator Maurice Sendak (1988: 153) dismisses this urge towards selecting what is safe and described such choices as ‘loved by adults who have a false and sentimental recollection of childhood. My own guess is that they bore the eyeteeth out of children.’

His statement was part of an acceptance speech for the Caldecott Medal Award in 1966 for *Where the Wild Things Are* and he goes on to reflect: 'The need for evasive books is the most obvious indication of the common wish to protect children from their everyday fears and anxieties, a hopeless wish that denies the child's endless battle with disturbing emotions'. Here Sendak is engaging with the debate about the potential power of picture books and the need for adults to see them as a resource for addressing and learning to cope with difficult issues. Picture books are particularly powerful in this respect and Stephens (1992) suggests that it is important to recognise that pictures can have even more significance than written text when they are interpreted by children. Knowles and Malmkjaer (1996:63) point out that very early experiences of understanding how books work and how they relate to reality as presented by adult authors and illustrators 'can simultaneously actively promote certain beliefs and certain forms of behaviour while discouraging others'.

Indeed, the emphasis on reading picture books as a fun, interactive experience could be said to give them additional influence over the young reader. Knowles and Malmkjaer (1996) give the example of how a well renowned lift-the-flap book, *Dear Zoo* (1982) by Rod Campbell, cleverly legitimises a view of the world through the lexical choices and organisation of the text. Failing to recognise the messages that are being conveyed by what, on the surface, is a straightforward, colourful, simple visual text reinforces the idea that children's picture books are unimportant. Nodleman (2008:13) claims that what is often described as 'an innocent eye' is in fact more akin to the sophisticated eye of an adult 'who has learnt to value an intuitive response and is in itself a complex response'.

Nikolajeva and Scott (2006:2) explain that when children are re-reading a picture book they are not having a repeat experience but going 'more and more deeply into its meaning'. They argue that adult readers miss out much of the complexity of pictures because 'they ignore the whole and regard the illustrations as decorative'. This may also be a consideration in the selection of particular books based on individual aesthetic taste, perhaps influenced by initial impressions of the cover and end papers rather than the content. These writers propose the layout of the title of a book can contribute to the overall message and that the title itself can enhance or obscure the content. In turn, this may play a part in whether an EY practitioner selects an unfamiliar book for a particular purpose.

Pictures themselves can convey ideology and culture in a particularly effective way. In describing the impact of an innovative picture book, *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats (1962) which at the time of publication unusually depicted an African American child as the main protagonist in a story, Nodelman (2008:11) explains:

A visual detail provided by the pictures makes the text's apparent simplicity itself a source of great complexity, fraught with a political and cultural import it would not have had if it had simply named what its pictures had showed.

Evans (1998:5) suggests that modern readers are highly influenced by visual images – perhaps more than written text at times and this places added responsibility on illustrators:

consciously or unconsciously, overtly or covertly, picture books provide through the combination of images and words, themes and ideas, texts and subtexts, a representation not only of how the world is but also of how it ought to be.

Wilkie (1994) states that even very young children are able to respond to the sophisticated social codes contained in picture books because they are already equipped to understand what she describes as the postmodern discourse. She explains that early exposure to a wide range of visual messages, both overt and subliminal, equips children to be able to respond to subtle messages in pictures even before they are able to de-code written texts. The complexity of recent postmodern picture books that subvert more traditional conventions can be challenging. Smith (2009:83) defines these as prompting 'readers and onlookers to reconsider what they take for granted' in terms of 'overturning reader's expectations of strong, single narrative; linear construction and determinate endings.' Reynolds (2009:38) explains how picture books are at the forefront of experimentation with form because they break conventional narrative rules. She suggests that they are thereby 'introducing ideas that many adults find challenging... preparing readers to advance thinking about self and society in philosophically and aesthetically exciting ways'. They can highlight multiple viewpoints and use intertextuality with references to literary, new technologies and visual and popular culture in ways that may be unfamiliar to EY practitioners (Anstey, Bull, 2009; Pantaleo, 2009).

The responsibility practitioners have for providing a range of such books for young children is considerable if they are to ‘develop the acuity to identify the games that postmodern author-illustrators play, and be able to enter into the discourse of constructedness’ (Smith, 2009: 95). O’Neil (2010:41) expands on this further with respect to the potential of postmodern picture books in teaching about social justice since they ‘prepare students for current and traditional ways of being, and perhaps even stimulate them to launch their own challenges to the old order’.

Wilkie (1994) also proposes that the complexity of these books challenges a widely held belief that young children are only able to cope with relatively simple storylines and concepts because of their cognitive developmental stage. In effect they are aimed at children who are likely to be able to engage with and understand sophisticated visual texts because they have grown up in a more technological Anstey and Bull (2009:27) are amongst those that suggest that facility in reading such picture books increasingly requires an understanding of ‘the visual semiotic system if they (children) are to make meaning from paper texts and also be able to interpret new communication technologies such as those employed by mobile phones and computers’.

Wilkie (1994: 75) describes inter subjective knowledge or ‘a mirage of citations’ that affects how readers respond to literature. In this way, even very young children use what they have already learned about the world, often via other books and wider visual culture to make meaning from a text. Nodleman (2008:288) points out that young children need to see representations of themselves in pictures as an ‘important stage in learning to be human’. He also discusses how children look at and make meaning from illustrations in very different ways from the adult reader because of the way in which they ‘tend to scan pictures giving equal attention to all parts of the picture plane’ (Nodleman, 2008: 260). In this way they may ascribe different meanings to parts of a picture depending on their previous experiences and also the circumstances in which they look at it.

This would suggest that EY practitioners need to be aware of how children approach picture books as a complex interpretative task and that what they think they may be learning is not something that can be assumed (Agnew, 1996). This is particularly concerning since the developmental approach to learning may imply that books with reduced text are inappropriate for older children (Barron, 2005) and if these are not experienced by children in EY settings, they

are unlikely to ever be encountered in school where written texts have higher status in the curriculum.

The fact that modern children are now constantly exposed to a range of texts - including advertising, cartoons, posters, graffiti, games and instructions - and that this goes beyond what is defined by traditional academics as literature is explored by Zipes (2002:63). In many ways Zipes represents a dissenting voice when it comes to the potential influence that children's books might have. He proposes that it is 'nonsense' to suppose that adults can 'detect, determine, and alter their values' through what they provide for children to read. He suggests, albeit from an American perspective, that, despite the richer seam of children's literature that has been available for many years, inequality clearly remains. He believes that this is a bigger and more structural challenge in which books play very little part. Zipes, however, is expressing concerns about older children who, for a variety of reasons, are not avid readers and so are unlikely to be influenced in the way that children's literature academics may believe. He proposes that many consumers of children's books for the older age-range, including those that reflect diversity, are mostly read by white, middle class children, their parents and professional academics, whilst the majority of children have relatively limited experience outside school because, for a number of reasons, reading books is not a significant part of their cultural experience. However, this study is focused on a much younger group of readers whose experience of picture books may be considerable when they attend NS as these are a recognised feature of good practice. They are therefore more likely to be influenced at this stage of their education, whether or not they experience picture books at home.

Saltmarsh (2007:99), proposes that picture books are particularly powerful when compared to other toys and activities that are made available to children. She explains that this is because they are aimed at both children and adults and are designed to be used by both as a way of 'navigating subjectivities and social relations'. She therefore suggests that: 'This makes picture books a particularly potent site for both inter subjective and pedagogic interaction, as well as a potential site for disrupting, through practices of critical literacy, dominant discursive norms'.

Particular picture books that are regularly selected, recommended and used by EY practitioners may also have more influence on children, endorsing their value. Research by Arizpe and Styles (2003) demonstrates that children respond positively to picture books that have been given status

and value by practitioners. In this way, even if picture books are made freely available for children to look at, they may be more likely to choose one that they have shared before with a significant, enabling adult who has made an informed choice and communicated enthusiasm (Chambers, 1991; Fremantle, 1993). In turn, Agnew (1996) suggests that frequent exposure to recommended picture books at school may strongly influence whether a particular title remains on a publisher's list. It may be that choices made by practitioners are influenced by their desire to meet curriculum guidelines that encourage the provision of a diverse range of books for children. In this way, any book that is seen to represent minority culture may be selected in order to fulfil requirements but this does not mean it is automatically a good choice when other considerations of quality are taken into account and as a result its selection can be seen as merely a tokenistic response. Pinsent (1997:11) warns that 'a book written to deal with a problem or out of a deep commitment to a political cause should be a good book, or it may only do harm'. There is a danger that these may be selected precisely because they convey an explicit ideology which seeks to influence a reader in a particular way and are sometimes overly didactic (Hollindale, 1988). This writer also identifies that any ideology is embedded in a particular culture and time in the sense that the author is inevitably influenced by the world in which they live.

Those who create the literature that we choose to make available to young children are particularly powerful in that they are 'the dominant group, with access to the media of expression, which gets to define the framework within which the discussion can take place' (Foster, Simons, 1995:67). Again, in looking for evidence for the way this might have an impact on whether disability is depicted in children's books, it is necessary to turn, as an example, to the presentation of ethnic minorities and the way it is necessary to acknowledge the historical relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. Postcolonial criticism is defined by Godek (2005:93) as that which 'examines the representation of cultures treated as 'other' by literary texts' and 'demonstrates the profound influence on the deeply embedded attitudes that emphasize the cultural hegemony of European knowledge'. It builds on the work of Edward Said who is cited by Pinsent (2005a:17) as identifying that it 'emphasizes how non-western cultures have been seen as 'other' or 'exotic'. Robertson and Jones –Diaz (2006: 19) also believe that this is a valuable perspective from which to consider 'the concept of power and how it is utilized to define and control the lives and silence the Other'.

Practitioners working with young children are as susceptible to this as any other adult in terms of informing a culturally located perspective. They themselves may have read and absorbed children's literature that exemplified some overtly colonial attitudes such as those found in the writing of authors like Rudyard Kipling or Rider-Haggard.

Dixon (1978) was very influential in raising concerns about the potential influence of negative stereotypes relating to race and gender in children's books, an issue which had already started to be taken very seriously in the United States as a result of the impact of the civil rights movement. As part of a move towards social realism in children's literature in 1970s Britain, it was also felt by many that books for children should more accurately depict a society that included people from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds who were participating in communities and making decisions about their lives. There was also an increasing concern that representation of women and the working classes was often outdated and patronising. These new themes were partly in response to emerging legislation to deal with issues of discrimination at the time (Pinsent, 2005b). However, Quicke (1985:10) explains that, despite developments in legislation and policy from the 1970s with regard to disability in general, most children's fiction with a related theme remained stubbornly fixed in the past and was disproportionately focussed on the representation of blindness and physical difficulties. He suggests that this may be due to 'the public's perception of the nature of the handicap and the manipulation of the public mind by charitable bodies.'

The change in emphasis and raised awareness of the ways in which books could influence stereotypical views began to influence the development of guidelines about discrimination and although this seemed positive at one level it also led to accusations that that there was a 'sanitising' of stories in order to convey political messages. Pinsent (1997) discusses the need to approach guidelines about discrimination with caution as they have sometimes been applied over-zealously, by librarians in particular. She, and others believe in the importance of developing critical awareness in readers with respect to all equality images and this means exposure to a range of good and bad stereotypes, although practitioners may lack the confidence to use these effectively, particularly if they have not received any appropriate training. Lane (2008) explains that they may also be misinformed by popular myths in relation to the negative media perception of 'political correctness'.

The extent to which authors and illustrators know that they are challenging such important issues is interesting to consider. For instance, in a discussion of Lauren Child's recent picture book, *Hubert Horatio Bartle Bobton-Trent* (2005), Saltmarsh (2007) suggests that she has presented a view of the child subject of the story who takes control of the family finances as having 'a *gentive* role as entrepreneurial *decision-maker*' [italics in original]. She goes on to explain that this is an important example of what Nikolajeva (2002:306) describes as a representation of a traditional, utopian childhood that 'precludes any elaboration, or sometimes even mention, of the restrictive aspects of human (that is adult) civilization such as government, law, money and labor.' Interpretation is everything and as Nodelman (2008) points out, there is a need to be aware that what critics of children's literature see to be significant may not be recognised by the author/illustrator or the adult and child readers. Rosen (2007:26) reminds us that, despite his belief in the power of children's literature to be transformative: 'No matter what we think a book is about, or for that matter what its political unconscious is, there is no certainty that any child will agree'.

Another consideration is that there is still limited knowledge about what meaning and understanding children take from written and visual text. Despite this, Hunt (1994:172) acknowledges that 'the picture book is a potent form' which has the potential to convey and confirm a version of reality that may have a strong effect on shaping perceptions. Chambers (1985:91-92) suggests that this may be very influential in terms of how a particular minority group is represented: 'Young children are the most vulnerable to stereotypes and bias in books because books play a major role in shaping children's first images of the larger society'.

Both curriculum guidance and academic writing on the subject of promoting understanding of equality and diversity in general makes frequent reference to the need for what are described as 'positive' images. This is problematic both in terms of accurate representation and which books are deemed to be appropriate or satisfactory representations of a particular group. There is a danger that any representation of a minority group might be viewed as acceptable, particularly if there is little to choose from. For instance, with reference to what are deemed 'appropriate' film representations of disabled characters, Shakespeare (1999:172) warns against an over simplistic interpretation of this term as 'the common problems of stereotypes have been identified, there is

less consensus about what constitutes a 'positive image'. He explains that 'positive' does not always have to be associated with 'conformist' or well behaved to make it a valid representation. He warns that over sensitivity to this issue in an attempt to redress the balance of historically negative images can result in a skewed portrayal of a group that is as varied as any other. He argues that the wide variety of representation of minority groups throughout the media is crucial to achieving social realism. In other words, if picture books are important in portraying reality, then it is necessary to recognise whose definition of reality is being promoted (Sampson, 2000).. There is also the caution against representing a version of reality that confirms particular groups as problematic or needy and which thereby reinforces negative stereotypes. For instance, O'Dell (2008:385) raises the concern that 'lost children', 'child saving' and 'stolen childhood' are common imagery and icons in liberal Western imagery' and that these confirm an over dependent view of childhood which is largely uncontested. She explains that this discourse is exploited through advertising, particularly in relation to child abuse which conveys a lack of agency and resilience on the part of children. Whilst she recognizes the need to raise public awareness of the issue, she has reservations about the extent to which views can be manipulated. Such portrayals confirm the idea of having 'innocence' corrupted and 'reinforces our notions of 'normal' childhood as circumscribed by innocence, passivity and powerlessness' (O'Dell, 2008:304).

Similar concerns were expressed in the US when children's books were first published that purported to represent 'authentic' African American life in the ghetto but which can almost be interpreted as a kind of negative exoticism. Alexander (1979:72) warns that 'the constant depiction of ghetto society in this light is destructive - both of black children's view of themselves and of white children's understanding' which as Holmes and Barron, (2005) warn can confirm 'otherness' more strongly through confirmation of a stereotype.

When considering the subject of children's literature as an area for research there is the danger in making the assumption that it is more straightforward than the study of literature targetted at adults (Grenby, Reynolds, 2011). However, in reality, research relating to children's books ranges from describing and analysing particular genres, historical chronology, key authors and illustrators to bodies of work such as post-colonial writing or the ways in which school is depicted. Rather than viewing it as less important than adult literature, Reynolds (2005:4)

believes that ‘children’s literature is a safe house and incubator for literary modes’ because it often explores radical ways of looking at the world. She cites the work of Dusiherre (1987) that explores how works such as *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, (Carroll, 1865) inspired writers such as Virginia Woolf to go beyond existing conventions of writing. This is encouraging in terms of recognising that children’s books play an important role in shaping attitudes about controversial subjects.

What are the perceived circumstances affecting the availability of picture books with a disability related theme for use in nursery schools?

Decisions about which books get published are made in the context of a set of market constraints around the perceived needs of a reading public and these might be guided by a range of interests (Tucker, 1998a; Nodleman, 2008; Squires, 2009; Tucker, 2009). The incentive to produce picture books with a disability related theme might include the requirements of college courses, current legislation and policy recommendations, social justice agendas, professional development for practitioners and curriculum requirements. The reader’s personal interests in a particular subject, author, illustrator or an individual genre may play a part, as would the needs and requirements of those parents or family members of a child with a disability.

Nevertheless, despite the increasing numbers of children’s picture books being published, there is still a reluctance to take on ‘challenging’ issues like disability. Publisher delegates who attended the ‘In the Picture-The Story so Far’ conference of 11th October 2006 indicated many concerns with regard to publishing images that relate to disability:

- *Not on the agenda of many publishers*
 - *Text has been turned down for three years by illustrators who are scared to use it*
 - *How do you represent children with disabilities that are not visual?*
 - *Risk that wheelchair image will be overused as it is the only image of disability*
- (Scope, 2006: 19-20)

It would appear that despite a potentially large market for the publication of picture books with a disability related theme, there remain several barriers to production that mirror earlier concerns about the lack of representation of other minority groups (Tucker, 1998b; Wilkins, 2001).

Matthew and Clow (2007:67) describe how ‘the same issues of under and poor representation of disability in books for very young children continues to be evident in the new millennium’ despite the fact that considerably more children with a range of disabilities are being educated in mainstream education as a result of more inclusive legislation and policies. They explain how an earlier concern about the ‘invisibility’ of disabled children in literature had led to an important conference on the topic in 1995, but that little progress was made in affecting subsequent output. They emphasise that those books that are published are produced and distributed in limited numbers by smaller publishing houses and are frequently out of print. Early research in 2004 by the charity, Scope, demonstrated a need for books that made disability ordinary, normal and socially realistic. One librarian who was interviewed as part of this preliminary research is quoted as saying: ‘it would just be so much easier if mainstream books came out with images that reflected the real world’ (Matthew, Clow, 2007: 67).

Concern over the availability of socially realistic picture books is not a new one. Part of the multicultural educational approach proposed in the 1970s includes the recommendation that books reflecting diversity and difference should be used in all educational settings (Moss, 1980). As Nodleman (2008:120) describes, with reference to Bourdieu’s notion of ‘field positions’, trends in education have a powerful influence on what gets produced because of the close relationship between the ‘fields’ of children’s publishing and education. In this case, the drive towards multiculturalism led to ‘a number of positions available in children’s publishing to be taken by books that might be perceived to relate to multicultural concerns’. In this respect it would seem that, unless these ‘field positions’ are available, it may be very difficult for books to be published despite the fact that individual writers and illustrators might themselves hold these positions.

At first, books relating to the new multicultural ‘field position’ were relatively scarce in the UK. However, the need for social realism in children’s literature increased in popularity from the 1960s onwards, partly in response to a growing recognition about children needing to see their lives and daily concerns represented in books (Sampson, 2000). This provided writers and illustrators with the opportunity to directly address inequality issues in terms of race, culture, gender, and class. It is important to remember that the growing number of these books were a hasty response to a new market by writers, illustrators, editors and publishers who were

predominantly white and middle class. Stinton (1979) suggests that this led to a proliferation of books that were not necessarily of good quality and there is a clear relationship here with concerns about the quality of picture books that relate to disability (Quicke, 1985; Saunders, 2000).

Before considering the particular evolution of those books relating to disability, it is important to consider why picture books have become so significant and prolific in terms of the numbers published. Reynolds and Tucker (1998: xi) note that:

There is nothing natural about the children's book scene today; it is a product of historical circumstances, ideology and market forces. Neither are children's books neutral. We live in a text based society, and the books we give young people to read ... play an important part in acculturating them.

The availability of a wide range of titles by many highly regarded authors and illustrators now means that picture books are no longer regarded as luxury items or merely as tools for instruction (Powers, 2003) but as part of the experience of all young children, particularly in educational settings. Books recommended through critical acclaim in the media and professional journals continue to drive the development of picture books that are recommended as part of the curriculum in NS (Agnew, 1996; Goodwin, 2008).

This is by no means a new phenomenon in publishing. Carey (British Council, British Library, 2003) explains how the publisher John Newbury was the first to recognize the enormous commercial implications of producing cheap illustrated books for children in the mid eighteenth century which had the dual function of entertainment and instruction. For the first time, books for children were regarded as the first step in achieving functional literacy and were widely available. The rather crude illustrations for these early books were usually produced by woodblock printing rather than engravings on metal which were much more expensive and very time consuming to use. Eyre (1971) describes how the use of printing blocks led to a very limited range of illustrations and as a result stories were usually written to fit the existing pictures and used several times with different texts. At this stage the pictures were not seen as important other than as embellishments of the written text.

Much later, the improvements to book manufacture brought about as the result new technological and mechanical processes during the industrial revolution led to better design and the use of full

colour illustration, a process that had previously required intensive and expensive techniques like hand tinting and stencilling (Darling, 1999). Within a decade pictures were more commonly used on book covers to invite readership and hint at the story contained within the covers.

The growing market was being recognized and targeted at an increasingly discerning middle class adult public who needed to be tempted to select books as gifts for their children (Darling, 1999). Increasingly, decisions had to be made on behalf of children and this was done on the basis of which books were appropriate and aesthetically pleasing to adults. The cultural context of the time placed a clear responsibility on adults to guide and lead children towards books that would confirm the mores of the time. Indeed, Meek (1991:120) argues that: 'Publishers, distributors and parents have created a myth of 'what children like', by which they judge what children are to have'.

Much of the marketing for picture books continues to be aimed at pleasing an intended audience of adults who must first have a positive aesthetic response and then be persuaded that a particular book will satisfy the needs of children, especially if the book is perceived to have educational or moral purpose beyond its initial appeal. From a bookseller's perspective, Agnew (1996) proposes that adults are not always good at selecting books for children because they tend to value educational worth above everything else and place a premium on issues of affordability.

By the 1890s, Powers (2003: 22) describes how an artist's original work could for the first time be accurately reproduced mechanically without needing to be copied by an engraver. Despite this technological progress which led to reduced costs, he goes on to describe a 'sense of loss and nostalgia' for earlier printing methods. He suggests that the desire to return to previous less sophisticated techniques represented 'part of the desire at the time to protect the innocence of childhood from the harsh realities of the modern world'. He believes that this led to an enthusiasm for 'archaic styles', for instance the covers of Beatrix Potter books which were published privately in 1910 which had a 'rough paper finish' and delicate watercolours throughout that were a challenge to printers. Nevertheless, their individual charm, which lay partly in their small child size format, made them a huge commercial success and demonstrated that innovative design could be turned to advantage.

The world of children's book illustration was also influenced by other publishing trends. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Higgonet (1995:69) describes how improvements to technology drove a proliferation of magazines in the United States for an audience that had increased at least five times within forty years. This led to the rapid rise in popularity of women artists such as Bessie Pease Gutmann who was able to produce and popularize her famous idealized images of children: 'Intense but bland, the sensuality of Gutmann's image is monotone, a thick and very sweet vanilla cream'.

This sentimental, plump, dimpled view of children was later made famous in England by many more illustrators such as Mabel Lucie Atwell who started her career with periodicals and magazines but soon went on to illustrate several classic children's books. Whalley and Chester (1988:174) point out that her reputation for 'supplying cute and cuddly children to order' was a strong influence on other illustrators and confirmed a romantic view of childhood. Another prolific artist in this genre was Cicely Mary Barker in her depictions of Flower Fairies which continue to be popular perhaps due to their confirmation of the idealized child. Like the books of Beatrix Potter, their charm lay partly in the child size format which was convenient and commercially successful.

It has already been highlighted that wider social and economic changes can have an impact on the breadth of subjects explored in children's literature. These also provided opportunities and constraints within the field of children's publishing and subsequent distribution channels. For instance, the wave of optimism following the end of World War One (WW1) led to renewed investments in the publishing industry that encouraged the development of new authors, illustrators and designers (Darling, 1999; Hunt, 2009). The rising birth rate alongside an increasing interest in child rearing was highly beneficial to publishers of children's books. They now had a growing and eager audience to supply and their product gained legitimacy through the endorsement of the ever increasing number of child development 'experts'. Tucker (1998:6) suggests that this led to growth of stories set in a 'bland passionless world where everything falls comfortably into place.

There was also a commitment to publicly funded culture through the provision of public libraries and improved budgets for school libraries which drove both increases in publication and widened their potential audience to those that could not afford to buy books of their own. An influential

network of authors, illustrators, publishers, librarians and retailers had also developed in America after the turn of the century and was now flourishing and ‘serviced by new organizations and publications such as the *Horn Book* first published in 1924’ (Powers, 2003: 45).

The developments in printing technology in the 1960s liberated design, especially through the use of lithography. Technological advances in four colour half- tone printing during this period meant that the picture book became legitimate as an art object in its own right prompting the beginning of a significant new era in children’s book publishing. It is generally acknowledged that *ABC* by Brian Wildsmith (1962) was the first vivid example of this. Powers (2003:94) quotes the artist as describing how ‘the shapes and colours seep into the child’s artistic digestive system, and he is aroused and stimulated by them.’ Carey (2003:19) describes that the ‘unprecedented painterly quality’ was so attractive to children that they ‘were reported as wanting to lick them.’ However, some critics believe that his distinctive broad brush, dramatic artistic style is better received by aesthetically aware adults and that children find it confusing although Hunt (1994:157) believes that his illustrations may particularly appeal to children that have a ‘static concept of art’ that can recognize and respond to his particular style. In other words, not all children will respond to them in the same way.

The EY practitioner who is making decisions about whether to include such picture books in a setting may be influenced by such debates about what is appropriate for young children to experience. If they believe that children are perceptually unable to make sense of a detailed picture or a particular artistic style, then many children may never experience them at all. As Nodleman (2008:4) points out: ‘In terms of success in producing what children actually want to read or do end up reading is of less significance than what adult teachers, librarians, and parents will want them to read’.

The widespread improvement in the quality of children’s picture books published in the 1960s encouraged many new and innovative illustrative styles. Powers (2003:93) quotes the critic and librarian Marcus Crouch, who wrote in 1962 that: ‘Children have never, in their own homes or in the school and public library, had a better chance of finding, wherever their choice falls, books which have style, intelligence, and an original viewpoint’.

Even if the underlying purpose of producing books was to educate and inspire young readers, it has always been a commercial undertaking. The 1970s saw increasing pressure to standardize the content of books in response to growing international markets. Graham (1998:79) suggests that some publishers do not welcome too much specificity (about location) because it may act as a barrier to overseas sales.’ It is probable that subjects that are perceived as relating to minority interests may also be unwelcome as the market is potentially small and not guaranteed (Tucker, 1998b).

Partly in response to this inherently cautious and conservative approach, there was a growth in small specialist publishing houses and distributors who bucked the trend and continued to employ less well-known authors and import small consignments from abroad. These were not necessarily extensively advertised as they had limited marketing budgets and so were to some extent invisible to the general buying public. However, they were often driven by specific concerns (see table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Extracts from publicity literature of two small publishing houses and one distributor

Tamarind Books (publisher)	Barefoot Books (publisher)	Letter box Library (distributor)
<p>Tamarind Books was founded in 1987. Verna’s mission was to redress the balance in publishing by giving a high positive profile to children from ethnic minorities and those with disabilities. This is done unselfconsciously with engaging and enjoyable stories and stunning illustrations. All Tamarind stories, including the biographies offer positive role models for success. Many of the books feature on the National Curriculum and on children’s television. Tamarind titles have also been chosen among the Children’s Books of the Year.</p> <p>With 20 groundbreaking years behind us, Tamarind is looking forward to growing its list and reaching children across the globe.</p>	<p>When we started Barefoot Books in 1993, we were abandoning the security of the corporate world to risk doing something we believed in. With young families to care for, we wanted to work in a way that would enable us to be close to our children, so for several years, our homes were also our offices. We also wanted to make a difference — not only with the books we created but also with the way we did business. When you start out, no-one has heard of you, and you wonder if anyone is going to listen to what you have to say. No –one was publishing books quite like ours- would anyone buy them? We believed they would- we just had to find out way to parents and educators who shared our values.</p> <p>At Barefoot Books, we celebrate art and story that opens the hearts and minds of children from all walks of life, inspiring them to read deeper, search further, and explore their own creative gifts. Taking our inspiration from different cultures, we focus on themes that encourage independence of spirit, enthusiasm for learning, and sharing of the world’s diversity. Interactive and beautiful, our products combine the best of the present with the best of the past to educate our children as caretakers of tomorrow.</p>	<p>Letterbox Library was established 23 years ago by two single mothers who- inspired (and provoked!) by the lack of appropriate books for their own daughters- decided to search out and provide inclusive children’s books. We have a co-operative structure and we therefore share the values which motivate the work of the wider co-operative sector: social responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity.</p> <p>Letterbox is committed to celebrating equality and diversity in the very best children’s books. We believe that challenging stereotypes and discrimination should play a fundamental part in every child’s education and that we all, as adults, share a collective responsibility for making each child valued, regardless of their background or abilities.</p>

These particular organizations demonstrate a clear company philosophy that endorses the present inclusive ethos of the EY settings. Their publicity states that their mission was to address what was perceived as a gap in the children's literature market. This was a risky enterprise and the founder of 'Tamarind Press' explains that she was forced to challenge the 'belief that books about black children were not money spinners' (Wilkins, 2001:55).

Two of the publishers suggest that people who 'share our values' will be attracted to buy their distinctive products but this seems problematic in terms of limiting their market to those who are already sensitised to their message and raises questions as to whether these books will ever be regarded as mainstream in appeal. The commitment to 'collective responsibility' seems insignificant if most EY practitioners do not share this view, or are perhaps unaware of it due to a lack of mainstream availability. Whilst 'Barefoot Books' places a strong emphasis on artistic merit and inspiration for creativity through using a range of artistic styles, this is unlikely to be influential on children if their books are not advertised more widely and available in high street bookshops. Despite their longevity, all these small publishers and distributors continue to rely heavily on 'word of mouth' and achieve a majority of their sales through catalogues and internet advertising. The decline of innovative and unknown authors exploring unfamiliar, non-traditional subject matter may also be influenced by the growth of reprints of more familiar authors and stories that are guaranteed to sell, particularly those that appeal to the adult buyers of picture books who may remember them with nostalgic affection (Reynolds, 1998).

Alongside this, cuts in library and education budgets and the consequent decline of markets for hardback books, which were more expensive to produce, led to increasingly conservative booklists for mainstream publishers in order to guarantee the established market (Reynolds, 1998; Nodleman, 2008). In this respect, Powers (2003:101) believes that there was a 'perceptible shift in children's publishing from innovation in the 1960s to safety and nostalgia in the '70s'. He explains that this was largely due to these economic constraints and a diminishing commitment to publicly funded culture. It would seem that, unless the adult buying public had been exposed to the earlier wave of more innovative picture books, they may not have the same range of choices available when selecting those to buy on behalf of children.

Links to emerging technologies demonstrates both a restraint and an opportunity in terms of what can be produced. For instance the 1980s –1990s saw a radical re-modelling of the printing industry which damaged the fragile and time consuming relationships between publishers,

illustrators and printers that had been a feature of the 1960s and 1970s. Traditional and lengthier production methods were under threat due to financial constraints and consequently there was a move towards cheaper, less diverse methods of production in order to respond to more competitive market forces which Powers (2003:128) quotes Michael Rosen describing as: ‘The inexorable anarchy of capitalism... more titles, more authors, quick quick, write, write, no time to edit, no time to rewrite, get it out, sell it, drop it, pulp it’

The growth of consumerism during the 1980s was a strong driver for the production of children’s books aimed at the younger reader ‘as child rearing became increasingly an experience involving shopping and consumption’ (Powers, 2003: 122). The emergence of Walker Books as a publishing house that was committed to providing good quality, affordable picture books for younger children led to the production of board books specifically aimed at babies during this decade. Established illustrators like Helen Oxenbury were commissioned to fill a perceived gap in the market and, in collaboration with Sainsbury’s supermarket, proved a huge commercial success. Martin (1989: 111) describes Oxenbury’s facility and skilful understanding that ‘extends and exploits limitations usually considered to dictate complexity of format for very young children.’ Martin (1989) continues by suggesting that she was a good example of an illustrator whose knowledge of young children based on her experiences as a parent helped her to perfectly judge her intended audience in a non- patronizing way. At the same time she appeals to many adults because of her humorous attention to domestic detail and the sensitivity of her drawing.

The development of modern technologies, many of which became established in the 1990’s, have had a dramatic impact on publishing (Reynolds, 1998; Hunt, 2009). The continuing growth of alternative forms of entertainment and information for children through television and computers has had an impact on the variety and number of books published for children. Carey (British Library, British Council, 2003:18) points out that there is a growing ‘tendency for fictional characters to get their visual identity from films and television’. There has subsequently been an increasing influence of TV and film imagery on illustrations in children’s books which has both extended and restricted the breadth. The relative flatness of these images alongside their conformity of style and content may be regarded as less intellectually challenging to young children. On the other hand, Watson (1996) suggests that watching films is an increasingly visually sophisticated experience in terms of variety of technique and multi- layered meanings. He gives the example of the Disney interpretation of *Aladdin* (1992) which he suggests has more cultural allusions per minute than in any other he has seen. Picture book images derived from

such films are of course guaranteed consumer popularity due to links with the original film and other commodities (Zipes, 2002). This not only relates to children but also to a generation of adults (including EY practitioners) who themselves may have been exposed to such film influences in their own childhood. It may be that this contributes to choices based on nostalgic memories for instance in choosing a sentimental Disney interpretation of a traditional story like *Snow White* (1937) rather than interpretations by less familiar but more challenging illustrators who interpret a text in a different way. This variety of interpretation of traditional stories is discussed by Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) in terms of demonstrating how different illustrators amplify different parts of a story and therefore change it for the reader. Awareness of this range of interpretation is not helped by the increasing monopoly of a limited range of book suppliers who stock more popular versions of traditional stories.

Outsourcing of production to countries where production and labour costs are cheaper have also had an effect on the kinds of books that are published. Salisbury (2007:6) notes that the effects of global market demands in terms of selling co-editions of picture books to a range of countries has meant that illustrators wanting to convey a particular cultural flavour in their work are now discouraged from making 'overtly 'local' visual references' which can have the effect of further limited, uninspiring and standardized products. Graham (1998: 79) recognizes that 'some publishers do not welcome too much specificity because it may act as a barrier to overseas sales' If these are the only available choices that are easily available through suppliers, then they may be the ones that are purchased on behalf of young children by EY practitioners.

Mainstream publishers appear to remain cautious in terms of taking risks with their style of illustrations. Tucker (1998b: 156) explains that this is partly due to the 'increasingly centralized book distribution through only a limited amount of retailing outlets'. This reluctance is further compounded by a reticence to explore non-traditional or controversial subjects. 'Censorship by the invisible forces of what were once considered conventional standards of good taste and form has been replaced by the censorship of market forces'

Salisbury (2007:6) explains how many picture books published in Europe, America and Australia are more experimental in design and content:

When asked about this, most UK publishers will claim that, much as they love the 'sophisticated stuff', they can't sell it. It is never easy to know who is leading whom

here, but it is hard to believe that some countries produce innately more sophisticated and visually discerning children.

In other words, picture books designed for young children in some other countries appear to be aimed at an audience that is deemed to be able to deconstruct and interpret complex imagery whereas this is often not the case in the UK. Since this thesis is focusing on what is available in the UK it is not possible to explore the reasons for this apparent anomaly, although it would be an interesting subject for further research. It may be assumed that the forces that drive particular publishing trends in this country are subject to both economic and cultural influences that include a lack of emphasis on the importance of developing artistic and aesthetic development in children.

Can picture books be seen as contributing to alternative constructions of disability?

This section of the literature review aims to examine the premise that picture books can contribute to new constructions of disability in much the same way as earlier books were used to raise awareness about racial diversity and gender. There have been considerable improvements in relation to the quantity and quality of books relating to these issues which may provide some insight into how they have become more widely produced and used that will read across to the issue of disability. The current lack of resources might not represent an unalterable condition because Saunders (2000) points out that, despite many concerns about the pervasiveness of gender stereotyping in children's literature from the 1970s, it is only recently that this has been widely recognized as potentially harmful.

As Evans (1998: 99) comments with reference to books that show gender stereotypes: 'it is the texts that surround us in our culture that tell us how to read the world'. It has already been discussed that there is a danger in believing that mere representation is sufficient whereas many writers feel strongly that those books that are specifically designed to convey a message are often contrived and bordering on the offensive due to their stereotypical content in terms of presenting a tokenistic view (Worotyneć, 2004).

Evans (1998:99) quotes research by Davies and Banks (1992) showing that, despite being exposed to books that challenged a stereotypical view of gender roles, children's viewpoints remain strongly influenced by the dominant discourse. They suggest that instead of mere

exposure, children need to 'begin to understand how the gendered discourse works'. However, the extent to which any children's book can influence attitudes remains controversial and Hunt (1994:164) cites Klein (1985) who warns that there is an assumption that books have the power to influence whereas it is actually 'the reader who must be educated to deal with the books, rather than the books must be changed'. In some cases this may mean that picture books that convey negative stereotypes could be used to inform debate with young children and that as Saunders (2000) suggests, almost any picture book could be used as a basis for discussing broader issues relating to power, control and difference. This echoes the earlier concern that EY practitioners need to be able to recognise examples of bias and to reflect on this in order to help young children to learn to do the same.

The continued lack of images representing disability in children's literature may accurately represent the way in which people with disabilities are still viewed as marginal. As part of his concern that books did not sufficiently reflect post Warnock integrationist policy, Quicke (1985) raises issues such as the authenticity of the voice, the accuracy of the portrayal of a disability, and whether the style of illustration sufficiently conveys relevant information about a hidden disability like ASD. Quicke also considers whether those with disabilities are portrayed as complex, fully rounded characters with a full range of emotions, including humour, and motives that are both positive and negative where relevant. As with all effective storytelling, he is also concerned that the plot should be well- executed and engaging. This addresses the question of whether disability is central to the story and if there is an emphasis on what Cianciolo, (1997: 3) describes as 'universal shared experiences' (experiences common to many like eating a meal or getting ready for bed) or 'salient shared experiences' (those that relate to a specific group of people). An example would be the need for diabetics to inject insulin as part of everyday routine, or a child with ASD using a Pictorial Communication System as part of an everyday experience in a nursery school. The fictional picture book needs to be able to weave the above information into the narrative but not at the expense of plot and characterization.

Before young children can recognise and challenge stereotypical portrayals, it is relevant to reflect on whether EY practitioners are confident and knowledgeable about picture books in terms of how they might be used to benefit children's understanding about equality issues. It is possible to see the increased emphasis in training and practice undertaken in the 1980s in response to concerns about the need to increase awareness of minority cultures as offering important lessons for the way in which disability awareness could be introduced to practitioners

and young children. This approach came to be known as ‘multicultural education’ through which young children can be made aware of a range of cultural lifestyles and practices and exposed to a range of cultural images throughout the curriculum (Blair, Cole, 2000; Lane, 2008). The belief that exposure to different cultures was important was endorsed in The Swann Report (Great Britain. DES, 1985) which, some have argued, has been at times superficially interpreted by practitioners as providing information about food, clothes, music and festivals. This criticism about the way multicultural education has often been operationalised stresses that whilst this may begin to address some misconceptions about different cultural groups, it is certainly not enough and has been criticized as contributing to confirming stereotypes. It is seen to be a ‘soft’ approach to a challenging issue and ‘needs to be embedded in an anti discriminatory framework so that racist attitudes and practices can be challenged’ (Browne, 1998:45). Troyna in particular was influential in challenging some of the ‘liberal assumptions’ associated with elements of multicultural practice and for transforming it into what he saw as more powerful anti racist practice (Sikes, Rizvi, 1997: 9). The extent to which this informs the ways in which other aspects of inclusive practice is interpreted may rely on an understanding of why groups have been and continue to be socially excluded.

An earlier section has raised the concern that some practitioners may lack knowledge about the potential of picture books and that this lack of perception of a book’s intrinsic value contributes to practitioners selecting from a limited choice. Any book that is presented to children in order to develop empathy or to address the understanding of any equality issue needs to be judged first in terms of its design and narrative qualities and Evans (1998) points out that practitioners, like children, need to understand how traditional picture book texts work if they are then going to be able to deconstruct them and be critical and creative in the way they are used.

This may be problematic. Wyse and Jones (2001:580) point out that teachers need to read ‘widely and analytically’ in order to make informed judgements about the books they use with children. Research by Cremin et al. (2008) that investigated primary teachers’ knowledge of children’s literature in general clearly demonstrates a lack of awareness about picture books. Interestingly it finds that those with less than five years teaching experience had the least knowledge. It may be deduced from this finding that this is an area that currently receives little attention in initial training as it is not included in the Standards for Teaching (TDA, 2007) and also may be lacking in their school-based experience and this raises concerns about existing practice. The authors comment that there may be ‘an assumed knowledge of their professional

repertoire' despite this, as it is not included with any significant emphasis in CPD literacy training (Cremin et al., 2008: 451). They raise the concern that many teachers working with children aged 5-7 years struggled to name half a dozen picture book creators and noted that children of this age 'deserve to be introduced to the notion of authorship and to develop their pleasure and preferences for writers and illustrators' (Cremin et al., 2008:457). This would seem to emphasize the need for children in the preceding stage of education to be exposed to a wealth of picture books chosen by knowledgeable practitioners since they may get limited opportunities in Key Stage One.

Unfortunately, the findings of the above research may indicate a similar lack of knowledge for those teachers that have been specifically trained for EY teaching and it should also be remembered that many teachers working in NS have not been trained specifically to work with this age group. Although practitioners in NS have a range of training experiences and qualifications, it may be supposed that the teachers will have considerable influence in picture book selection since they are usually in a more senior role with responsibility for buying these resources.

Alongside this lack of training, and subsequent deficit in practitioner knowledge about the range and potential of picture books, is a parallel (and potentially more significant) concern about the subject of diversity and difference within the context of diversity and children's rights. It is suggested (Lane 2008) that EY practitioners will themselves need some understanding of equality issues in general if they are going to recognize the potential of and use picture books as a tool for raising awareness of disability related issues with young children.

The wider legislative and policy context

Despite the relative flexibility of curriculum organisation and delivery in NS, all EY practitioners are required to be aware of and respond to developments in legislation and policy and in respect of issues relating to disability within all children's services the speed and scale of change has been particularly significant. Practitioners need to understand the way in which policy in this area has moved in order to respond properly to what the legislation demands of them and so it is worth taking some time to examine the way the policy environment has changed over what is a relatively short period of time. It is also important to point out that this research focuses on EY practice during 2007-8 which falls within the third consecutive term of the Labour government

which ended in 2010 and, as a result, is only concerned with analysing legislation and policy within and prior to this period.

It was the emergence of a politically active disability movement with a civil rights agenda which resulted in the appointment of the first Minister for the Disabled in 1974. Subsequent legislation included The Invalid Care Allowance and The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons (Amendment) Act (Great Britain, 1976) which improved access to public buildings (Drake, 1999). Between 1980 and 1995 the disability movement helped to unite individuals or disparate groups of people with disabilities and campaigned for improvements to equality legislation in line with other human rights issues. The result of this was the publication of The DDA (Great Britain, 1995) which placed a responsibility on all providers to remove barriers to services and to actively work towards inclusive practice. This has now been extended to cover all schools and colleges in The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) (Great Britain, 2001).

Definitions of, and subsequent policy responses to, disability have been dominated in recent years by a shift from so-called ‘medical’ definitions of disability which focus on deficits within an individual, to descriptions based on the ‘social’ model which instead emphasizes the ‘disabling’ nature of social institutions (Oliver 1996, Goodley, 2010). A good example of this would be the way in which barriers to mainstream education for children who were previously segregated into special schools have been recognized. These barriers might include things like a lack of physical access to the classroom, lack of specialist medical support, an undifferentiated curriculum that fails to take into account the specific needs of pupils, an inflexible routine that does not allow for special therapies to take place, and lack of specialized support from extra integration staff. In terms of providing appropriate resources to facilitate a more inclusive learning environment for all children, whether or not they themselves have disabilities or SEN, picture books are clearly significant in constructing and confirming what is deemed to be socially acceptable and desirable.

The emphasis on the importance of early identification of SEN and consequent intervention and support in settings is enshrined in the core principles of EYFS (Great Britain. DfES, 2007a). Robinson (2010: 172) suggests that including children into mainstream provision at this early stage of education ‘has a pragmatic as well as philosophical impact on both parents and providers’. She explains that the impact is experienced by both parties which mean that

‘society’s expectations shift with each positive experience’. However, these changes have been slow to develop and it is important to recognize that they have happened largely as a result of concerns expressed by disabled people’s organizations who continue to campaign for fairer provision. However, the extent to which more radical voices within the disability rights movement have dominated the inclusion debate has been viewed as unhelpful by some who believe that an insistence on inclusion for all contradicts rather than upholds human rights in terms of limiting choice and freedom of decision making. For instance, Low (2007) believes the drive towards inclusion for all has been led by an unrepresentative minority of vocal disability activists whose negative personal experiences of segregated schooling in the past has inadvertently led to the closure of many special schools and disadvantaged children in the process because mainstream schools are not sufficiently resourced to meet their needs. Warnock (2007:x) despite her positive views in 1978 on the importance of what was then termed integration, has subsequently expressed disquiet at the dominance of social model thinking which she warns has led to an unsatisfactory experience of mainstream schooling for many children who may have flourished in special schools:

My contention was and still is that there are some children who simply fail to get that education in a mainstream school, and no adaptation of the school can turn it into an environment in which such children can learn.

Wedell (2008:128) points out that her perceived ‘recantation is relevant only in terms of the system as it currently exists’ and that there needs to be a fundamental structural change to how schools are organized in terms of curriculum and pedagogy if inclusion can be effective.

The majority of media coverage in relation to this shift of position by Warnock and the subsequent discussion was about what Mittler (2000: vii) describes as the ‘largely historical’ debate about the need for special schools as part of provision versus integration (not inclusion). This is significant as this limited view of the debate has an influence on public knowledge and understanding of a complex subject which, it may be assumed, includes some EY practitioners.

Academic literature relating to the inclusion debate as it affects disability and SEN has become increasingly complex and prolific since The Education Act (Great Britain, 1981). Themes that are explored include an acknowledgement of advances in medical research that have led to better understanding of many previously unrecognized conditions and Skidmore (2004:21) discusses recently published work on Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) as an example of this ‘psycho

medical paradigm' in the research field. Tutt (2007) recognizes that the increased earlier diagnosis and improved intervention and support have led to a high prevalence of children with a range of communication and behavioural difficulties including ASD and ADHD. Many of these children are now included in mainstream provision, particularly in EY settings.

The social construction of disability has been explored by sociologists in terms of power relationships and political agendas at national and international levels (Tomlinson, 1982; Barton, 1996). There are clear links to the history of segregated schooling and the consequent developments through partial integration towards better inclusive provision. The 'organizational paradigm' (Skidmore, 2004) continues to emphasize the importance of institutional reform in line with the social model of disability if children are to be better included into mainstream schooling. This emphasis on solutions to complex issues is appealing and confirms the technical approach to EY practice endorsed by prescriptive curriculum guidance that suggests provision can be made effective through applying appropriate strategies (Moss, 2006). Clearly, these strategies do not always work and continue to fuel the debate about the effectiveness and viability of inclusive mainstream schools.

Despite the legislative framework, the debate around definitions of what is meant by inclusion alongside whether this is the best way to educate all children is longstanding and, despite recent legislation and policy, continues to be controversial (Nutbrown, Clough, 2010). Therefore EY practitioners work within a context that acknowledges the need for inclusive practice without necessarily addressing the challenges and contradictions underpinned by an educational system that is 'constructed upon the premise of the normally developing child' (Hodkinson, Vickerman, 2009: 47).

At the same time, the perceived need to educate all children about the necessity to acknowledge and respect diverse groups in society is not a new concern and was first debated in the late 1980s. Since 2002, citizenship education has been a compulsory part of the curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 and covers these areas to some extent. In addition, The Crick Report (Great Britain, 1998) recommends that younger pupils should also develop an understanding of fairness, justice and human rights through the curriculum and this is given legislative weight through The Human Rights Act (Great Britain, 1998) which places clear responsibilities on the UK government to recommend more emphasis on removing all forms of discrimination in education.

This involves changing the ethos of a school far beyond what is required by SENDA (Great Britain, 2001) and may include auditing the environment; examining the content of the curriculum; ensuring accurate representation of disability; reviewing all policies; critically evaluating all resources and educating all staff to understand and promote disability equality through initial training programmes and CPD (Reiser, 2000 b). Armstrong et al (2000:11) view schools as dynamic cultures that can themselves shape and change perceptions: ‘Demands for inclusive schooling should concern not only the ‘rights’ of disabled children but are also part of a wider critique of that which constitutes itself as normal.’ In order to achieve better inclusion for those with disabilities, Booth et al (1999) and Mittler (2000) emphasise the need to change schools at a fundamental level to enable participation of all children and that this includes a review of curriculum resources.

All educational settings have an important role to play in translating SENDA into practice. There are many levels on which they need to work, but the most difficult relates to scrutinising and challenging the attitudes of practitioners. Research by Clough and Nutbrown (2004) that looked at attitudes to inclusion with ninety four preschool educators across the UK, demonstrated a wide range of views that included only twenty four of these as ‘unequivocal advocates for full inclusion’ whereas sixty four indicated that children should be included in principle, depending on the nature of difficulties, and six felt that children with learning difficulties should not be included at all (Nutbrown, Clough, 2006). Whilst these writers recognise that these views may be influenced by a lack of resources, negative experiences and insufficient training, EY practitioner attitudes will also have been influenced by a social construction of disability that is a complex mix of political, religious, moral and medical history that may contribute to perpetuating negative stereotypes. The extent to which schools also reflect and endorse society’s attitudes to disability is likely to be a continuing debate, particularly with respect to the dominant ‘scientific’ medical knowledge that underpins educational provision for children with SEN (Reiser, 2000 b).

Pedagogical challenges associated with particular disabilities also need to be considered and Cooper (2005:128), for instance gives the example of ADHD as a disability that is, to a large extent, socially constructed, but points out that this is too simple an explanation: ‘certain individuals, by virtue of their biological inheritance and social circumstances, are more prone to being constructed as being ‘disordered’ in this way than others’. He goes on to recognize that schools have a major part to play in confirming a negative construction but that they ‘also provide the means by which deconstruction can take place.’ He reflects that practitioners have an

important role to play in terms ‘of incorporating research-based theoretical knowledge’ into their pedagogy which may otherwise be over reliant on what he describes as ‘craft knowledge’ which is that which is developed through initial training and practical experience but not always as well informed and up-to- date as it needs to be. This supports the view of Lewis and Norwich (2005: xiii) who point out that all practitioners need to have a ‘systematic and coherent basis for discerning the relative value of a plethora of tips and packages.’

Barber and Turner (2007) and Golder et al (2009) emphasise the importance of trainee teachers having substantial experience of working with children with SEN as well as theoretical knowledge in order to have a positive and confident attitude to inclusion. They highlight the historic lack of emphasis in initial teacher training as a concern that must be better addressed if the following redefined Qualified Teaching Standards are to have meaning:

Q19: Know how to make effective personalised provision for those they teach, including those for whom English is an Additional language or who have special educational needs or disabilities, and how to take practical account of diversity and promote equality and inclusion in their teaching.

Q25: Use a range of teaching strategies and resources, including e learning, taking practical account of diversity and promoting equality and inclusion.

(TDA, 2007, online)

Smith (2005:149) warns that inclusion is difficult to achieve since ‘it underestimates the challenges involved in delivering something which is seen, in the abstract, as an unqualified good.’ The implications of delivering an inclusive programme of activities in terms of the logistics of everyday practice when working with young children may contribute towards practitioners’ attitudes to the viability of inclusion and may, in turn, also influence how they choose to express their interpretation of inclusive practice through the resources they provide, including the picture books they do or don’t select to use with children (Reiser, Mason, 1992;Saunders, 2000; Matthew, Clow, 2007).

It is important to consider whether these changes in legislation and the move towards inclusion are reflected in the content of more recently produced picture books. An unpublished paper by Carlisle, (2004) examined the publication of books in the United States that included a theme of disability after the introduction of Public Law 94 – 142 (1975) The Equal Education for All

Handicapped Children Act. Her conclusions appear to be that, despite an increase in proliferation, the literary quality and impact of these books were difficult to measure. It would seem that the production of such books in response to a perceived need requires careful consideration that perhaps includes more effective consultation with the groups concerned in order to avoid tokenism and misrepresentation. Access and entitlement issues are only a small part of the challenge however since negative attitudes are more difficult to change and this may take considerable time: 'While the language has changed, the same group of professionals are doing the same things to the same groups of children as they were before' Oliver (1996, 23).

It has already been discussed that the way in which adults describe the world through literature is only one version of reality and that children interpret this in unpredictable ways. However, if this version of reality is one in which children with disabilities do not appear other than as outsiders, this confirms a normality that is not necessarily conducive to the portrayal of an inclusive society which other policy implies is desirable. It certainly may contradict the day to day experiences of children in an inclusive NS. If this is a common representation of absence of children and adults with disabilities that is repeated across many picture books, it serves to reinforce the message that mainstream inclusive environments are rare (Matthew, Clow, 2008)..

The extent to which EY practitioners are aware of these complex ongoing debates about inclusion may depend on when they undertook their initial training. Those that are more recently trained may be better aware of the legislative and policy context or may have received positive experiences of working in an inclusive environment as part of their induction year (Barber, Turner, 2007; Golder et al, 2009). The type of training may also be relevant in terms of whether the subject of disability was discussed at either a social policy or a philosophical level and if so, whether this was through a particular ideological lens. CPD may focus more closely on pragmatic responses to the challenge of meeting the individual needs of a particular child. Therefore, whilst the current policy discourse is framed in terms of the social model of disability, everyday reality requires practitioners to meet the individual needs of children. This may be perceived as problematic in terms of access to appropriate medical support and physical therapies, or presenting challenging behaviour which has a detrimental impact of the learning of their peers. Some practitioners may view their professional role to be only in relation to meeting these perceived needs rather than pondering how needs are defined and categorized in terms of historical and political context 'in a society whose structural inequalities remain largely uninterrogated' (Levitas,1998:7).

There is also the need to consider whether EY practitioners who are not abreast of research and wider debates about inclusion are defining themselves in a particularly narrow way, described earlier by Dahberg and Moss (2005:10) as predominantly carrying out ‘standardized and technical practice’. This perception may be further compounded by ‘the public discourse of childhood disability (which) emphasizes personal tragedy and vulnerability’ (Priestly, 1999:92). In this way, stories relating to individual circumstances are commonly portrayed in the wider media in a way that Reiser and Mason (1992) believe contribute to a negative, deficit-led portrayal of people with disability. The potential social isolation of children with disabilities where they are not seen to participate in everyday activities with their peers is a concern. For instance, Beresford (2002:150) cites research by Watson et al (1999) that describes how, apart from school, many disabled children ‘spend much of their time in a disablist, childist adult world’ in which they are both excluded and protected from the ordinary world of children. It may be that this is now further compounded by the extent to which all children are subjected to increased surveillance and protection (James, James, 2004).

Beresford (2002) goes on to discuss how over-surveillance by concerned adults and a lack of opportunity to learn the cultural rules associated with socializing with non-disabled peers can also lead to over reliance on adults. Although this becomes more problematic as children grow older, Beresford (2002:152) cites the work of Mulderij (1996) whose study of young children ‘concluded that the ‘lifeworlds’ of young physically disabled children are smaller and more restricted than those of non disabled children.’

Alongside an awareness and understanding of the wider context of exclusion and the benefits of inclusion from a human rights perspective, EY practitioner attitudes need to be informed by knowledge of the possible consequences of social exclusion alongside providing the appropriate environment and resources to meet individual needs. This is endorsed by a government policy statement (Great Britain. Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) (2007:78) which says: ‘in some cases identifying a child as having SEN can also lead to low expectations- an excuse for a widening gap with their peers, rather than a means to secure the support that enables them to catch up’. An understanding of the causes and effects of discrimination for any excluded group is a requirement for all professional practice alongside a responsibility and commitment to improving how services are delivered (Smith, 2005).

It has been noted above that the EY practitioner is operating in a complex policy environment that is often difficult to understand or keep track of. However, the literature makes a strong case for the idea that practitioners need to develop a better awareness of what drives these policy changes and how the debate around disability and inclusion has a history it is necessary to be aware of if ideas like inclusion are going to have the sort of impact required of them. As Nutbrown and Clough (2006) have noted the inclusive culture of any EY setting is created and defined by all those that are part of it. An understanding and interpretation of what is meant by inclusion and how the idea fits into the wider social policy context enables EY practitioners to engage with the debate about the ways in which an inclusive society that actively works against discrimination and the exclusion of vulnerable groups is achievable and why it remains such a challenging goal to reach. Rose (2011:3) explains that practitioners need to step back from narrow, limited personal experiences and to be aware of the historical and political context in order to better understand the structural causes of inequality and thus gain ‘a broader perspective of the causes of marginalisation’ and ‘an understanding of the established cultures and traditions upon which societies have been founded’. He suggests that this is necessary in order for individuals to understand why policy in this area has been subject to constantly changing priorities that frequently place political and economic expediency over demonstrable need.

Picture books as a tool for inclusive practice

An understanding of what is to be gained through a policy of inclusion and the challenges such an approach represents provides an important context for the way in which inclusive practice can actually be made to happen. The EYFS curriculum guidance (Great Britain. DfES, 2006:15) recommends that:

Positive attitudes to disability can be promoted in a wide variety of ways in schools. This includes ensuring that there are positive images in school books and other materials.

The LA in which the field research takes place currently uses a document that is used in all education settings (Named LA, 2008). It includes the following three related objectives to be achieved to complete Standard 6: Teaching and Learning:

6.12 Resources and curriculum materials are selected to reflect the backgrounds and experience of all learners, the diversity in society and to promote positive images of all groups.

6.14 Adults are aware of the range of available resources to support inclusion and use them where appropriate.

6.19 Resources are regularly evaluated and this is used to plan for future resource needs.

The role of practitioners in providing picture books to help achieve a better understanding of disability would at first seem clear from the above statements, but research by Siraj-Blatchford (1993:90) indicates a problem with how teaching children about any aspect of equality is vague and difficult to interpret. She traces a lack of commitment on the part of initial teacher training to sufficiently address this as part of a move towards a more 'practical' approach to training which emerged in the early 1980s as a result of political pressure relating to concerns about poor standards of literacy and numeracy in schools. She believes this change of emphasis to be at the expense of 'theoretical and professional education' which includes content relating to equality issues. Blair and Cole (2000:71) suggest that during the period of Conservative government in the 1980s 'equality issues were not only placed on the back burner, but actively demonized'. They describe how the popular usage of the term 'political correctness' was introduced, embraced and still retains its power to diminish the importance of issues relating to equality 'at the expense of the majority'. In this way a particular negative discourse has become embedded and sustained and may have an influence on attitudes and values. There is also a pejorative view that the use of the term 'ideology' only applies to material with a 'left wing' stance (Pinsent, 1997:138).

The move towards this more practical approach to training prevented complex issues being specifically addressed in initial training and consequently practice lacked emphasis and rigour. Siraj-Blatchford (1993) describes concerns expressed by UK Anti-Racist Teacher Education Network (ARTEN) (1988) that teacher educators themselves were not knowledgeable about equality issues and so were ineffective in communicating its importance to trainees. This was raised as a potential concern in the Swann Report (Great Britain. DES, 1985:544) which pointed out that: 'It is important to recognize that ITE is one spoke in a deterministic cycle of inequality and if issues of equality are carefully addressed that cycle could be weakened considerably'.

Gilborn (2008:722) confirms that both the Thatcher and Major Conservative governments were underpinned by an often expressed belief in ‘colour blindness’ in education. He is however concerned that the subsequently stated commitment to equal opportunities and race inequalities by the Labour government that took power in 1997 proved to be empty rhetoric. He believes that:

Despite its radical rhetoric, New Labour never moved beyond a superficial notion of equal opportunities; education policy simply could not accept that many fundamental assumptions that appear commonsensical (such as the nature of ‘ability’) are actually deeply implicated in the creation and legitimation of racist educational inequality.

He goes on to comment that the effects of a proposed Citizenship Bill that insisted on a facility in spoken English sends mixed messages about whether the government values diversity. This raises questions as to whether EY practitioners are aware of and influenced by such policy development that could be seen to run counter to inclusive practice in general. Once again popular media has a powerful role to play in shaping discourse when it quotes a government minister as commenting ‘Why it is my little boy’s school has “Welcome” in 20 different languages? Immigrants must learn English’ (Cohen, 2008). Despite the emphasis on supporting the needs of EAL learners clearly expressed in legislation, policy and curriculum documents, this message in the public arena is contradictory yet potentially highly influential.

Eggleston (1993: 6) also underlines the need for trainee teachers to be able to recognize and understand the causes of inequality to be able to identify and analyse the reasons for their own ‘assumptions and prejudices’. Waterson (2002: 42) proposes that the teaching profession increasingly requires people who are able to be critically self reflective and informed and that this needs to be considered even at the stage of enrolment onto a vocational course that prepares students for working with children. He believes that the content of the training curriculum also needs to be reviewed where ‘issues of both personal and professional ideology are raised and examined as well as the issues and effective practices that will promote social and educational inclusion.’

There is perhaps a mistaken belief that, once trained, an EY practitioner will have the necessary fixed knowledge and skills to be able to carry out their role sufficiently. There is a concern that this can lead to professional complacency that does not encourage criticism of existing practice

and that can stifle the development of truly self aware and transformative practice. Dahlberg and Moss (2005:20) quote Rose (1999) as reflecting on the importance of reflective practice: ‘It is a matter of introducing a kind of awkwardness into the fabric of one’s experience, of interrupting the fluency of the narratives that encode that experience and making them stutter’.

Current curriculum guidance clearly states the importance of presenting young children with positive images to counteract the more negative stereotypes that may be experienced in the outside world in relation to race, culture, gender, religion, class and disability (Great Britain. DfES, 2007). One of the Teaching Standards states that qualified teachers must be able to ‘promote equality and inclusion in their teaching’ (TDA, 2007:Q19) and Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) Standards include the more proactive requirement to ‘Promote children’s rights, equality, inclusion and anti-discriminatory practice in all aspects of their practice’ (Best Practice Network, 2007: S18). The government has also signalled a clear commitment to improving all training over the next three years in order to: ‘Improve the workforce’s knowledge, skills and understanding of SEN and disability through better initial teacher training and continuing professional development by working with the Training and Development Agency for Schools and others’ (Great Britain. DCFS, 2007: 78 para. 3.117)

There is however, little indication in any guidance of how this complex and sometimes controversial area of education should be carried out in practice, with the implicit assumption that it is unproblematic. Robertson and Jones Diaz (2006:2) recognize that there is a dearth of international research about how ‘early childhood educators’ perspectives of diversity and difference impact on their pedagogy’. They comment on a lack of willingness to engage with what are sometimes perceived as difficult ‘adult issues’ that do not conform to ‘an imagined world of the child, constructed by adults’ (Robertson, Jones Diaz, 2006: 7). They go on to suggest that training institutions confirm and perpetuate this discourse by not sufficiently covering issues relating to equality in their courses. Even if these constitute a significant part of training, these writers cite the work of Kobayashi and Ray (2000) who point out that individuals delivering the training may select which particular areas of equality they wish to promote and emphasize. In this way, uncomfortable issues like sexuality may be avoided and thus confirm some negative values due to their omission.

Mohamed (2006:145) comments on how recent CPD training with EY practitioners about anti – discriminatory practice in one LA demonstrates the distinct lack of confidence in this area.

Concerns are raised about a lack of understanding of terminology and some complacency about tokenistic practice that is not based on knowledge and understanding about the causes and consequences of discrimination:

It is important that professional development affords practitioners the opportunity to reflect on how discrimination occurs. In this way an attempt can be made to move beyond a simplistic view of children as innocent and harmless, towards discussion to address issues of race, class, disability, ethnicity and gender.

Her research demonstrates that although practitioners on the course are concerned about providing an appropriate curriculum, they lack awareness about why it could be problematic and culturally located. This may relate back to when practitioners were initially trained since Browne (1998:31) describes how books that were widely used on childcare courses in 1970s and 1980s included misinformed (but nevertheless influential) stereotypical comments about children from different racial groups. For instance she cites one course book published as late as 1983 that comments on the behaviour of children with West Indian origins: ‘Their responsiveness to music makes it almost impossible for them to remain still when music is played.’ It goes on to present similarly shocking statements to explain the behaviour of other groups of children based on racial characteristics. Whilst it is to be hoped that these stereotypes are challenged through subsequent professional experience and CPD, they may remain influential for some EY practitioners trained at this time, who may perceive them as constituting ‘expert knowledge’.

The literature suggests that selection of particular picture books by EY practitioners is, to a large extent, haphazard and may depend on access to and awareness of appropriate examples within and beyond the setting in which they work. The fact that the majority of picture books do not portray any characters with disabilities may symbolise that this group, by virtue of their invisibility, do not exist or at least are insignificant (Matthew, Clow, 2007). Nodleman (2008:105) has explained how these decisions are related to what is perceived as ‘appropriate’ for children to read and that this acts as a filter on which picture books are produced for children in the first place: ‘It tends to be imperial in its basic assumptions, making texts produced in centres of power central and normative and marginalising texts produced by less powerful people in less powerful places’.

Saunders (2000:3) believes that teachers and other readers of books have become better at identifying racial and gender bias but that this is not the case with the issue of disability. She suggests that younger children need knowledgeable adults to help them critique any images of disability in a text and that EY practitioners working with very young children are in an ideal position to develop these skills. She suggests that once children progress to more independent reading that precludes discussion ‘lingering ideas can become consolidated into taboos by half baked information and minimal personal experience’. Unless readers have had this personal experience Saunders (2000:2) warns that ‘many children internalise a basic message that disability is a fearsome thing that happens to other people’. She believes that many picture books can be used to discuss the issue whether they have an overt disability theme or not as part of developing critical awareness that improves general literacy skills. She agrees with Pinsent (1997) by commenting that this should include looking at what may be perceived as more negative images and in this way learn to recognise bias. However, she suggests that those working with young children have insufficient training about how to use picture books as a positive resource for raising awareness about disability. Her view is that practitioners have a responsibility to help young children to interrogate any text for subliminal meanings and that this is a skill that needs to be learned and practised. She goes on to express the view that the early years of education may be unwittingly contributing to negative ideas about disability that goes beyond the lack of picture books. For instance she suggests that warnings about the damaging effects of accidents portrayed in road safety talks and fundraising for disability charities are examples of how negative stereotypes are reinforced. Practitioners themselves may be influenced by traditional charitable advertising that portrays a dependency and lack of agency. Whilst these are designed to encourage donations, they can also confirm and perpetuate a negative image of disability (Reiser, 2000b).

Saunders (2000:4) believes that it is important to consider how these more subliminal messages may confirm traditional views that inclusive practice is supposed to be challenging and even that ‘absence of disability in all its shades may unintentionally create expectations in children of perfection’. She also warns against the frequent use of ‘reverse images’ to build up tension in stories whereby particular characteristics like hunched, one eyed, hook handed astigmatic, knobbly people are associated with danger and suspicion and can become transferred onto real individuals. It is very important that children do not immediately associate disability with

negative characteristics. It is inevitably the case that some EY practitioners will encounter and sometimes absorb these negative attributions via the media.

Quicke (1985) and Reiser (2000b) point out that the lack of disabled imagery in our history and culture has deep roots in myth, legend and classical literature. They suggest that there remain many negative images of disability in children's literature that are associated with evil and criminality and that this needs to be countered with more realistic images that reflect modern society. Saunders (2000:17) notes that the tendency for children's books of the past like *Heidi* (Spyri, 1860) and *The Secret Garden* (Burnett, 1911) to portray a 'colourful or heart tugging portrayal of disability was better than real life'. She proposes that this was used as a literary device to embellish plot and should not be viewed as deliberately seeking to minimise the effects of a disability. She explains that writers in the past may have had little personal experience to relate to and that they were also reflecting attitudes of the times. However, she makes the important point that 'these texts remain the source of the literary stereotype of disability'. They are also texts that may be familiar to practitioners as part of their own childhoods and so again may contribute to a particular view of the subject.

Young children are often very aware of traditional stories particularly through the medium of films like *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996), and associated merchandise that may reinforce some of these negative stereotypes. This is because, as Saunders (2000:7) suggests, they 'fix disability as the only important feature of a character' and thereby 'block the complex diversity of human conditions and situations.'

However, modern children are also likely to be familiar with more recent postmodern interpretations of traditional stories, as for instance portrayed in the film *Shrek* (2001), which works against the view that an aesthetically pleasing physical appearance denotes goodness. Practitioners themselves also have a range of film influences that may contribute to their understanding of disability since this is an issue that has been increasingly addressed, partly as a result of the emergence of Disability Arts groups. Despite this, a recent example of fear about the negative influence of portraying disability led to *Special People* (2008) a film about wheelchair users being given a certificate 12A alongside a warning that it contained "disability themes".

The cult of the 'body beautiful' remains particularly powerful and Wilkie – Stibbs (2007:51) suggests that current discourse, now endorsed by government policy in relation to 'Being Healthy', actively promotes a well disciplined, healthy body which may influence what is

deemed to be appropriate images to promote: 'Children are in training to aspire to the fit body image through all manner of private and public regulatory agencies...'

She goes further to suggest that those who fail to conform to this ideal are viewed negatively and are 'often associated with unruliness and disorder'. She suggests that children with disabilities conform to this negative perception and that the lack of visibility in visual images lies in their challenge to a dominant discourse that prefers children to be 'innocent angels'. She uses Foucault's categories of 'abnormals' and 'incorrigibles' to explain how the pictorial representation of children who fall outside the conventional stereotype make many adults uncomfortable. She believes that children are already outsiders because their 'status between the uterus and the adult effectively already defines them as transitional beings, and as outsiders in regulatory practices.' (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2007:5). She therefore sees those with disabilities as having an exaggerated outsider status which is unlikely to be made visible.

She discusses how representations of disability are relatively unusual precisely because that particular group remains 'othered' in the sense that they have not been allowed a voice and are usually erased from view. She comments on the controversy that surrounded the depiction of Alison Lapper as the statue on the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square as challenging 'the normally occluded spaces that disabled bodies more usually occupy, just outside the line of vision of the averted gaze and conjectured as passive, retreating, inactive, dependent and powerless' (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2007:48).

Whereas it is unlikely that this view would be articulated as a reason for not producing, publishing and selecting particular picture books, it needs to be considered as an underlying reason for a persistent lack of availability. In this sense, the rhetoric of inclusion that is widely upheld by disability activists, those concerned with human rights and endorsed by government can be read as rather hollow. After all, with reference to picture books, Hunt (1990, 2) reminds us that: 'Perhaps more than any other texts, they reflect society as it wishes to be, as it wishes to be seen, and as it unconsciously reveals itself to be'.

Those writers who suggest that picture books need to reflect the real world in terms of inclusive practice may be doing just that. Returning to Nodelman's (2008) discussion of Bourdieu's 'field positions' in terms of whether publishing is committed to representing a more diverse society, it may be that the time is not yet right for a blossoming of this particular genre in relation

to disability. In this sense, he explains ‘it is important to distinguish between what people think they control and what more obviously controls them’.

With respect to concerns expressed by Quicke (1985) that there was a need for further research into the role of illustrations in raising awareness about disability, there has clearly been some significant progress. However, despite legislation and policy about inclusive practice needing to be conveyed through the curriculum, there remains little academic research literature that specifically addresses this area. Alongside this, the lack of emphasis about this subject in initial and CDP training remains a concern if EY practitioners are going to be effective in using picture books as a teaching tool to raise awareness of and contribute to new constructions of disability.

This review of the literature has demonstrated the many factors that have contributed to both the social construction of childhood and disability. Childhood is socially and culturally located and results in a particular set of discourses which are constantly competing for dominance and which, in turn, can influence the popularity of particular images and the publication and distribution of children’s picture books. It is apparent that social policy on disability is driven by legislation, economics, history, politics, medical research, campaigning by individuals and groups, academic debate and public opinion. Schools have been shown to be examples of frontline services that can transmit and reflect existing values and attitudes that relate to the above constructions. On the other hand, they can have a significant role to play in contributing to alternative constructions of disability through structural and organizational change, particularly through practitioner training in relation to curriculum resources that include picture books.

Chapter three

Methodology

This chapter explains how the fieldwork for the study was undertaken and how data was gathered from a range of relevant participants over a two year period. The rationale for the research design and the various methods used are then discussed in some detail in order to further investigate the four research questions.

Methodological position

Cohen et al (2005: 23) describe how the interpretative approach to research is concerned with subjectivity, negotiated meanings and interpretations resulting in ‘multi-faceted images of human behaviour.’ The methodological approach for this study sits within the tradition of critical educational research as it is concerned to examine the underlying interests and policy agendas that influence behaviour with the ultimate aim of shaping professional practice (Giroux 1981; Shor, 1992; Apple, 2004; Moss 2006; Goodley, 2011). It is more specifically defined as taking a critical theory approach; as Geuss (1981) cited in Cohen et al (2005: 30) explains that it seeks to uncover underlying interests and be transformative from the researcher’s stated ideological position in order to investigate ‘the vested interests at work which may be occurring consciously or subliminally to participants and how they may be acting to perpetuate a system which keeps them either empowered or disempowered’. Reynolds (2011:123) explains that any research in the field of children’s literature is ‘indebted to the rise of critical theory’ because of the role that this theoretical approach has played in ‘expanding the canon of academic research’ since it emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. In this piece of research, the EY practitioners and other participants may be unaware of the various ways in which their picture book choices are influenced. A critical theory approach to research is unequivocal in seeking to acknowledge that participants may not knowingly be aware of these influences, both subtle and more overt. However, looking more closely at and exposing what influences individual choices may in itself contribute towards ‘a more just, egalitarian society in which individual and collective freedoms are practised, and to eradicate the exercise and effects of illegitimate power’(Cohen et al, 2011:32).

This approach suggests that the value of the subsequent findings ‘is judged in terms of their political and emancipatory effects, rather than simply the extent to which they portray and explain the social world of participants’ (Ritchie, Lewis, 2003:9). Bassey (1999: 5) recommends that the findings from this kind of research should inform the kind of professional discourse that is partly influenced by ‘a range of ideological positions’ that are ‘often unacknowledged or even unrecognized’. This acknowledges the influence of academics such as Troyna who holds that ‘research is not only about understanding the relationships between specific events and underlying social relations but is to be utilized in support of political struggles’ (Troyna, 1994:73). However, it is important to recognize that this approach is not without its critics who see it as ‘an abandonment of research in favour of propaganda’ (Foster et al, 1996:32). In this study it is necessary be mindful of the overarching purpose of this research when carrying out the fieldwork alongside the need to provide a measured interpretation of the findings. However, research such as this has a role to play in highlighting areas that have been given little attention in the past and to contribute to campaigning for changes to educational practice. (Bloor 2011:413) explains that qualitative social researchers have a part to play in influencing practitioners because, despite wider policy constraints all ‘have the autonomy to modify their everyday work practices’.

The methodology used here employs what is described as ‘a collective case study’ approach which uses several different but related sources of evidence to ‘investigate[s] a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context’ (Yin 1984:23). In this way, different but related perspectives can be explored (Cresswell, 2007). Thus, in exploring the related individual perspectives of a sample of EY practitioners and training providers, alongside relevant literature and documentary evidence, this research intended to generate qualitative data that would contribute to a better understanding of the subject. This resulted in what is described as ‘analytical generalisation’ rather than ‘statistical generalisation’ that would highlight areas of concern and indicate areas for further research in order to have an impact on practice (Robson, 2002:183).

Bassey (1999:62) defines this approach to case study research as ‘theory seeking and theory testing’ where ‘the focus is the issue rather than the case as such.’ He goes on to cite the work of Stake (1995: 16-17) who describes this approach as ‘instrumental’ because ‘we start and end with issues dominant’. In terms of having an effect on consequent policy and practice, Bassey (1999:46) explains that case study research needs to be focussed on providing what he describes

as ‘fuzzy generalisations’ which move beyond the singularity of individual events and interpretations. He describes this as ‘the kind of prediction arising from empirical enquiry, that says that something *may* happen, but without any measure of its probability. It is a qualified generalisation, carrying the idea of possibility but no certainty.’ [italics in original]. He suggests that educational research can only hope to contribute to changes in practice via professional discourse that acknowledges this degree of possibility as opposed to probability: ‘A fuzzy generalisation carries an element of uncertainty. It reports something that has happened in one place and that it may also happen elsewhere (Bassey, 1999:52) ‘A fuzzy generalisation carries an element of uncertainty. It reports that something has happened in one place and that it may also happen elsewhere (Bassey, 1999: 52).

In this way, the particular experiences of twelve EY practitioners and ten training providers gained through questionnaires and interviews provided a meaningful snapshot of how picture books are selected. Although, these were particular experiences interpreted by one researcher, they served as a representative sample of practice. It is difficult to be precise about how findings such as these can be generalised since, particularly with regard to interview data, ‘participants are not so much elicitors and repositories of experiential knowledge, as they are constructors of experiential information (Holstein and Gubrim, 2011:151). Bassey (1999: 26) quotes Stenhouse (1985:49) who points out that generalisation of case study research is controversial:

Generalisation and application are matters of judgement rather than calculation, and the task of case study is to produce ordered reports of experience which invite judgement and offer evidence to which a judgment can appeal.

This thesis used a case study approach situated within an interpretative paradigm in order to ‘understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors’ and thereby ‘provides a unique example of real people in real situations’ (Cohen et al, 2000:181). In this way it provided ‘a thick description of participants’ lived experiences of, thoughts about and feelings for a situation’ (Cohen et al, 2005:182). It recognised that these individual interpretations are also powerfully influenced by historical, social and cultural context (Bassey, 1999; Dressman, 2008). As stated by Giddens (1993:168), ‘Society is not concerned with a pre-given universe of objects but with one which is constituted or produced by the active doing of subjects.’ In other words each individual, including the researcher, also influences history and culture to some extent by virtue of their lived experiences and professional perspectives. Radnor (2001:21) discusses how this

need to explain the relationship between individual agency and wider structural constraints, for instance legislation and policy, underpins much social research. She describes the role of an interpretive researcher as being to look at ‘meanings and experiences of the people who function in the cultural web...’ As has already been discussed in the previous chapter, there are also less tangible but powerful structural influences within this complex web, like, for example, the cultural discourses framed by the media.

At the same time, it is important to consider the reflexive nature of interpretative research that recognises variables such as the subjectivity and self-awareness of both the researcher and those being researched are of significance (Denscombe, 2000; Gilbert, 2008). From the point of view of the researcher, it was important to recognize the emotional relationship invested in the research in terms of both the subject matter and the way it would contribute to a final thesis. Finlay (2003:14) discusses how the recognition of ‘multiple, shifting researcher-participant positions’ brings particular challenges to the researcher which also included how language is used and how communication was negotiated during interviews. She goes on to suggest that this notion of ‘presentation’ extends further into how the findings are expressed and disseminated to the wider research community and practitioners and that the acknowledgment of reflexivity is a crucial part of both research design and analysis.

A case study approach is potentially fraught with difficulties, as it provides only a brief glimpse into the complexity of individual views, without necessarily providing conclusions that can be generalised. Stark and Torrance (2005) explain that the approach has been criticised in the past due to its potential limitations and over-subjectivity and this is acknowledged by many others (see for example Bassey, 1999; Robson, 2002,). However, Stake (2000:19) argues that case studies have an inherent advantage with regard to accessibility ‘because they may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader’s experience and this to that person is a natural basis for generalization.’ In other words, views expressed about the subject of picture book choices contributes to the validity of the research because they represent a sample of perspectives of EY practitioners and training providers (Robson, 2002). Whilst each response to the questionnaires or interviews was individual, all were involved in working with young children in NS that had a common purpose or were preparing students for jobs in the EY sector.

Stake (2000) goes on to place great value on the experiential professional knowledge of the researcher in contributing to the generalization of findings from case studies. In this sense, the

selection of a range of relevant samples alongside an in-depth knowledge of the subject, supported by recent and relevant literature, led to an informed analysis. From a positive perspective, Radnor (2001: 30) quotes Glesne and Peshkin (1992:104) who acknowledge the advantage of personal experiential knowledge when undertaking research as ‘the basis for the story that I am able to tell. It is a strength on which I build.’ However, whilst the knowledge of the researcher in this study is based on considerable experience of working in EY settings over a period of more than twenty years, the most recent was ten years ago. As Griffiths (1998) points out, a long period away from practice means that claims to be an ‘insider’ are questionable, as in this case, EY practice has changed in terms of pedagogy, policy and curriculum guidance. It is likely that this researcher’s perspective has also shifted because of working in a Higher Education (HE) context and so the ‘insider’ identity is now more aligned with the trainer participants than the EY practitioner participants.

The case study approach is relevant because it provided an insight into the various viewpoints of the EY practitioners in this research as a group of professionals working in a particular environment that may at first appear to be homogeneous. To those outside the field of EY education and care, each workplace may appear to be very similar and bound by a strong, distinctive EY pedagogy which is regulated by a plethora of policies and curriculum guidance. However, the ways in which individual practitioners interpreted and carried out their instrumental role was varied because, despite the commonality of pedagogical approaches alongside the compliance with curriculum guidance, other individual and structural influences remained a powerful influence. These matters are explored in more detail in chapter four.

Ethical implications

As already highlighted in the introductory chapter, it was also important to acknowledge the advocacy or partisan component that underpinned the research in terms of a stated concern about the lack of images relating to disability in picture books. Bryman (2005:517) notes that ‘values intrude in all phases of the research process- from the choice of a research area to the formulation of conclusions’. He quotes Mies (1993: 68) who describes this as a ‘conscious partiality’ which is justified as long as it is acknowledged. Thus research such as this is regarded as valid but Denscombe (2002) points out that it also must include an open mindedness about findings that may conflict with the views of the researcher. Flick (2007: 6) cites the view

expressed by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) that all ‘qualitative research is explicitly political and intends to transform the world with its practices.’ Whilst this would seem to be an ambitious outcome, the underlying premise of the research was that it would influence professional discourse and contribute to an awareness of the issue of how young children can be educated about rights and diversity through the provision of picture books (Bassey, 1999).

Shipman (1997:46) points out that the actual data is only a fractional influence in the final analysis since ‘researchers of all people are likely to be saturated with theories that determine their perceptions’. Seale (1999:13) warns against ‘prioritizing particular political goals in research is that these come to dominate researchers’ interpretation of the social world being investigated.’

This had some methodological implications with respect to the questions that were asked in both questionnaires and interviews. Miller and Glassner (2011) point out that the researcher needs to be aware that, particularly with respect to interview data, since different interpretations can be made by the interviewer from those intended by the interviewee. For example, the researcher may believe that what drives choices about picture book selection is essentially a political decision but this view may not be shared or understood by all the participants. Indeed Griffiths (1998:3) asks whether ‘having a political or ethical position makes the research biased and suspect from the start’ She also goes on to discuss the challenge of writing on behalf of a group that may not be able to easily access the research findings because of the narrow academic audience for which it is ultimately published. Like Bassey (1999), Griffiths debates the responsibility of researchers to find ways to make the final analysis of the data more accessible to the participants. She warns that otherwise educational researchers can ‘stand accused by teachers and policy makers of mystifying the important questions that need to be answered’ (Griffiths, 1998: 34).

EY practitioners are very busy people and it was felt that, once initial interest had been expressed, an incentive to remain as a participant over an extended period of time was needed (Ritchie, Lewis, 2003). Those that had agreed to take part were therefore offered a regular, reader friendly A4 Research Bulletin (see Addenda 2) in order to provide basic information about the next stage of the research, plus some related reading on the subject of picture books. The rationale for the selection of this reading was to recognize practitioner interest in the subject at both an academic and professional level and also to provide an ‘intrinsic reward’ (Denscombe,

2002:75). It was important to provide access to material that they might not usually encounter so that participating in the research would add to existing subject knowledge. It was also necessary to recognize the breadth of the audience and provide extracts that were accessible to most readers in terms of length, style and format. Three bulletins were subsequently sent during phase one of the research (see table 3.4).

The first bulletin contained a short extract from Doonan (1993) in which she described the need to help children to respond to pictures aesthetically from a young age and it was hoped that this might inspire some reflection on personal aesthetic responses to pictures. The second extract consisted of four examples of illustrators describing the variety of influences on their artistic style (British Council, British Library, 2003) which was meant to encourage the practitioner to reflect on other examples from their experience. This first bulletin also acted as an opportunity to thank participants for the offer of participation in the research and to indicate when the questionnaire would be received. Bickman and Rog (1998) refer to the importance of establishing a friendly rapport with participants and Roberts-Holmes (2005) also recognizes the benefits of providing ongoing feedback to participants in order to maintain an interest in the research and to help them to feel involved. It was felt that the regular bulletins would provide an ongoing interest in belonging to a piece of research that was regularly being updated and that it would also imply a co-construction of knowledge that underpins the principles of interpretative research (Bassey, 1999; Denscombe, 2002). The production of these bulletins meant the research had further cost implications to consider due to repeated postings and this also helped to underscore the need to keep the sample to a manageable size.

All participants were provided with clear written details about the purpose of the research in order to ensure informed consent. All questionnaires included a statement about the right to confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any stage of the research and anonymity within the collected data was ensured as far as possible through the deletion of recognition indicators (Cohen et al, 2000). It was challenging to consider the extent to which the data would be perceived as valid and reliable since this is sometimes difficult to achieve through case study research (Bassey, 1999; Seale, 1999). Both these authors make reference to the notion of 'trustworthiness' when designing qualitative research and this includes the use of 'member checks' with participants in terms of making interview transcripts available to participants and 'transferability' in terms of providing a detailed context for the reader.

All those completing questionnaires and participating in interviews were also asked to complete written confidentiality agreements before approving the accuracy of the data collected through taped interviews, and to give written permission for this data to be used in the final thesis and in subsequent conference papers (see Appendix 4). Field notes were kept to provide context and reference to these was made where relevant in the presentation of the findings and analysis. The final contribution to achieving ‘trustworthiness’ was the ongoing documentation of a self-critical account in order to further establish the dependability of the researcher. Seale (1999) explains that this is an exercise in reflexivity that provides a valuable opportunity to critically analyse different stages of the field research and should therefore contribute to a review of the methodology.

Table 3.1 Research bulletins to EY participant sample

Research bulletin	Date sent	Content
One	July 2007	Extracts from: Doonan (1993) British Council and British Library (2003) (with acknowledgement letter for participants)
Two	September 2007	Extracts from: Merchant and Thomas (1999) Rawstone (2007) (with questionnaire)
Three	December 2007	Information about ‘ In the Picture ‘ project ‘Letterbox Library’ catalogue (2007) Interview alert (with ‘Top ten’ picture books results from questionnaire)

Piper and Simons (2005:57) write of the need for all researchers to ‘seek clearance from the individuals concerned for use of the data in a specific context or report’. In this respect it is

important to make all the participants aware of the broader purpose of the research without leading their responses towards ‘right answerism’ which may limit the breadth of response.

This was particularly relevant when interviewing the EY practitioners who were all employed by an LA. The policies followed in their settings would be expected to conform to guidelines laid down by this LA that prides itself on its inclusion policies and subsequent practice. The publication of *Success for Everyone: Standards for Inclusive Practice in EY Settings* (Named LA EY Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP), 2000) is an indication of a commitment to improvement that has since developed into a framework that is used in all settings. If the research demonstrated that this commitment was not as widespread as intended, or that practitioners lacked knowledge and understanding about the subject of inclusion, it was important to highlight this. At the same time it was necessary to recognise that it may prove difficult to challenge practitioners’ existing knowledge as ‘many people take it for granted that they know what they know’ (Griffiths, 1998:35). In this sense, the practitioners were usually confident in what is described as ‘craft knowledge’ of teaching (Brown, McIntyre, 1993; Cooper, 2005) relating to both the use of picture books and the subject of inclusive practice. However, the researcher needed to be sensitive and cautious in how any potentially controversial area was broached, particularly in interviews if a good rapport was to be established and maintained.

How the samples were selected

In order to get the rich, related data which would answer the research questions, purposive sampling was used. This is described by Punch (2005:187) as ‘sampling in a deliberate way, with some purpose or focus in mind’. There are a range of different approaches to purposive sampling and these are dependent on the aims of the research. The EY practitioner and student participants comprised a ‘homogeneous sample’ because they have common interests and responsibilities in relation to their role in providing and using picture books with young children. However, the training providers comprise a ‘heterogenous sample’ in relation to these as the research aims to ‘identify central themes which cut across the variety of cases or people’ (Ritchie, Lewis, 2003:79).

Personal experience of working in the EY sector provided relatively easy access to this particular group of EY practitioners. Having worked in the LA for a considerable time in the past, it was an

advantage for the researcher to be familiar with the location and overall ethos of each setting and to feel comfortable with a familiar group of professionals. There may be advantages to a cultural affinity between researcher and those being researched because this common ground can help to make the interview more productive (Ritchie, Lewis, 2003). On the other hand this familiarity with the professional environment and potentially informed relationship between the researcher and the participants could influence the depth to which questions were pursued or lead to assumptions being made (Miller, Glassner, 2011). Radnor (2001:38) recognizes that ‘the researcher cannot remove her own way of seeing from the process but she can engage reflexively in the process and be aware of her interpretative framework.’ She therefore suggests that several analytical readings of the data at different times during the research may help to avoid biased interpretation and indicate mistaken suppositions.

Research methods

Robson (2002) discusses the need for research about people to use a range of methods to understand multiple and varied constructions of meaning and thereby beginning to make sense of motivation for their actions. Mason (1996:79) suggests that each method should be designed to help answer the research questions and in this way contribute to ‘solving parts of the puzzle.’ Appropriate piloting of each chosen method helped to address any concerns with regard to the research questions in terms of wording and order and minor amendments allowed phase one of the field research to begin with the practitioner participants at the beginning of Autumn Term 2007(see table 3.2). The trainer participants were not involved until phase two which started in Spring 2008 (see table 3.3). This illustrates the length of time taken to gather the various strands of data from each sample for the research findings.

Table 3.2 Time line for phase one of field research 2007

Sample and research method	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter	Total number of participants in final sample
Questionnaires to EY practitioners from Local Authority Nursery Schools	March: Pilot questionnaires with EY students	May: Initial letter to Head Teachers in 27 Nursery Schools June: response from 10 NS (2 not able to participate) July: Acknowledgment letter and Research Bulletin (1)	September: questionnaires distributed to 13 participants in 8 Nursery Schools Research Bulletin (2)	November: 12 Questionnaires returned December: Research Bulletin (3) Arrange interviews	12

Questionnaire to EY practitioners from a range of EY settings/ EY students	April: Pilot questionnaires with EY students Picture Book response questionnaire (ongoing through year)				35
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Table 3.3 Time line for phase two of field research 2008

Sample and research method	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter	Total number of participants in sample
Semi structured interviews with EY practitioners from Local Authority Nursery Schools	January: pilot questions with experienced researchers February: 4 practitioner interviews	May: 1 practitioner interview	September: 2 practitioner interview	November: 4 practitioner interviews December: 1 practitioner interview	12
Online questionnaires to Initial Training providers	March: pilot questionnaires with HE colleagues	May: Initial letter with questionnaires to 20 providers June: follow up e mails	September: follow up e mail and telephone calls 6 questionnaires returned October: initial questionnaire to 6 more providers	November: 4 more questionnaires returned	10
Questionnaires to EY practitioners from a range of EY settings/ EY students	Picture Book response questionnaire (ongoing through year)				35

The importance of piloting research methods

Yin (1994:74) describes the importance of pilot studies as being ‘a laboratory for the investigators, allowing them to observe different phenomena from many different angles or to try different approaches on a trial basis.’ Each of the chosen research methods needed to be piloted with an appropriate audience in order to identify potential difficulties that would either present barriers to understanding as ‘what is perfectly clear to us may not convey the meaning intended to others’ (Bell, Opie, 2002:55). It was also an important process in terms of contributing to the validity of the questions and consequent data (Denscombe, 2002).

Selecting the questions that broadly related to the four research questions to be used with all the samples was important in order to gain different perspectives on how picture books in general might transmit ideology and culture and this then needed to address whether participants felt that picture books might contribute to new constructions of disability. It was anticipated that responses to both the questionnaires and the interviews would also uncover the extent to which the wider legislative and policy context endorses the production and use of particular resources and how this may contribute to a rationale for selection. For instance, individuals may make specific reference to SENDA, the DED, and/or LA inclusion policies and relevant CPD.

The EY practitioner sample

It was important to work with a sample of EY practitioners in different settings in order to explore the ways in which individual preferences and choices of adults might influence the picture book selection in educational settings. A purposive sample of twenty seven NS (the total number of these kinds of settings in the chosen LA) was initially selected in order to focus on practice within one particular LA which was known to have a longstanding commitment to developing inclusive practice in all educational settings: ‘(Named city) has unequivocally set equal opportunities at the top of its political agenda. Social and educational inclusion are central pillars of the city’s commitment to equality for all its citizens. (Named LA EYDCP, 2000)

The term ‘practitioners’ was chosen in line with the Qualifications and Curriculum Association (QCA) preferred generic term for those working with young children used since the publication of *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (CGFS) (QCA,

2000). This term was used in order to emphasise the broad range of qualified and unqualified adults who are involved in the education of young children. As the sample were all statutory sector NS who are required to employ a high percentage of well qualified staff, it was hoped that there would be a response predominantly from both teachers and other qualified professionals, for example Nursery Nurses (NN) and Teaching Assistants (TA), in order to open up the research to a potentially wide range of practitioners. From personal professional experience in several of these kind of settings, it was recognised that all members of staff would be involved in using picture books with the children in some way. Unlike many primary schools, non- teaching staff would be given considerable responsibility in selecting and using resources. The potential range of roles performed by these practitioners was also an important consideration in light of the need to explore the issue of initial training from both Further Education (FE) and HE perspectives.

NS were selected in preference to other forms of EY provision in recognition of a significant and highly regarded longitudinal study of a national sample of young children's development. This was The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project whose findings demonstrated that NS provision and integrated centres ' have the highest scores on pre-school quality, whilst playgroups, private day nurseries and local authority centres have lower scores.' (Sylva et al, 2003:2). Quality was defined in this study in terms of a range of criteria including impact on children's development, provision of instructive learning environments and impact on aspects of social behaviour.

All the NS Head Teachers (HTs) were initially contacted by letter (see Appendix 1) with stamped addressed envelopes (SAEs) to invite participation in the project and to establish contact details for at least one member of staff. Whilst it was important to gain the permission of these senior managers because of their role as institutional 'gatekeepers', this created some potential issues with regard to informed consent by the members of staff who were elected to participate. The extent to which these HTs gave consent on behalf of others needs to be acknowledged because those in a position of power in an organization can exercise control over who is volunteered as a participant. This may include an overt or covert obligation on that less powerful member of staff to comply with the request (Denscombe, 2002). It was hoped that the extent to which the participation was voluntary could be further explored at the interview stage of the research through discussion about individual roles in the setting.

Some of these NS were newly established [or in the process of becoming] Children's Centres (CCs). These organisations are designed to offer integrated multi-agency community provision in line with the Labour government's aspirations to address child poverty and provide early preventative intervention and support to benefit the needs of all children under the age of five (Pugh, 2001). Despite this change in designation, they remain grouped by the LA under their original NS status and so would retain their integrity as 'quality' provision as defined by the EPPE research.

Despite the fact that these schools were managed by separate governing bodies, it was felt to be good practice to inform a relevant senior member of the LA that the research was being undertaken. This is because individual staff may well have felt the need to comment on LA policy and guidelines and reference would be made to at least one LA publication as part of the documentary analysis stage of the research, although anonymity would be maintained as far as possible.

The sample was relatively small but as there was a finite number of NS in the LA, this could not be avoided. Cohen et al (2000) make reference to the recommended minimum of thirty when selecting a sample but it was felt that extending the parameters of the sample to nursery classes in primary schools would interfere with the validity of the study. In any case, practice is very different in EY settings other than NS. For instance, concerns that the more formal delivery of the curriculum including a predominant emphasis on the pre-reading function of picture books (to the exclusion of other benefits) have been expressed by several authors (Goodwin, 2008, Browne and Evans, 2009, Duffy, 2010). Whilst, like all EY education settings, NS use CGFS or EYFS document (after September 2007) as a planning template, the self contained nature of the schools allows considerable flexibility that is not as constrained by the demands of measurable outcomes of Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) at the end of Year 2 in primary schools.

Another important consideration was related to the practicalities of gathering data after the initial questionnaire had been returned (Bryman, 2004; Gilbert, 2008). As this piece of research was to also consider responses from training providers the logistics were potentially complicated for a part time researcher in terms of being able to arrange mutually convenient interviews at different locations across a large geographical area in a limited time period. Once the interview schedule was agreed it was important to consider the length of time for transcription of interviews and the time required to get participant

approval of the transcripts. This, in effect, acted as an ongoing opportunity to confirm or withdraw from the research and was an important ethical consideration in the way the study was designed (Piper, Simons, 2005). There was also a cost consideration in terms of travel to different settings and postage including SAEs for quite bulky transcripts.

The initial letter to HTs did not initially specify details about the research project or that it would have a focus on disability but described it as ‘Research into Picture Books’. This decision was taken in order to place a clear emphasis on the importance of interest in the resource in itself before going on to examine specific content. It was also felt that an early disclosure of the emphasis on disability awareness may influence initial responses and consequent data. To some extent this contradicts conventional guidelines in terms of fully informed consent although ‘if you tell the participant precisely what you are looking at, their response on that matter might be altered from normal’ and it is vital to only use this deception if clearly justified (Denscombe, 2002: 178). A compromise is suggested in terms of what is described as ‘rolling informed consent’ (Piper, Simons, 2005:56) which keeps the participants informed after the data is collected and before it is used. In this way, the focus on disability was clearly stated after the initial questionnaire responses were collated and prior to the subsequent individual practitioner interviews.

Four weeks were allowed for an initial response to be followed up with email contact if necessary in order to send replacement information. It was anticipated that a further two weeks should provide the required 50% positive response (thirteen in total). Although this was a relatively small number of settings, it was felt that these were varied enough and dispersed across a wide geographical area of the LA serving very different communities to provide a good variety of response.

There were positive responses from only eight different NS but these included the anticipated spread of roles within these kinds of setting (see table 3.4).

Table 3.4 Twelve EY practitioner participants from eight NS

Role in NS	Number
Head teacher (HT)	2
Deputy Head teacher(DH)	3
DH and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator(SENCO)	2
Teacher (T)	3
T and SENCO	1
Teaching Assistant (TA)	1

An interest in the research included responses from more than one member of staff in two of these settings (see table 3:5). As these practitioners held different roles and responsibilities, it was decided that this would provide sufficient variation to generate a range of qualitative data.

Table 3.5 NS settings with more than one participant

Name of setting	Number of participants	Roles in the setting
Lakeside NS and CC	2	T and T
Heathers NS	3	HT, T and T/ SENCO

Designing the questionnaire for EY practitioners in NS

The original letter had indicated the general content of the questionnaire in terms of gathering data about recommended picture books and some training information. This method was used to gather general information in preparation for the collection of more detailed data via interviews at a later stage. This was judged to be a relevant information gathering tool at this early stage of the research because it established an initial relationship with the participants, identified the key areas for discussion, and clearly focused on the importance of picture books in NS. Questionnaire returns achieve

notoriously low response rates (Cohen et al, 2000) but it was hoped that completion and subsequent return would have an incentive in this case since one of the questions involved recommending picture books to be used with 3-5 year olds. It was hoped that the shared list would be regarded as useful information by all the participants and this potential to add to or improve a situation is described by Cohen et al (2000:246) as 'beneficence' and acknowledged as a feature of continued involvement.

The questionnaire was piloted with a group of part time EY Education Studies (BA) students as part of a taught session on how to use questionnaires in research. They were all experienced EY practitioners and offered some suggestions for minor amendments to the design which were principally concerned with aspects of the layout that was thought to be confusing by some of the group. Some of the wording was also felt to be ambiguous which also led to slight modifications. Bell and Opie (2002) warn that despite considering recommended templates for questionnaire design, each one is subtly different as each research investigation is unique. It is difficult to exactly match the participants of a pilot study with the intended research sample and whilst this group represented some attributes of the final practitioner sample, the staff-student dynamic may have been a significant variable, as was their emerging knowledge of the principles of research design in their role as HE students.

The questionnaire (see Appendix 2) was regarded as an important first step in making contact with the individual participants and gathering data to be shared within the LA. It was also intended to be a baseline for semi-structured interview questions for the next stage of the research. It was hoped that it would provide 'a broad picture of people's experiences and views' and also to 'raise more questions than answers for the respondent and the researcher' (Roberts-Holmes, 2005:143). The literature review had highlighted the different influences on illustrators in terms of portraying childhood and meeting the perceived needs of children and it was hoped that an invitation to choose a selection of picture books would provide some initial insight into practitioner's own views in this respect that would be developed in later interviews.

The length and design of the questionnaire was important in recognizing the needs of the participants. The initial emphasis on providing useful and unthreatening information about picture books would set the tone for the whole research project. Both the name of the setting and the role of the participant were requested at the start of the questionnaire;

this information had already been given in the response to the original letter so confidentiality was not an issue in this case. It was also important to know which responses to build on in future interviews as these would only provide limited information which would need to be further developed.

The sequence of questions and the importance of using non-threatening questions that can be easily answered must also be taken into account and both of these are important considerations in gaining the trust of a participant. The first question asked the practitioner to list a personal 'top ten' of picture books that they do use or would recommend for use with children aged 3-5 in the setting. This question was intended to gather information that could be shared with other participants in terms of recommended picture books. This initial request was intended not to be overly onerous as presumably the titles would be familiar to the EY participants and it was also likely that the list would be compiled in the setting, which would provide easy access to the picture books. The physical task of writing more than ten separate titles was seen to be relatively time consuming for practitioners and on recommendation from the pilot study, as this was seen as the most demanding task of the questionnaire it was placed at the beginning to ensure a fuller response.

The next four questions were designed to find out how the picture books were used in an individual setting and clear instructions were given with regard to their completion at the beginning of this section. This was felt to be a quick method of gaining lots of information and clearly encouraged a multiple answer mode (Cohen et al, 2000). The selected categories within each question relating to 'how', 'where' and 'who' were drawn from personal professional experience and wide reading around the quality of EY provision (e.g. Whitehead, 2000; Godwin, Perkins, 2000). An opportunity to add other examples was also included in each question in order to recognize individual creative practice. Cohen et al (2000:255) recognize the value of open ended questions in providing 'gems' of information and emphasizing 'ownership' of data.

Children beginning NS have a range of experiences of using picture books at home and opportunities to look at them in the setting may vary considerably and compete with a wealth of tantalizing resources and activities on offer. To some extent the second question was intended to reflect the philosophy of the setting with regard to recognizing the value of the picture book resource through providing accessibility.

The third question sought to determine whether picture books were embedded throughout the physical environment or only provided in particular contexts. The physical location of the resource was felt to be significant in terms of accessing books and that to some extent this would begin to reflect the control of provision of the resource.

Question four focussed on the extent to which particular individuals were in control of which books were offered to the children. As NS have relatively small numbers of staff with many different responsibilities it was important to determine how many were involved in book selection as this may have an impact on which particular books were provided. It was also designed to indicate whether the selection was democratic or related to a staff hierarchy because other people involved in the setting were also included in order to suggest the possibility of consultation beyond the staffroom.

The fifth question was designed to begin to find out the influences on individual selection by those involved. It was hoped that the data would indicate the extent to which practitioners rely on what is provided to them via information from publishers, distributors and any other sources of information or recommendation.

The next three questions focused on the issue of disability in order to address the premise that picture books contribute to alternative constructions of disability. The different emphasis was reinforced by a change in question format. Once again this was not over demanding in terms of response but enabled further elaboration if required. The first part required a yes/ no response and then a more open- ended response. There were only two questions about training although, as already discussed, this was seen to be a significant area for the research. It was felt that a proportion of responses may be negative, so it was important not to make the participant feel anxious about their lack of knowledge about this area. Cohen et al (2000: 249) caution the researcher from asking 'irritating' questions that imply guilt from a negative response. On the other hand, it was important for this early stage of the research to begin to determine the contribution of training to practitioner's knowledge and understanding of disability.

Participants were asked for clear information about the coverage of the subject of disability in initial training and CPD. These questions were important in order to provide some initial data in for further development at the interview stage. Originally this was to include details of date and place of training, but this was felt to be over intrusive at this

stage. The focus was on the issue of disability in general in preference to disability related content in picture books.

The final question returned to the picture book theme with a yes/ no question and then an invitation to provide some titles in line with format of the opening question. This time there was no minimum or maximum number suggested. Again, this was to be sensitive to the probability of some participants not providing few/any titles on this theme. It was felt that the questionnaire might alert a need to investigate some titles and also provide some reflection to be discussed in a later interview.

The questionnaire with SAE was sent to all participants at the beginning of the autumn term 2007 (see figure 3.2). Two weeks were allowed for an initial response to be followed up with email contact if necessary in order to send replacement information and it was anticipated that a further two weeks should provide the required response and allow time for sharing the findings. A second Research Bulletin was included with the questionnaire with extracts from Rawstone (2007) and Merchant and Thomas (1999) and while the first magazine article explored the concern that the publication of picture books is in decline and emphasized the need for practitioners to work in partnership with parents and families in using them with their children, the second one explored the importance of picture books as a vehicle for developing early reading skills which was felt to be an important related area of interest to the participants.

EY practitioner interviews

A third Research Bulletin was distributed at the end of the autumn term 2007 with results from the questionnaire giving the ranking for the ‘top ten’ picture books. It included information about Scope’s ‘In the Picture’ project and to provide a catalogue for ‘Letterbox Library’, a well- established national distributor of books covering equality issues and which included titles relating to disability. All the participants were alerted to the possibility of an interview during the following spring term and were subsequently contacted by telephone to arrange a mutually convenient time. The HT of each NS was asked via a telephone call whether they would give permission for a member of their staff to be interviewed with an assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.

Mason (1996) suggests that it is desirable to pilot the interviews themselves and be observed in order to learn about the social interaction aspect of an interview. She explains that all aspects of the interview, verbal and non-verbal are potentially significant in shaping responses and that a researcher can identify areas of strength and to understand how they might have a less intrusive impact on the interviewees. However, due to the small scale nature of the study it was not possible to do a pilot interview, because an accurate rehearsal of the event would involve a scenario with a non-participant EY practitioner in their workplace and since it had been a challenge to find enough participants for this piece of research, did not seem feasible. Such a pilot would also be unlikely to replicate the particular interaction between the researcher and the intended interviewee due to individual characteristics of the participants alongside the differing interview contexts.

Instead, the proposed interview questions were discussed with several experienced researchers in terms of how these could add to the information gained via the questionnaire responses and also how the use of prompts and probes might elicit useful responses (Radnor, 2002; Gillam, 2005).

Semi structured interviews were chosen as an appropriate method at this stage of the research in order to build upon the information gathered through the questionnaires. Although these had a common structure in terms of the questions that were asked and the time allocated, they also provided a flexibility of response through the use of open questions and probes as appropriate (Gillam, 2005). For convenience these were carried out in the practitioner's work settings, which provided an opportunity to observe the work environment which had been briefly discussed in some of the questionnaire responses. All the participants agreed to be taped for the purposes of accuracy and the interviews were designed to take a maximum of twenty minutes. The questions were the same as those in the questionnaire and designed to build on the individual responses in order to encourage a more in depth response to address the research questions (see Appendix 5).

Each practitioner interview was summarised soon after the event using field notes in order to document particular features and concerns that would supplement the written transcript. These included information about the time and circumstances in which the interview took place and provided the opportunity to highlight any significant non-verbal indicators, such as the nervousness of the interviewee, which are expressed through body

language and which may not be evident in the tape recording and therefore not evident in the written transcript.

Throughout the collection of the data, information gathered was loosely organised and reviewed as part of an ongoing process, a technique recommended as good research practice by Delamont (2002:170): ‘Generate themes and categories as you go along/ write analytic memoranda / be creative use methodological literature to inform work not to justify it’.

Whilst the wording differed slightly for each interview situation (Mason, 1996), each question was felt to be an appropriate open-ended statement that still established necessary parameters to move the interview forward in order to provide the necessary data. Nevertheless, it was important to recognize that too much prompting could unduly influence the response of the interviewee (Robson, 1993).

The availability and organization of the picture books were explored through the interviews in more detail with a view to gaining a better understanding of how they were used and organized in the individual setting. The tick box responses on the original questionnaires were felt to be a useful starting point for this discussion and were available for reference in the interviews. Again, each of these differed considerably and the interviewer needed to provide prompts as necessary:

e.g.

Interviewer: I gather you have been here for quite a long time; you have ticked that it is pretty much free access, the books are everywhere. Has that changed a lot over the time you have been here in the way books are used, can you tell me a bit more?

Clearly an important part of the interview was in relation to initial training and CPD that related to the subject of disability awareness. It was therefore hoped that this would provide a valuable insight into individual practitioner experience and begin to identify whether they had been influenced significantly by any guidance, legislation or policy. It was hoped that the interviewee would provide some detail with regard to when they initially trained and that this might provide an opportunity for discussing awareness of legislation and policy that related to that particular time period and how that context endorsed the use of particular resources e.g.

Interviewer: *Did you feel that on your course you did anything about disability in terms of it being an issue you needed to know about?*

No absolutely not

Interviewer: *Ok it doesn't surprise me because of the time really. Although it is interesting, because in the early 80s there were a lot of changes coming through.*

The final question explored further any picture books that had been named in terms of how they were used with the children and why they were recommended. It also intended to find out whether the practitioner had any previous knowledge of the 'In the Picture' project or 'Letterbox Library' prior to the information sent in the third Research Bulletin. The interview concluded with the opportunity to add any further questions or information about the subject. Participants were reassured that they would be sent a copy of the interview transcript for approval as soon as possible. Gillham (2005:79) makes reference to the importance of the 'social closure' value of an interview in terms of marking appreciation and summarizing what has been gained from the experience.

Range of participants

There was only one EY participant who did not hold a teaching qualification, although in a NS setting it is expected that all staff will work together as a team to meet the needs of individual children (Edgington, 1998). Often this will mean that a TA will have considerable responsibility under the general supervision of someone with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). The information in tables 3:6 – 3:9 was gathered at the questionnaire stage and clearly demonstrates the range of different training routes, time of initial training and range of subject specialisms. This was interesting as it constituted wide variety from a relatively small sample of NS and may indicate the breadth of professional experience, subject knowledge and expertise within the sector.

Table 3.6 Teaching Assistant (TA) practitioner participant

Name of EY practitioner and setting	Current role	Initial Training course/s	Final year of training
Julie at Treetops NS	TA	NNEB	1972

Table 3.7 Teacher (T) practitioner participants

Name of EY practitioner and setting	Current role	Initial Training course/s	Final year of training
Debbie at Lakeside NS and CC	T	BEd (Hons)	1975
Mel at Heathers NS	T	BEd (Hons)	1973
Lucy at Heathers NS	T and SENCO	BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies PGCE	2000
Helen at Lakeside NS and CC	T	BA (Hons) Politics PGCE	1989

Table 3.8 Deputy Head Teacher (DH) practitioner participants

Name of EY practitioner and setting	Current role	Initial Training course/s	Final year of training
Alice at Wildwood NS	DH	BA (Hons) Humanities PGCE	Not disclosed (ND) 1982
Gillian at Jones Road NS	DH	BA(Hons)Drama PGCE	ND 1977
Eddie at Castle Heights NS and CC	DH	BA (Hons) Law PGCE	ND 1999
Lily at Susan Sorrento NS	DH and SENCO	Cert Ed BPhil Ed	ND 1990
Edith at Flintlock NS and CC	DH and SENCO	BA(Hons) Social Studies PGCE	ND 1992

Table 3:9 Head Teacher (HT) practitioner participants

Jane at Benningfields NS and Children's Centre (CC)	HT	BEd (Hons)	1997
Isabel at Heathers NS	HT	BEd (Hons)	1970s

Picture Books response questionnaire

A separate strand to the research was to investigate individual responses to four picture books that had a disability related theme and which had not been cited by EY practitioners in the original questionnaires when recommended titles had been asked for. A different group of part-time EY Education Studies (BA) practitioner students were asked to complete this second pilot questionnaire as part of a module that related to the use of picture books. None of these students had seen any of the books before, despite up to twenty years of experience of working in the sector. Although the purposive sample was a different one, it was assumed that the selected books may be similarly unfamiliar to another group of EY practitioners and EY students, although this could not be guaranteed. It was suggested that an additional question should be included to indicate whether the respondent was a current practitioner and how long they had been working with children as this may provide additionally useful data with respect to training.

To some extent the selection of four picture books for this exercise (see table 3.11) was random and based on the view that very different illustrative styles could inspire an individual aesthetic response (Doonan, 1993; British Council, British Library, 2003). The earlier identified criteria recommended in relation to the accurate and sensitive portrayal of disability (Quicke, 1985; Leicester, 1992, Saunders, 2000) was also considered when making the selection. It was felt that all four picture books presented a positive view of disability in which the characterization was strong and non stereotypical.

This exercise was designed to elicit further data about individual responses to a selection of picture books and was therefore carried out over a much longer period of time. This represented a different approach to gathering complementary data when compared with the way the NS sample was dealt with.

Table 3.10 Picture books used

Title of picture book	Disability related theme
<i>Looking After Louis</i> (Ely and Dunbar, 2004)	This story explores how a child with ASD is included in a mainstream classroom and particularly focuses on individual characteristics of <u>all</u> the children in the class.
<i>Mama Zooms</i> (Cowen-Fletcher,1993)	The mother in the story is a very active wheelchair user and there is much emphasis on the advantages for her child in having such a mother.
<i>Rolling Along with Goldilocks and the Three Bears</i> (Meyers and Morgan,1999)	This traditional tale is given a twist by making baby bear a wheelchair user which has an effect on the storyline- eg the house has a stair ramp.
<i>My Brother Sammy</i> (Edwards and Armitage, 1999)	This looks at the sometimes difficult relationship between two siblings- one of whom happens to have ASD.

It was intended that this questionnaire should be completed by a convenience sample which, as Cohen et al (2000:102) point out, can be a useful strategy in case study research that utilizes a ‘captive audience’ and provides ease of access to participants in order to gather a wider range of data to contribute to the analysis (Ritchie, Lewis, 2003) . This sample included a range of current and ex-EY practitioners with varying degrees of experience and both full time and part time EY Education Studies (BA) students. This data collection was in order to complement and extend the individual practitioner responses gained from the other questionnaire and subsequent interviews in relation to illustrative style, amount of text and general content relating to disability. It was also included to canvass a wider response in order to establish whether availability and access may be a factor in picture book selection. Even if it had been repeated with hundreds of

participants, the results would not be able to be generalized since the point of the exercise was to demonstrate the wide range of individual responses.

The questionnaire was made available to a wide number of EY participants known to the researcher as colleagues, ex- colleagues and students. Whilst there was no compulsion to participate, it is important to note that some may have taken part in order to be helpful. This is described by Homan (1991:84) as an interesting, but nevertheless very common, interpretation of informed consent where ‘aspects of favour and authority which haunt consent at many levels and perhaps belie the notion of its voluntariness’. For a small scale piece of research such as this, it seemed appropriate to draw on existing networks and the nature of the subject might be assumed to be relatively uncontroversial whereas in other circumstances, this approach would be unreliable.

Participants were given each book in a folder with written instructions on how to complete the questionnaire (see Appendix 3). This then required them to comment on the style of the illustrations and the amount of text used. Two of the selected books included a wheelchair user and the other two included a child with ASD as part of the story content and two of these had won prestigious awards. Participants were also asked if they were familiar with each book in order to establish some data about availability and access and they were also requested to comment on whether they would use it with EY children. The results were not collated until the end of 2008 by which time seventy participants had completed a questionnaire relating to one of the four selected picture books.

The Training Provider sample

As with the EY practitioner sample, the training providers who needed to be consulted were working in a subject area that related closely to personal interests and recent professional experience in FE and HE. Although familiarity with the landscape was potentially advantageous in terms of accessing participants for all samples, it was also vital to recognize the need to maintain distance and objectivity thereby ‘making the familiar strange’ (Hollindale, 2007:25) and Gillham (2005:71) recommends that the researcher has to learn to develop a ‘naïve eye’ in order to maintain a necessary degree of objectivity. Despite this ‘insider knowledge’, Denscombe (2002:170) cautions that social

researchers need to ‘suspend common sense beliefs about the subject they choose to investigate and then question the obvious, taking nothing for granted.’

Questionnaires were trialled with HE colleagues because it was felt they would be able to offer an informed and useful perspective in terms of the relevance of the questions and that they would also comment on whether length and depth of the questions was realistic and manageable for them. Once again, there were some minor modifications made in the light of suggestions in terms of wording which was felt to be ambiguous in order to gain specific information about course content. It was the original aim to send out the letters and questionnaires by post but, after consultation with colleagues, this was changed to an online version as it was felt that this was more likely to be acknowledged or forwarded to the appropriate respondent. The final questions were agreed to be fit for purpose and sufficiently concise.

The significance of initial training for those working with children was highlighted in an earlier chapter. As individual EY practitioner participants were asked about their own training experiences, it seemed relevant to also investigate what different courses and colleges offered to students on the subject of disability awareness, which may or may not include the use of picture books as a learning resource. It would also indicate the currency of legislative and policy developments with regard to training about disability.

A small purposive sample of twenty HE and FE colleges nationwide was approached to invite participation based on existing professional networks in the hope that this would encourage a good response. In order to reflect the range of practitioners training to work with children aged 3-5 years, an introductory letter and questionnaire (see Appendix 4) was sent online to academic leaders who offered the following programmes:

- Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) EY focus)
- Initial teacher training (BA Honours) EY focus)
- Early Childhood/ EY Education Studies (BA Honours)
- Foundation degree in Early Childhood/ EY Education Studies (FdA)
- BTec National Diploma in EY

All of the above courses are aimed at students with a broad interest in all aspects of Early Childhood and are closely related to a range of careers working with young children and families and reflected the range of training backgrounds of the EY practitioner sample.

Four weeks elapsed with no response from any of the institutions although follow-up email contacts and phone calls eventually elicited a positive response from six trainer participants. Due to this disappointingly low initial response, a further six HE training providers were approached via email in October 2008 in order to establish a valid sample for this strand of the research. Four of these responded which resulted in a final sample of ten participants who offered a range of courses (see table 3.11).

Table 3.11 Range of courses taught by ten initial training provider participants

Course type	Training institution participants
PGCE Primary 3-7	2
BA (Hons) EY Education Studies/ Early Childhood Studies(ECS)/ EY Education and Teaching 3-7/ EY Management	7
FdA ECS/ Management of Childcare Provision	5
CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Childcare and Education	2

Many EY practitioners have an initial degree before they undertake training specifically to work with young children and while all the HE training institutions offered a PGCE course for teaching this age range, only those who volunteered to participate were able to be included (see table 3.12). Several participants had passed on information about this piece of research to colleagues who taught these courses in their institutions, but this was not followed up.

Table 3.12 PGCE 3-7 Trainer participants

Training institution	Course type	Name
Blueskies University College	PGCE	Ruby
Northern University College	PGCE	James

Similarly, some institutions that offered related EY teaching courses also offered a BA in EY Education Studies or ECS (see table 3.13) although this information was not always represented in the feedback. The questionnaires were sent to Heads of Subject areas in large complex HE organisations and the difficulties of internal communication alongside other priorities may have contributed to the low response, despite several e mail and telephone reminders.

Table 3.13 BA Trainer participants

Training institution	Course type	Name
Blueskies University	EY Education and Teaching 3-7	Ruby
Northern University College	EY Education Studies	Kathy
Middleton University	ECS	Sarah
Blueskies University	ECS	Ruby
University of Woodridge	ECS	Fiona
University of Wildheart	ECS	Tammy
Lilliput University	EY Management	Polly

It was decided to include information from FdA (level five) providers as it was hoped that these might provide some insight into CPD provision (see table 3.14). Whilst the course content is more explicitly linked to practice, many students on these part time courses progress to the level six qualification in order to achieve a full honours degree (often in the same training institution). As a result of the raising of standards of qualification in the EY sector post 1997, the formation of the Children’s Workforce Development Council

(CWDC) now recommends that EY practitioners add to their existing professional qualifications.

Table 3.14 FdA Trainer participants

Training institution	Course type	Name
University of Woodridge	ECS	Josie
Northern University College	ECS	Grace
Sunshine College	ECS	Anna
Fallowhurst University College	Professional Studies in EY	Gina
Lilliput University	Management of Childcare Provision	Polly

Despite the drive towards a more highly qualified EY workforce, many settings, particularly in the private sector, are largely staffed by practitioners with a level three or level two qualification. Because of this it was thought important to include these training providers in the sample because of their enduring influence on practice and although a total of ten FE providers were originally approached with an online letter, but only two responded (see table 3.15).

Table 3.15 CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Childcare and Education Trainer participants

Training institution	Course type	Name
Jeremiah College	CACHE	Mary
Nancy New College	CACHE	Zoe

Other CPD within EY settings was also an important consideration, particularly with regard to the response to legislation and policy changes in the area of disability. The principal training provider that would be accessed by practitioners working across all sectors in the LA would be the local EYDCP whose overall responsibility for developing

professional knowledge and practice was originally highlighted in The National Childcare Strategy (Great Britain. Department for Education and Employment(DfEE), 1998).

The relevant senior manager for CPD in the named LA was also approached via email and asked to complete the same questionnaire put to the programme leaders of the college sample. She did not respond.

The next chapter explores how the consequent data collected can be organised and used to inform analysis. In order to refine themes the final coding of all the data was colour coded manually using the four research questions. It soon became apparent that there was some predictable overlap between these and that it was sometimes difficult to decide which code to use. Each question had several aspects which were then collated and quantified across the different samples and research tools and this resulted in a series of tables that appeared to provide some solid outcomes. However, at this point, questions arose about the most useful way of presenting the data, especially as organising it in a statistical format did not seem very helpful. This dilemma has been well described by Miles and Huberman, (1994:56): ‘Converting words into numbers and then tossing away the words gets a researcher into all kinds of mischief. You thus are assuming that the chief property of the words is that there are more of some than others’.

In seeking to ‘tame’ the verbal data in this way, there seemed to be a danger of creating an entirely false premise in terms of assigning value to the number of times a particular topic was specifically alluded to. For example, the following extract (see table 3.16) demonstrates the result of scrutinising the interview transcripts from across the different samples in order to identify some common responses. This particular code: Instrumental Factors (IF) was part of the second research question: ‘What influences picture book choices by EY practitioners? Each participant had expressed a view that broadly related to the theme of perceived developmental needs in children when selecting/ producing/ providing picture books. Some of these were discussed several times, in different ways throughout the interviews. These responses were collated and then ranked in terms of frequency in order to provide an overview of which views were most commonly expressed across the different samples.

Table 3.16: Instrumental factors

Comment by a participant in questionnaire or interview	Number of times mentioned
simplicity of illustrative style, helps visual perception	8
meets individual needs, character identification, empathy, familiarity	4
builds vocabulary, develops imagination, scary in a safe context	3
links with phonics, social learning, assessment opportunities, problem solving, suspense, predicting skills, routines, reading readiness, fantastical subjects, experimenting with words before understanding, new ideas, complex subjects, fun, excitement	1

Although this kind of presentation has identified some important and interesting points for further discussion, it remains very limited. For instance, the recorded number of responses provided no indication of the length or depth of the response, the particular way in which it was articulated, the extent to which it was in response to a prompt, or many other variables. Indeed, the fact that only one respondent mentioned ‘problem solving’ as a factor in driving picture book selection provided no indication of whether other respondents believed this to be important because they may have not chosen to express it or said something else equally important. Similarly, the prevalence of ‘simplicity of illustrative style’ may have simply not emerged as a response unless as part of a semi structured interview which Corbetta (2003:265) describes as ‘a guided conversation in which the interviewer establishes the topic and ensures that the interview is conducted according to the cognitive aims set.’ Lastly, the interpretation of the data is subjective as ‘what you “see” in a transcript is inescapably selective’ (Miles, Huberman, 1994:56).

The coding framework was eventually devised with reference to that recommended by Radnor (2001:68) in order to provide ‘a consistent, thoughtful ordering (not a mechanistic one), so as to give rigour without rigidity....’ She suggests that interview data should be coded in terms of reference to relevant topics which may be either explicitly stated in the data or implicitly embedded that are constructed by the researcher as part of the interpretative approach. The coding of EY practitioner interview data was therefore

undertaken through designating broad topics with codes relating to the four research questions (see tables 3.17 and 3.18). Each script was systematically marked accordingly.

Table 3.17 Explicit emerging themes from practitioner interview data re choice of picture books relating to research questions:

Topic	Code
Instrumental factors	IF
Pedagogical Framework	PF
Priority in the setting	PS
Training influences	TI
Personal influences	PPI
Legislation and policy	LP
Availability for use	AU

Table 3.18 Implicit emerging themes from practitioner interview data re choice of picture books relating to research questions:

Topic	Code
Childhood Discourse	CD
Ideology	ID
Disability Awareness Dimension	DA

These topics were then subdivided into further specific categories. Participants were given an alphabetical designation in capital letters. Instances occurring in the interview data were then been given an alphabetical letter in lower case indicating the number of times significant reference was made to the specific category within the individual interview (see tables 3.19 and 3.20).

Table 3.19 Example of interview data coding (explicit emerging theme)

<p>12 practitioner interviews: A:Julie, B: Alice, C: Debbie, D: Gillian, E: Jane, F:Eddie, G: Mel, H:Lucy, I: Isabel, J: Lily, K: Edith, L:Helen,</p>	
<p>Topic: Instrumental Factors</p>	<p>Code: IF</p>
<p>1. Links to curriculum areas</p>	<p>A:a,b,c, B: a, C: a, D:a,b,c, F:a, b, c, G:a,b,c,d,e,f, J:a,b, K:a, L:a</p>
<p>2. Adaptability of picture books</p>	<p>C:a, D:a, E:a, G:a,b, c</p>
<p>3. Meeting individual needs of children in the setting</p>	<p>A:a, B:a, C:a,b,c,d, D:a,b,c,d, E:a,b,c,d, F:a,b,c, G:a,b</p>
<p>4. Perceptual development</p>	<p>B:a, E:a, G:a, H:a, I:ab, K:a</p>

Table 3.20 Example of interview data coding (implicit emerging theme)

<p>12 practitioner interviews: A:Julie, B: Alice, C: Debbie, D: Gillian, E: Jane, F:Eddie, G: Mel, H:Lucy, I: Isabel, J: Lily, K: Edith, L:Helen,</p>	
<p>Topic: Childhood discourse</p>	<p>Code: CD</p>
<p>1. Romantic / the ‘ being’ child</p>	<p>A: a, b, E: a, b, c, F: a, b, c, J; a, K: a, b, L: a, b, c, d, e</p>
<p>2. Lockean / the ‘ becoming ‘ child</p>	<p>B: a, C: a ,b, c , G: a, b, c, d, e, H: a, I: a</p>

The organization and analysis of such data from a range of sources was challenging and Miles and Huberman (1994) are amongst those who warn against the challenge of disaggregating significant from irrelevant data at the end of a long research project

despite the fact that, in the early stages of any study, almost everything seems important. The following chapter presents the findings and analysis and attempts the need to ‘tell a story’ with regard to the data collected and to thereby ‘construct an illuminating narrative’ for the reader (Dey (1993:39). In order to achieve this, it has been necessary to make some decisions with regard to how the data have been organised for analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994:36) state that this process in itself is analytical: ‘To review a set of field notes, transcribed or synthesized, and to dissect them meaningfully, while keeping the relations between the parts intact, is the stuff of analysis’. Dey (1993:4).talks about the way this, should lead to the next stage of making connections whereby ‘we can build up a picture of our data which is both clearer and more complex than our initial impressions.’

Chapter 4

Findings and analysis

Dey (1993:2) suggests that ‘qualitative analysis is more likely to result in the construction of walls than the creation of palaces.’ However, Shipman (1997:44) believes that the exercise should be viewed positively as ‘the flexibility adds to the surprises, the snags, the fun of this style of enquiry’. This chapter looks at the ways in which the different samples contributed to the research narrative (Shipman, 1997). It then presents the data collected from the different samples. Several strong themes emerged relating to each question using the coding process (see pages 118-120) and these are discussed with reference to relevant literature. At this stage it is worth reiterating the research questions that this study is seeking to answer:

1. What individual and structural factors influence picture book choices by practitioners in nursery schools?
2. How do picture books transmit ideology and culture?
3. What are the perceived circumstances affecting availability of picture books with a disability related theme for use in nursery schools?
4. Can picture books be seen as contributing to alternative constructions of disability?

The use of more than one method of data collection (questionnaires and semi structured interviews) alongside the different participant perspectives (EY practitioners, colleagues, students and training providers) contributed towards triangulation in terms of capturing ‘the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one viewpoint’ (Cohen et al., 2011) and thereby ‘getting a fix’ on the research questions ‘from two or more places (Robson, 2002: 371). Miles and Huberman (1994:29) suggest that using a range of participants from different but related professional backgrounds ‘can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings’.

Who were the EY practitioner participants?

The participants taking part in this research were representative of a wide range of roles within their work settings. There was only one male amongst the sample and, although no information on ethnicity was requested, the evidence of the interviews suggested that all participants were likely to be of White European origin. At least half appeared to be within the age band 45-60 years of age, which is an observation supported by the date of their final year of training which was disclosed in the interviews. Seven held senior management positions within the setting and three held the role of SENCO alongside other responsibilities, which may have been a factor in influencing their responses to questions about disability (see table 3.5). Wearmouth (2000: 47) explains that this complex role: ‘necessitates an awareness and understanding of issues of policy development, management of personnel and physical resources, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and planning for pupil learning’. However Jones (2004:75) suggests that the inevitable emphasis on bureaucratic procedures can seriously compromise the wider aspects of the role and imply that the SEN Code of Practice can be ‘interpreted as a job description rather than a set of principles’.

The sample was purposive as ‘it builds in certain characteristics or criteria which help to develop and test’ (Mason, 1996:94). The original letter to HTs was entitled ‘Picture book research’ (see Appendix 1) so there was an assumption, that all resulting participants were interested in this subject. However, it emerged from the interview that Julie, the only TA, was ‘volunteered’ as a participant in the research by the HT because of having overall responsibility for ordering books for the setting. The four T participants were from two NS that demonstrated a particularly strong commitment to using picture books to facilitate learning (see table 3.8). This perception was further enhanced when visiting the setting in order to carry out the interviews because the use of displays and the organisation of resources in the learning environment that was very much in line with recommendations made in the non-statutory section of the EYFS (Great Britain. DfES, 2007b: 40):

Plan an environment that is rich in signs, symbols, notices, numbers, words, rhymes, books, pictures, music and songs that takes into account children's different interests, understandings, home backgrounds and cultures.

Whitehead (2010:122) points out the importance of providing an environment where books are easily accessible, located in a safe and comfortable space, and given clear value by adults. She suggests that EY practitioners have a crucial role to play in fostering a love of books since at this stage of education 'there is less discernible threat of pressure linked with the cultural prestige of reading' whereby children may be assessed largely in terms of their reading ability rather than their enjoyment of literature and their developing ability to use picture books to enter the world of what Meek, (1991:117) describes as 'literate seeing'.

The largest number of EY practitioner participants had the role of DH (see table 3.9) and in a small NS this is potentially very significant since these members of staff are usually on a full time teaching timetable as well as having a strong influence on recommending and providing staff development and other curriculum and pastoral responsibilities (Edgington, 1998; Aubrey, 2007). When the most senior member of staff was committed to developing staff expertise on the subject of picture books in terms of their selection and use, then there was a clear impact on their status in the setting. All the EY practitioner involvement had been as a result of an initial correspondence with the HT but in only two cases did this result in the HT taking part (see table 3.10). It was, however, difficult to determine why this might be the case.

All participants demonstrated a keen enthusiasm for picture books by completing the initial questionnaire although it has to be remembered that they were a self-selecting sample that volunteered to be part of the research because of the subject matter. The questionnaire responses indicated that the majority also had overall responsibility for selecting books to be purchased for the setting.

The picture book questionnaire

The responses provided to the initial questionnaire to EY practitioners were taken as the starting point for the subsequent semi-structured interviews and were successful in this

respect. Three of the questionnaires were completed and returned by participants who each included a note apologizing for withdrawal from the next stage of the research due to lack of time. This meant that there were sixteen questionnaires completed, but only thirteen participants to follow through with an interview. One of these also subsequently withdrew but gave no reason, resulting in a final sample of twelve interview participants (see table 3.2).

Despite the wide range of new picture books available, those cited as favourite texts in response to the opening question in the initial questionnaire, (see Appendix 2) came from a relatively limited range (see table 4.1). No titles that related to disability themes were included anywhere on this list, which indicated that this kind of picture book, if known, was not highly regarded by this group of EY practitioners in comparison to others. This was not surprising when a later response indicating a very low awareness of such books is taken into account.

Table 4.1 Three most popular picture book choices from EY practitioner questionnaire

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We're going on a Bear Hunt</i> by Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury 	Chosen by seven practitioners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Goldilocks and the Three Bears</i> Traditional- no particular version specified 	Chosen by eight practitioners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Very Hungry Caterpillar</i> by Eric Carle • <i>Peace at Last</i> by Jill Murphy 	Chosen by six practitioners Chosen by six practitioners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Gingerbread Man</i> Traditional- no particular version specified 	Chosen by five practitioners

When these choices were discussed in more detail in the interviews, the majority of practitioners explained that they had interpreted the question in terms of those picture books that were most successful with the children in terms of their flexibility of use and potential links with the curriculum. This perceived instrumental value of the picture books emerged as an important theme in influencing the selections they made and this issue will be returned to later in this chapter.

It is also worth noting that the responses to the questions that related to the physical learning environment helped to establish that there was a consistent pedagogical

viewpoint shared by the participants which was in line with the historical roots of NS first proposed by Margaret Mc Millan at the beginning of the twentieth century (Steedman, 1990). This also echoes recommendations made in the current EY curriculum guidance relating to the provision of a play based, child centred learning environment.

Some participants were working in the same NS (see table 3.6) although the information they provided about general issues did not always correlate. This may be because they had different roles in the setting with different responsibilities or that they were located in different areas of the school. The involvement of more than one participant may have indicated a particular interest in the subject of picture books amongst the staff, or that several had expressed an interest or been approached by the HT.

The questionnaires provided valuable information about who was responsible for buying and ordering picture books in the setting and in all cases this seemed to be quite a democratic process involving staff at all levels in the organisation. This appears to be a feature of NS where the relatively small size of the setting encourages several members of staff to be involved in decision making at many levels (Edgington, 1998; Rodd, 1994; Savage, Leeson, 2004). Clearly books can only be selected to be used with the children if those purchasing them are aware of what is available and the questionnaire was designed to specifically suggest sources from which books can be obtained and these were also discussed further in the interviews. Whilst the limitations of a statistical analysis have been previously discussed, table 4:2 demonstrates how frequently participants cited a narrow number of sources for accessing picture books in the questionnaire responses:

Table 4.2 How do practitioners know about what is on offer?

Comment by EY participant in questionnaire or interview	Number of times mentioned
book clubs/ reps contacting NS directly	six
general book catalogues, named distributor 1	five
'Letterbox Library', named publisher 1, personal choice, own children's books	three
personal collection, marketing/ popularity/fashion/ TV, gatekeepers, central library staff recommendation	twice
named publisher 2, named publisher 3, named publisher 4, named distributor 2, book reviews in professional journals, local library, HT, designated person, staff recommendations, identifying curriculum links, school improvement advisor, recommendations from courses	once

This data suggests that access to this information about the availability of picture books was somewhat arbitrary. It has already been noted that this particular sample of EY practitioners were all interested in picture books because they agreed to take part in the research, however it demonstrates that whilst some were influenced by factors such as a recommendation from a course or a book review, those publishers and distributors that advertised their products directly to the setting through catalogues and representatives provided the most often acknowledged convenient source. Several practitioners explained that a lack of time to browse over collections of books outside the setting was a constraint, and that this made it very useful to be able to look at and order books from these sources. It may be that it is beneficial for practitioners to view books before purchasing them, but this is a challenge for busy staff who do not always have time to keep abreast of new publications. Several participants commented that this opportunity to view was valued by senior managers and that time was allocated for staff to visit the main LA distributor showroom, and in two cases, other named booksellers in the city centre.

The final part of the questionnaire was designed to focus on the subject of disability. As expected, limited information was obtained from the responses to the questionnaire but the interview provided further opportunities to discuss this issue in some depth. The questionnaire findings illustrated that there had been little coverage of the subject in initial training despite the fact that several participants had trained since the introduction of The Warnock Report (Great Britain. DES, 1978) and The Education Act (Great Britain, 1981) which were designed to transform policy and practice. However, several individuals had undertaken recent CPD which related to inclusive practice since this time in order that they could deliver on the stated LA priorities and also as part of training for those staff who held the role of SENCO in the setting.

Practitioner knowledge of picture books relating to disability was central to the research in order to explore whether such resources were being used in NS. Questionnaire responses indicated a very low level of awareness from all participants with several naming between one and four titles (a number of which were non-fiction - see table 4.3) and six participants unable to name any picture books at all.

Table 4.3 EY practitioner questionnaire response to naming picture books with disability related content.

Named fiction picture books	Named non -fiction picture books
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>My Friend Isabella</i> • <i>Baby Duck</i> • <i>Lucy's Picture</i> • <i>Sign and Singalong</i> • <i>Rock and Roll Clyde</i> • <i>Ringo the Flamingo</i> (named by two participants) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Don't call me Special</i> (named by two participants) • <i>I'm special</i> • <i>Every kid is different</i> • <i>David wears a hearing aid (series)</i>

These findings are interesting in relation to an earlier response on the questionnaire which indicated that the majority of participants had received CPD about inclusion. It would appear that this did not emphasise the importance of using picture books as a tool for

inclusive practice. The subsequent interview responses about these choices demonstrated several important themes and are now organised under relevant subheadings using the coding process as recommended by Radnor (2001) and described in chapter three.

Instrumental factors

The influence of the curriculum in determining the choice of picture books used by practitioners emerging from the interview data was not surprising in the light of an externally imposed curriculum framework. All practitioners working with three to five year olds would be required to follow the CGFS (QCA, 2000) guidance which is divided into six areas of learning. A close scrutiny of the Communication, Language and Literacy (CLL) section reveals that the benefit children might gain from experiencing *pictures* [my italics] as opposed to or in addition to written text in books, even as a stage in developing early reading skills, is not explicitly mentioned. Instead, the emphasis in this document is on the importance of exposing children to a range of more general types of book: ‘Giving opportunities to share and enjoy a wide range of rhymes, music, songs, poetry, stories and non-fiction books’ (QCA, 2000: 44).

It is reasonable to assume that this particular piece of curriculum guidance was not greatly influential on the practitioners interviewed for this project because they had completed their initial training prior to its introduction. However, all of them would have been using it to structure the curriculum since 2000 and may have had some CPD to facilitate this. There is also the possibility that the evident years of professional experience working with three to five year olds would have given them confidence in their own skills in using pictures alongside written text in picture books, thereby reducing their dependence on the guidance document.

The EYFS (Great Britain, DfES: 2007a) replaces all prior guidance for children aged 0-5 years and was statutory from September 2008 and whilst retaining the six curriculum areas, the accompanying non statutory practice guidance document (Great Britain, DfES, 2007b) uses four complementary themes which ‘work together to underpin effective practice in the delivery of EYFS. These are:

- A Unique Child
- Positive Relationships
- Enabling Environments

- Learning and Development

This current document mentions picture books once in terms of planning and resourcing for CLL for children aged 40-60 months, and also adds the word ‘daily’ to the already quoted extract from CGFS, which highlights the importance attached to a regular exposure to books. However, the overall emphasis in relation to learning and development in this curriculum area is clearly related to the influence of using synthetic phonics in preparation for reading: ‘Develop children’s phonological awareness, particularly through rhyme and alliteration and their knowledge of the alphabetic code’ (Great Britain. DfES 2007b: 40).

There is no mention of how learning and development in CLL might benefit from looking at pictures in books in this section. The emphasis is about learning to decode written text as an important first stage in learning to read – in other words, the child as ‘becoming’ reader. This is particularly interesting since the document now refers to the needs of children under the age of three years. It may be that this omission arises from an assumption that practitioners would know the value of pictures in terms of developing skills other than those directly concerned with preparing to read written text (Arizpe, Styles, 2003; Goodwin, 2009). Nevertheless, this lack of specific guidance in current curriculum guidance would seem to be significant in terms of providing an educational justification for using picture books with young children. If these are only regarded as a foundation for ‘proper books’ then this lack of accorded status could prevent them being regarded as important by those practitioners who did not have a personal interest, knowledge or understanding beyond this limited instrumental value (Cremin et al., 2008).

It is encouraging that the interview data suggests that practitioners understand that picture books can be used in a variety of ways: as starting points for further activities (particularly role play), reflection on the life cycle, reinforcing individual interests, affirming home culture and providing opportunities for enjoyment, escape and imagination. This can work against what Rosen (2007: 59) regards as potentially sinister: ‘education all over the West has come under greater and greater pressure to dispense with humanistic and liberal ideas and adopt instrumental approaches (of which the rush to synthetic phonics is only one)’.

Despite, Rosen's concerns, only a few EY practitioners referred specifically to the early stages of reading as a rationale for selecting particular books and none referred to the topic of synthetic phonics, despite its recent controversial emphasis by government. As already stated, the choice of NS practitioners may have contributed to this as they are not subject to the same 'top down' pressures. Again, the particular general interest in and enthusiasm for picture books expressed by these practitioners may also be significant in what they chose to talk about in the interviews. The value of books in published guidance for this stage of learning is almost exclusively focused on the importance of facilitating literacy in terms of being able to read and write adequately and consequently emphasized in initial training and CPD and has some influence.

Mel is one of several participants who made reference to this:

I do not do it [The Gruffalo] with these children until towards the end of the year when we are concentrating more on listening to sounds and rhyme and getting them ready for reading.

The perceived needs of children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) were mentioned by those participants who worked in settings where this was particularly relevant. Gillian drew attention to the importance of how particular books offered opportunities for practicing language patterns: 'getting children to tune into sounds particularly for second language learners is really important'.

Debbie explained that cultural backgrounds of the children in the setting also played a part in her picture book selection:

I do use it [So Much] a lot because in this setting you have a got a lot of West Indian children who identify with the language and the culture of the book and the large family setting and the big family gatherings. It matches the needs of these children and there is a lot of repetition that the children can join in with and I work a lot with the EAL children.

Once children enter the reception class of an Infants school, where EYFS is still the curriculum guidance that is followed, the emphasis may be driven more by the perceived need to encourage literacy in preparation for key stage one. This was described by Helen who splits her part time teaching commitments between the NS and a reception class in a different school and comments on the difference in the latter setting:

The lesson plan is pretty prescriptive when using books and it has to be that book and the response to it with the learning outcome. The final finished product that the child would produce is described in the lesson plan.

In this way, the use of a specified book is regarded as a tool in achieving a pre-determined learning outcome and once children are in statutory school environments there is the possibility that their opportunities to access picture books that do not have this functionality becomes limited. If books other than those recommended to develop literacy skills are made available for children to browse they may not be given the same status by practitioners and, as a result, children may pick up on this and also give them a lesser value.

As has already been discussed, most EY practitioners identified how picture books provided opportunities to make links with all curriculum areas. This response is what would generally be regarded as 'good' EY practice, in that it clearly communicates a willingness to use opportunities in a cross curricular way to support learning. Edith explained that one of her favourite books had potential beyond the story content:

'Rosie's Walk' is one I've used many times because it is so useful for teaching about lots of things. I use it to teach about positional language and also predicting what is going to happen next.

The responses from this sample indicated that the curriculum was significant in determining book choices and in particular texts that are recommended in curriculum guidance and professional journals as vehicles for educating children about particular topics. These recommendations are of great convenience to busy practitioners as many who were interviewed cited lack of time as an issue when selecting books. Mel explains that those which offer a clear link to the curriculum like *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1963) are often chosen because of their in-built opportunities to explore issues such as the life cycle:

I use it more from the nature point of view- that is my objective I don't particularly I think it is a bit ..., where is the story? So you eat through all these things, it does not capture my imagination. Use it as a nature teaching point for something else- which a lot of books are but other people love it just for the story and we have got

all the visual aids and I know one person who is off on maternity leave just makes it magical to me it just falls flat...

Despite this reaction to what she saw as a rather limited story, Mel acknowledged that another colleague would bring it to life by taking a different approach and perspective to telling the story. In a recent interview (Brookes, 2009:24) Carle, the illustrator of this book, reflects on the way the story has been interpreted as an ‘allegory of both Christianity and capitalism’ causing the article’s author to speculate over the question of how many practitioners are likely to see beyond the superficial opportunity to teach about the life cycle and food choices.

There were those, however, who were able to go beyond the immediately obvious and instrumentally narrow interpretation of the story. Mel points out the cross curricular potential of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*:

With any of those traditional stories you can bring in number, you can do so much language, so much sort of healthy eating like ‘are you eating porridge, I eat porridge it is good for the heart’- there is so much content in them.

In this way a traditional story is given added value because of its links to current policy emphasis on ‘healthy eating’. Her comments provide a good example of the dynamic nature of story that can be constantly reinterpreted and given different emphasis in order to teach children specific messages and illustrates the potential for exploring such stories for less obvious links with disability. The interviewees made a number of references to the six curriculum areas of Mathematical Understanding, Knowledge and Understanding of the World, Creativity, Physical Development, PSED, and CLL as reasons for why particular books were selected to be used in the setting, particularly in relation to opportunities for linking texts to specific topics such as ‘Myself’, ‘Life cycles’, ‘Day and Night’ and ‘Food’- all of which are recurrent themes in EY curricula and are also reflected in the subject matter of many picture books aimed at younger readers. Several practitioner responses indicated that this is a very important reason for having a good selection of books to exploit in this way and this, once again, highlights the ways in which the curriculum can be so influential on the choice of resources that are used. In explaining why *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* was selected as a favourite in the ‘Top Ten’ questionnaire response, Gillian made the following comment:

*So it is the content and also there is a kind morality about it, about change and everything else, so particularly with *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* it is very much about the curriculum and we tend to do that in the summer and we actually do get caterpillars that we hatch out into butterflies so children experience that first hand.*

Lily spoke of how particular picture books could also act as a starting point or stimulus for other activities:

For instance 'Little Rabbit Foo Foo' is really good for talking about feelings and emotions and it's funny too. Some were more resource led like 'The Gruffalo' in terms of using it to link with activities in Forest School. There's also 'Handa's Surprise' that encourages lots of related work with masks and creative activities.

Helen took this beyond the classroom and saw it as part of her responsibility to seek out related resources that had been initially stimulated by one particular story:

We did 'The Billy Goats Gruff' one time and it led, I'm trying to remember how, it led to me getting a mackerel from the deli counter from Waitrose and the children sketching it. I think that came from well if the billy goats, you know, if one of the children saying, well me saying if the troll can't eat the goats or didn't eat the goats what could they eat instead? Maybe then he wouldn't eat the goats, because there may be fish in the river...

Interviewer: *Right...*

...and I said 'would you like me to bring in a fish?', and the group said 'no you won't bring in a fish' I said I would and a mackerel is a very attractive fish so that kind of triggered that really

The variety of ways in which the picture book could be used by a creative practitioner in response to or as a starting point for other activities, was noteworthy. Of particular interest was their use in terms of providing opportunities for problem solving; a point raised by Eddie who felt that some had clear links to specific issues whilst others opened up a range of possibilities:

So look at the list, with things like 'Oliver's Vegetables' and 'Oliver's Milkshake' - they lead directly to activities that we know the children can exploit time and time

again and have been very successful and it's linking activities in making meaning between the book and activities.

The importance of a book's instrumental value seemed to dominate above the appeal of the book as an artistic object. For instance, despite acknowledging the importance of individual aesthetic taste in determining the choices of which books to use, Mel demonstrates that this was often made a secondary consideration behind the planned learning outcomes of the curriculum:

Interviewer: So you liked 'The Gruffalo', you have chosen two books that are illustrated by the same artist. Do you like that type of illustrations or are they pictures you think the children like?

No I would not say necessarily that it is the illustrations but I do quite like them but I would not say it is my priority. I think there are lots of books that I like the illustrations but I wouldn't use them because the content isn't what I am looking at.

By far the most dominant theme driving the choices of books made available for children was their perceived developmental needs in line with changing interests and developing abilities (Goldschmied, Jackson, 2004). Many practitioners expressed the importance of clear, brightly coloured and relatively simple illustrations in meeting the needs of young children; an issue mentioned at least once by eight of the practitioners who were interviewed:

I generally like pictures that are clear and explicit when selecting books to use with the children. As the children get used to looking at books they get used to more complex pictures and learn to look.

Edith

I like to provide a wide variety but feel that children respond best to simple bold illustration. They help to reinforce communication skills.

Isabel

I think children respond best to clear bright pictures. I like the illustrations in books to be simple and representative eg Rod Campbell, Mick Inkpen and Nick Sharratt.

Lucy

Part of the rationale for this appeared to be organisational as it was pointed out by Alice that it was difficult to use books with more subtle illustrative styles with a group of children. As Edith explained:

If you have got a larger group even if it's only ten or twelve children they can't always see the details it's more difficult for them to access all that information really.

Had the interview questions been more focused in this respect and able to elicit responses that were about how individual children used books, more precise data on this issue might have emerged. However, it is worth considering that practitioners do indeed think about how the chosen books could be used in group story time situations simply because they have to have regard to budgeting and storage constraints. After all, providing books that are only designed for individual use may be regarded as a luxury in times of severe budget restraint.

Eddie was the only participant who had included statements about the desirability of having a wide range of illustrative styles in his response to the questionnaire and he elaborated on this in the interview:

Interviewer: *You have quite a range there, on your list. Do you think it's important for children to see different styles?*

I think it is good. There is a danger that some are contrived somewhat and Burningham's illustrations particularly are a favourite of mine, because I think they are less than obvious perhaps in the way they are exploited and needed to be interpreted in many ways. So I think that's important in I think in children's artistic representation, I think I have seen some fantastic results in using that.

He sees a benefit in introducing children to a range of illustrations as a way of influencing their own artistic and creative development – a point of view which was not highlighted by any other participant. It is possible that this is due to aspects of his initial training

which had encouraged the exploration of a range of picture books and had resulted in him having a heightened awareness of their potential in terms of developing visual perceptual skills, aesthetic awareness and imagination

Participants working in those settings that had a large proportion of children with EAL mentioned simplicity of illustration as a factor in determining choice of illustrative style. It was difficult to establish whether this view was based on experience or information about the needs of EAL learners and whether this was seen to apply to all, despite individual needs based on particular language backgrounds and facility with their home language. Mel commented that a significant majority of children in her setting did not know what a book was when they started at three years of age:

our children don't know what a book is, don't know how to handle it and of course in Urdu as well things go the other way, it is a very complicated issue so we have got to get over all that before they can, and the language- it is no good doing perhaps 'The Lion and the Rat' especially reading it from the book, reading the text, because they have not got that language.

Similar views were expressed by Debbie and Gillian who both stressed the need to provide books with bold illustrations in order to help with developing early communication skills:

I think, it's these children I'm working with now, difficulty with limited language skills and limited communication skills the pictures are very important, the ones without any English at all need pictures and the resources you use with them make the story more meaningful for them.

I mean in this setting for example we have got two children out of our eighty who are coming in with English as a first language so it is very useful having those books that are big and bold.

This illustrates the rationale that is often used for limiting the range of books made available until children were deemed as 'ready' to understand them. It also demonstrated the extent to which practitioners may be in a powerful position to either offer or withhold particular books based on blanket perceptions of their needs based on their language and cultural backgrounds. Mel was concerned that they had little

experience of any books when they started at the setting and so needed to be trained to handle them appropriately:

We have got to be very simple and we do start in September with flat books and Spot books and stuff like that for perhaps a month because that is board books really, they don't know how to handle books...

This appeared to include a restricted selection also based on particular formats which limits the range of books made available because the range of different board books are themselves limited in number. They are also generally aimed at the under threes in terms of content, so some EAL learners may not be exposed to the same degree of challenging stories in line with their English speaking peers if this is the usual approach to provision. Goodwin (2008:6) points out the danger of trying to categorise picture books for groups of children in this way as she believes that very young children can gain pleasure from complex texts 'if the subject matter engages them' and that variety and breadth of provision should therefore be encouraged.

Pedagogical framework

All practitioners mentioned the benefit of a comfortable, appealing, child-centred learning environment in which children could concentrate and browse. Helen explained that an appealing location for the books was important because the children were encouraged to be self-directed in their choice of activity:

There are several quiet areas that have books, lots of storage for books- loads of books, access to big books, really big book stands and we recently got some new settees. It just looks so nice, all sort of miniature settees, three of them -they are lovely, they look so inviting, a really nice attractive area, and the children, you know, because a lot of their activities are self-directed - they will all fit in there.

Anderson et al (1996) explain that the EY learning environment relies on careful organization that allows the adults to be facilitators, instructors and enablers whilst at the same time meeting a wide range of both cognitive and affective needs.

Although the views of the children and their responses to the books were mentioned as influential factors when making picture book choices, it emerged from several of the interviews that this related more to the ways in which practitioners interpreted,

responded to and influenced children's interests. So, it was likely that a practitioner would respond to a child's interest in dinosaurs by looking for more books on the subject than if they responded well to a particular illustrative style. EY pedagogy places great emphasis on a curriculum that is meaningfully related to existing knowledge and interests (Coltman, Whitbread, 1996). Duffy (2010:105) states that this requires a skilful, responsive practitioner who can 'understand each child as an individual and personalize the curriculum content to match their needs and interests'.

Mel had been a teacher at the setting for a considerable time, and like Julie, had memories of learning to use picture books in her initial training. She reflected with enthusiasm on how the book budget had increased since NS had become self-managing:

I think there is more money available now and different initiatives that come and as we all love books and as I am the Communication, Language and Literacy co-ordinator and I do the community involvement too, I only have to say if I need perhaps £500 worth of books...

She went on to explain how books were now organised and prioritised differently:

They have always been inside the nursery I guess, but not necessarily in the corridor, we have got them in the corridor now for when the children are waiting. We did not used to have them outside but we do now because we have got a whole band of equipment in boxes.

The interviews revealed that the relative flexibility and autonomy of NS settings allowed time for innovative staff development: the day was not constrained by the challenge of fitting in the prescribed Literacy and Numeracy Hours and whole school routines that dictate designated playtimes and assemblies in most Infant School environments. Whilst this flexibility provided a valuable opportunity in terms of responding to the needs of the children, it did depend on the particular interests and priorities of individual senior staff. A personal interest in children's books was a powerful influence and this is well illustrated by Eddie who reflected on how his PGCE course at a university which has a renowned reputation for expertise in the study of children's literature had contributed to his enduring passion for books:

We spent a considerable amount of time simply talking and simply sharing experiences, similar to your research really. Why do this? Why choose this? What are the benefits? We were asked as an adult group of people to then take books away and explore them.

This emphasis on the value of thinking about and analysing texts was clearly viewed as an important process which he had adapted to use with colleagues and children. It was also evident that if this personal interests and expertise was shared by senior staff who were in a more influential position in NS, the impact could be considerable. Eddie described how his leadership in this subject area had led staff to reflect on the role of books in the physical environment:

We started to look at how busy the environment appeared, how children actually interacted with those displays and if they interacted with those displays, and if so how, how time was used as adults, if that was the best use of time and again begin to be quite contrived. So we spent far more time thinking about the books themselves as a product. Where and how they were used and watching children a great deal, making a lot of observation and found children wanting to use the books in ways that question, well I brought questions to the staff team as a whole, and we had different feelings about that as you might expect.

Edith felt that she had learnt about how to use picture books from observing EY colleagues. Like several other settings, she explained that all of the staff were involved in book selection although she had overall responsibility for ordering books from catalogues and book clubs. She felt that picture books could be used to reinforce children's own interests and explained that this helped to guide the selection that she used:

I use the book 'Owl Babies' a lot because it is such a simple story that is appropriate for when the children start at nursery. It's reassuring because their mother comes back. I used it the other day and talked about Bill Oddie's TV programme. Lots of the children had seen it so they brought their own experiences to it. I find that helps with lots of stories. We often use books to link in with topics we are looking at and the children's own interests of course.

Parents were cited by Alice as contributing to decision-making when it came to the selection of books, a factor that supported the view expressed in the EPPE findings that ‘what parents and carers do makes a real difference to young children’s development’ (Sylva et al, 2003:5).

If parents bring books into us and they say would you like them we are always willing to say yes bring them in and we will have a look at them. If they are suitable and they are in good condition we will keep them and be very grateful but if they are not then we will recycle them.

As Steedman (1990) has identified, it was Margaret McMillan who pioneered the view that parental partnership should be a dominant feature of NS pedagogy and this approach is endorsed in EYFS (Great Britain. DfESa: 10) as being ‘central to a child’s wellbeing’. There are also clear benefits for parents and practitioners although in practice a meaningful and equal partnership can be difficult to achieve (Draper and Wheeler, 2010). Gillian in her response, noted that, although parents had not been involved in book selection with the setting in the past it could potentially be an interesting idea to explore.

We haven’t done so far no, but that’s something that’s quite interesting – maybe something we could consider adding onto our admissions form about whether a child has got a favourite story so that if they are unhappy or a bit unsettled you know knowing that they particularly like ‘Goldilocks and the Three Bears’ or whatever might be a way of settling them?

The view seemed to be that the practitioners would usually make the decision about the recommended use of a picture book in the setting. They were seen as potentially useful as a transitional object to help with settling a child into the setting but not necessarily to be valued in their own right, if they did not conform with what the practitioner viewed as of the necessary quality.

Priority in the setting

It was clear from the majority of the interviews that each NS encouraged what is known as a ‘child centred’ learning environment with a strong emphasis on ‘free flow’ unstructured play throughout the day (Wood, Attfield,1996; Dahlberg, Moss, 2005). This organisational philosophy had an impact on picture book selection and use. Edith explained that the staff tried to build on children’s emerging interests:

We try to follow the children’s interests so, for instance, one little boy is very interested in dragons at the moment so we are looking for books about dragons. The children seem to choose to look at books a lot during free choice time and there is often a member of staff timetabled to be based in the book area so that they can look at them with children. They also have a group time at the end of every session when they often have stories read to them.

Eddie described books as an integral part of the children’s learning that practitioners need to use effectively:

we are noticing and getting better at noticing where the children are using their prior knowledge of books and giving further opportunities for children to re-engage in that learning. Perhaps before we had not noticed a child had literally picked up a story or seeks out a book or talked about a story character. Increasingly it is more subtle than that and you can see the overlap of the children’s learning between combining text and stories from home, verbal tales, stories they may have written themselves, and overlapping that and then seeking out those books where ever that may be appropriate.

Isabel stated that books were a high priority in the NS and that as HT she had volunteered herself for the research, alongside Mel and Lucy in the same setting, as a way of emphasising her view of their importance. She also believed that all her staff was equally committed to make picture books available to the children and families and they recognized their value in helping to develop early communication skills for those children with EAL who comprised the majority of the intake. She thought that all the staff had a contribution to make in choosing suitable books:

I know that everyone plays a part and I certainly encourage staff to recommend ones that they discover or find useful – everyone has different tastes and that is important to encourage. We like variety, quality and quantity in both large and small format. I'm not really aware of particular books about disability – there is clearly a need for more.

Alongside the book-friendly ethos of most settings, the interviews revealed that this was followed-through in a practical sense with picture books being made freely available to all children throughout the day in NS and were regarded as an integral part of the indoor and outdoor classroom resources. Lucy explained that:

books are inside and outside all over the place and freely available- that's very important. Children are really encouraged to use books right from when they start here. They are also used a lot at group times. The school lending library allows the children to choose a book to take home each week and they are also used in displays and to support topics.

Availability for use

The findings showed that several practitioners relied on catalogues and book company representatives when buying books for the setting and that this was partly due to the incentive of special offers with regard to bulk buying and linked discounts for the school if parents ordered from various companies. The range of books offered by these named companies is unlikely to contain many titles that include references to disability. Five practitioners referred to a 'named distributor' as influencing the choices they made and this particular company is widely regarded as the principal source for schools in this particular LA and offers many incentives to facilitate and support access for practitioners.

Contrary to what might be imagined, the library service was not as influential as might be assumed. Whilst three practitioners were very committed to inviting library staff into the nursery school on a regular basis and regarded them as a reliable source of information about picture books, the traditional free library loans offered to schools was only used by three settings. The majority visited the local library with the children and/ or had librarians in regularly to read to the children. When questioned about this in interviews, four practitioners cited costs incurred by fines as the major reason for stopping the library

loan service, three mentioned that it became an administrative problem to return books each term and Debbie referred to a change in the system which meant that books were selected by librarians rather than practitioners:

Well I think you stopped being able to choose them didn't you? The boxes used to come which was fine also sorting books to go back was always a bit of a nightmare I think it was the price basically the money was always better spent – we spent the money on more books to keep in school

Library policy now stipulates that each NS is now charged and that damaged or lost books have to be replaced. A subsequent email exchange (Anon, 2008) with the member of staff responsible for coordinating the Schools Library Service (SLS) clarified this further and she explained that although a centrally funded service had been provided to NS between 1996 and 2006, the HTs requested that the sum should be delegated so that they could choose to either use it or spend the money in some other way. She also stated that:

We never charge for damaged books and only charge for lost books after 12 months / and if the total is over £30.

Another reason cited for not using library loans was that it was logistically difficult to return all the books at the end of term and that this meant it was easier to build up the permanent nursery stock of their own. However logical or attractive this may seem, it does place the onus on NS staff to undertake the selection of the books in the first place when they may not have knowledge of recent publications and a general expertise in children's literature that is a feature of SLS.

Alongside making links with the local library and ordering books from book companies that targeted the setting, Julie was also allocated some time to browse in bookshops:

I had to go one morning to get some books from Waterstones and I got there at 9 and I just sat in the corner looking at the books. The head rang me at lunchtime and said 'are you ok?' and I said 'fine, I'm just still looking at the books'. I was there until about 4 that day!

But these kinds of visits to bookshops are comparatively rare because as both Lucy and Mel explained time constraints force them to rely heavily on buying books from representatives from book companies that visited the NS on a regular basis. However, despite these constraints there was a commitment to the importance of involving all staff in book selection and time was set aside regularly for everyone to visit the main LA distributor in the city centre.

Personal Influences

Despite conforming to particular curriculum guidance, every practitioner is subject to individual personal and professional influences which may have an impact on their choice of which picture books to provide to the children they work with. Throughout the interviews, a strong theme was beginning to emerge relating to the important role played by a well-developed personal interest in picture books when it came to guiding selection. Mel explained that she used many from her personal collection that she had added to over time and kept abreast of what was being published. She also admitted that she had strong personal preferences for particular books:

I am always in a bookshop- I am not into technology- I am into books. Bring back books! I am always buying for family nieces and nephews and so buy for early years too.

Interviewer: *So you know what is around out there?*

Yes- I know what is around and what I like and what I don't like. There is a lot of stuff I have to say I don't like and I worry about using a book that I'm not really keen on.

All the participants expressed the need for individual practitioners to like the books that they shared with children and all used their own personal collection to supplement the books purchased by the setting. They articulated the importance of helping to foster an interest in books by demonstrating their own enthusiasm for favourites and thereby conveying the message that it was 'ok to have tastes and preferences that are different from one another' (Bromley, 1996:166).

As an example of this, Helen revealed a longstanding passion for work of the illustrator Lauren Child that she had shared with other practitioners in the setting and this advocacy then led to several books being purchased from the school budget. Although she was adamant that the books were successful with the children because they were well written ‘to catch the voice of the child’, it may be that their recent proliferation as TV characters with the associated merchandise may have contributed to their popularity with children. However, they may have also been successful due to her evident enthusiasm and she acknowledged this to some extent when she went on to explain that older children that she had encountered as a supply teacher remembered her in association with this illustrator and asked for her books:

Year 2 children will say ‘I want Charlie and Lola’, and I will say ‘are you sure you are not too old now?’ and they say ‘no no you read it to us in reception and we want it’ and its lovely- it was I think as it was familiar and they know it’s funny and I think by the time you get to year 2, you know, Literacy Hour has massacred most of the enjoyment out of books anyway so, maybe I am flattering myself but I would like to think that the way I read it just as a story in itself, with no expectations of having worksheets following it or them being quizzed endlessly about their understanding of a plot twist or whatever, you know they can just sit and be with it....

Like Eddie, she communicated a personal philosophy about the importance of children experiencing story as a vehicle to foster creativity and empathy. In some ways this overlapped with the strong child-centred NS ethos that characterised these settings, and it may be supposed, if the EPPE research findings are reliable, it contributes to their distinctiveness and quality.

When it came to the subject of disability, the family experiences of the practitioners played a part. Mel explained:

I think I am quite interested in disability because my mother is registered disabled through arthritis so I live with it basically

An early interest in working with children with physical disabilities was also acknowledged by Isabel:

I did have personal experience as I volunteered with PHAB which gave me a big insight into individual needs at an early stage in my career.

Edith explained that she had early practical experience during her initial training that helped to prepare her for her current role as a SENCO:

I did a placement in a special school to see whether I wanted to be a teacher. It was a wonderful experience.

The extent to which these personal experiences have had an impact on a subsequent interest in the subject is impossible to measure but it may be that working with children who have disabilities and SEN may be ‘ a purposeful- if sometimes unconscious’ decision (Nutbrown, Clough 2006:63).

A key theme that emerged from the interview data was the extent to which individual aesthetic taste played a part in picture book selection. Mel explained that she has a definite personal preference for a particular bold illustrative style and actively chooses these.

I quite like the old fashioned ‘Ladybird’ pictures because I think they are distinct and they are colourful and bold, I can’t stand these ‘Read with me’ Ladybird versions those sort and those kind of illustrations even the traditional tales not the read with me but the full text with the traditional tales in all this wishey washey colours, I can’t stand them, I still use books that are actually dropping to bits or the spine has probably gone because they are so old rather than a newer version that we have got available but it is just a wishey washey I can’t stand wishey washey pictures.

Dixon (1978: 65) has pointed out that ‘the process by which a literary idea becomes an actual book in front of a child is almost entirely in middle class hands.’ His major concern was that writers, illustrators and publishers were predominantly from a particular class background and that this influenced what was available but it may be that the background of practitioners could also be a significant factor in this respect (Colley, 2006). One illustrator that seems to typify this debate was Shirley Hughes whose illustrative style was described by some as ‘fussy’, ‘unrealistic’ and rather

'middle class' in several interviews. However, others responded with more positive descriptions, finding her 'nostalgic', 'comforting', 'realistic' and 'beautifully illustrated'. The term 'old fashioned' was also used by several practitioners, some positively and some negatively.

What emerged strongly from the interview data was that, although individual practitioners had preferences, the illustrations were not really considered a priority when selecting books to be used. It was the content of the story itself that was perceived as important and Mel was one of several who described how they liked books that could be easily adapted to the perceived needs of children:

I use Brian Wildsmith's books all the time - again I love the text but I don't particularly like the illustrations. I mean I use them but I have always got other visual aids so if I am doing like the 'Lion and the Rat' I have got a big versions of the lion and the rat and just sort of an orange net from the bag of oranges, so you don't really need the book illustrations because you have got something else as well.

This view is particularly interesting since Wildsmith is highly renowned as an illustrator yet this practitioner would prefer to dispense with the illustrations altogether. In expressing his concern for developing the creative side of children's learning, Eddie explained that he liked *Grandpa* and other picture books illustrated by John Burningham because he felt that they were open to wide interpretation and therefore encouraged children's own imagination and creativity through role play which was given high priority in the setting:

A lot of our project work here tends to focus on our fantasy play as you might imagine, particularly the unseen, the mystery of things we're not sure about. Can we explain? Do we want to explain? Do we want to maintain the mystery? Equally things like 'Grandpa', - there is a link there because you can interpret that text in many ways and seek meaning as appropriate and often it's about the unseen the unsaid and I think that links closely to fantasy play and the exploration of meaning.

This focus on the power of the unsaid and the unseen is significant since it reinforces the previously discussed views of Hollindale (1988) with regard to 'passive ideology'. The

impact of the curriculum has already been highlighted as an important factor in determining the selection of particular picture books and it may be that a familiar repertoire that has been experienced and used many times contributed to the choice of two traditional tales being included in the practitioner's questionnaire response. These stories can be adapted in many ways and perhaps appeal to what Cooper (2005:124) describes as 'the teacher as craftsperson'. This notes that 'the common-sense theories that all teachers have about why particular pedagogical decisions are taken are usually based on what has worked in the past.'

Those participants who were parents themselves commented on how the preferences of their own children had influenced their selection of books. Several brought books from home collections to use in the setting as they felt confident of their appropriateness for children of a particular age. Affection and familiarity with these particular books was evident and this was felt to contribute to their success when presented to children in the setting as demonstrated by Helen:

Steffie (her child) got into those books before the television and all the merchandising and Lauren Child really spoke to me as an author

Interviewer: *Why do you like Lauren Child?*

She just catches the voice of the child. Lola is hysterical, absolutely hysterical and I love the artwork in the books it is a mixture of sketching and also photographs that is quite unusual

Interviewer: *Do you think do the children like them or do you think they like them because you like them?*

No they like Lola

Training Influences

The EY practitioner interviews investigated two aspects of training, the first related to disability awareness, and the second to picture books.

Disability awareness

Julie did not remember any input with respect to disability in her NNEB training in the 1970s, which might be expected for those qualifying prior to the Warnock Report (Great Britain.DES,1978) when segregated provision was usual and it was unlikely that any detail about the needs of children who were not in mainstream education would be included in initial training unless they were being specifically prepared to work in that specialised environment:

I don't think we covered it at all if I'm honest, but then I think it was probably because in the schools you didn't have the integration all the children with the special needs were in special units.

She had subsequently been on several CPD training courses largely because she had taken on the role as a Learning Support Assistant (LSA) for a particular child with Dyspraxia, which she explained had given her a particular interest in special needs. It was supposed that the three practitioners (Alice, Helen and Debbie) who completed their initial training during the 1980s would have received considerably more input about this subject due to the increased focus on related disability legislation and policy in this period. Alice reflected that they had been given information about the legislation but:

We didn't actually translate it into practical terms what it actually meant. We talked about it in theory. It was very poor really.

Helen had qualified at the end of the 1980s when the impact of the Warnock Report on practice should have been well established. In fact, although she did experience some input about the importance of positive images in general as part of the language element of her course, she did not feel that the issue of disability had been well covered in the general content of the course:

Interviewer: Right ok, so you did it as part of language did it you do it in any other part of the course around disability legislation or anything like that?

No, no

Interviewer: *That is quite interesting- in 1989 you would have thought perhaps it might have been included. So did you feel ready to work with children perhaps who had particular needs? Do you think your training really prepared you for that?*

No not at all, and I am still inclined to feel I am learning on the job...

Comments from these practitioners indicated that there was no consistency in the way the issue was dealt with in training and in some cases greater emphasis was given to it than in others. Debbie explained that ‘I really can’t remember anything specific, it clearly must have been at some point but to no big degree...’ Alice was very critical of the quality of the training believing that despite the existence of a nationally prescribed PGCE curriculum content, the way in which it was delivered depended very much on the interpretation of individual course teams and whether the individual lecturing staff had up-to-date knowledge:

We did a little bit about the Warnock Report we didn’t actually translate it into practical terms what it actually meant. We talked about it in theory. It was very poor really. I think that they were definitely working on previous knowledge and previous systems if you like and they were all looking to retire and to finish.

Eddie, Edith and Lily had been trained relatively recently and it would be reasonable to expect that they might have had specific input that related to the impact of the DDA (Great Britain, 1995) and the revised Code of Practice for SEN (Great Britain. DfES, 2001). Eddie did not remember this being particularly emphasised:

Interviewer: *And in terms of the course generally did you do very much around the changing of legislation relating to disability?*

There certainly wasn’t very much, bearing in mind what a rushed year the PG is, I think it would be a real challenge, not a great deal from what I can remember at that stage

Interviewer: *It was interesting that the emphasis wasn’t there...*

It certainly wasn’t on the focus on the legislation, I think there was a better focus on the effect upon practice but yes

Interviewer: *On strategies?*

Yes I suspect that was more the case

Edith, however, did remember the subject being covered to some extent:

We did have some information about legislation and how to teach particular children but not a great deal. I learnt a lot more on teaching practice and then in subsequent teaching jobs where I saw some good practice.

The relatively short time available on a one year PGCE course clearly precludes all subjects being covered in the same depth and this might explain these obvious gaps. The findings suggest that this subject is not consistently covered in initial training and confirms that preparation for working in inclusive educational settings is therefore difficult to judge (Nutbrown, Clough, 2006, Florian, Rouse, 2011)..

Awareness of picture books

When the use of picture books is explored in both initial and CPD training, it appears to have significance for many practitioners. Eddie explained that he had learnt the value of investigating books at a deep level in order to ‘explain and put into words or in feelings what drew us to particular books.’ Gillian, whose first degree was in drama reflected that ‘a lot of my interest in stories comes from my interest in drama and acting’ and Mel referred to studying English as the main subject for her initial teaching qualification which had fostered a love of reading. Julie had trained on an NNEB course which, when she qualified in 1972, was very practice-based and designed to prepare what were then termed ‘Nursery Nurses’ to work with confidence in a range of EY settings, including schools. Part of this included a focus on looking at and learning to use picture books effectively. Debbie explained how her initial training had a long lasting impact in relation to her love of books:

I can remember being on teaching practice and being told once I had a gift for story- telling, but I probably remembered that because I liked to hear it so, if it was, obviously she meant it because she would not have said it, due to that maybe I still like reading books and telling stories.

Jane was relatively new in post as HT and her interview revealed that there had been other urgent management challenges which meant that picture books were not a priority compared to other issues. Nevertheless, her overall response to all the questions about the value of picture books was enthusiastic and detailed at the beginning of the interview, but became rather cynical as it progressed to discussion of CPD training. In fact, when she read the transcript of her interview she decided her comments about the LA may have been too negative and so she refused to have her views quoted. But what her interview did re-emphasize was the need for all staff to be involved in book selection and she felt that despite having other priorities since taking up her post the setting was relatively well resourced in terms of the book stock. She was confident that all her staff used a good range of books but that each had personal preferences for different illustrative styles, hers being the series written and illustrated by Lucy Cousins which cover a wide range of familiar themes and which she felt can be used to enhance the curriculum in many ways.

Alice felt that she had a clear advantage with regard to picture book knowledge because for ten years prior to teaching she had been as a children's librarian. She still had family links to the library service via her sister and daughter and this she felt gave her the opportunity to use up-to-date 'insider knowledge' when ordering books from different publishers and distributors. Despite this area of interest and specialism, she also valued the contribution of the other staff in making decisions:

I do all the negotiating with the reps and I do all the ordering but I do get information from the staff first of all, and if it is possible to get staff to come and look at the books as well, then we will do that too.

Helen's recollections demonstrate how important initial training can be in terms of emphasising the need for good resources and providing examples of how to go about accessing these:

Um it was part of the language component course we spent quite a lot of time in the library and for at least three sessions I think, the librarian was very hot on it and she was very proud about these books that had been newly published which was quite ground breaking and we could borrow them and take them into school

In this case a member of the PGCE university staff having a particular interest and enthusiasm often transfers that enthusiasm to the students.

Eddie explained that reflection about picture books and their contribution to learning was ongoing by staff in his setting as a kind of informal version of CPD. He was concerned that there should be a considered selection of books made available to children to ensure that they are contributing effectively to the learning environment:

There can be too many texts, I think in place. This is another conversation we've had as a staff team, do we need that, should we limit it and how do we go about it- because it can be overwhelming.

Picture books were regarded by all the participants as worthy of regular review and discussion. Alice emphasized that, although she was the overall coordinator for book selection, it was important to ensure a variety of different practitioner tastes in books was reflected in the setting:

Every now and again we will go into the staff room we are all in there at lunch time or at the end of the day and we will go through the books and say has anybody read this lately did you want to keep this or should we throw it away. Even if one person says yes I read that then it gets kept.

Picture books as a vehicle for inclusive practice

The interviews confirmed some of the initial concerns arising from the questionnaire responses about the lack of knowledge of books with disability-related content and how these might be used. It seemed that the varied nature of initial and CPD training experienced by this group of practitioners had some influence on subsequent views and practice about the subject of disability and inclusion. For instance, Lucy's first degree had been in Early Childhood Studies, a subject area that has a strong sociological focus and which has only been available as a degree subject since the late 1990s. She was the only practitioner interviewed who felt she had explored disability from a human rights perspective in her initial training:

We had discussions about challenging stereotypical images with regard to gender, race and disability. I remember we looked at models of disability a lot. Perhaps we had just one session on inclusion in PGCE. Nothing that I remember about using resources- just strategies to help with meeting individual needs.

More recently, in her role as SENCO, she had been on several CPD courses but had only identified two picture books in her questionnaire response as she acknowledged that this had not featured in any CPD training:

I have tried to look for them but there don't seem to be many - not in catalogues anyway. I use a couple regularly: 'Ringo the Flamingo' and 'Rock and Roll Clyde' but they seem a bit contrived. I would rather see images of disabled people in ordinary stories to help raise awareness in a more naturalistic way.

Helen remembered that her PGCE training had included advice on using picture books to teach about diversity in general, although she commented that:

When I look back at some of those books now you know the story is pretty flimsy, it was just to get the issue over or just to show representation of a child with brown skin. The stories themselves really don't stand up.

Even though she had not been able to name any specific books with disability related content, she recalled an example that approached the issue in an interesting way:

I think there's been one recently where there was a child in a wheelchair and the story isn't about the wheelchair - the child in the wheelchair is the character! In the book, they are not, you know, it is not 'the day my wheelchair broke down', or 'the day my wheel fell off the wheelchair' or some complication arising out of the disability. This child is a character, she has friends among the other children in the book and it's kind of the disability is well represented but it is not made into a story line.

Gillian recognised that her well-developed interest in books derived from an earlier interest in drama and also discussed how her previous role as a SENCO in another school was the driving force in leading her to seek out resources, including picture books that reflected a range of abilities:

I've made sure that we've got within our SEN resources books that reflect different abilities, disability, race, gender all that kind of thing but that's something that came from my impetus rather than necessarily as a key element of training.

Despite this, she recognized that most books relating to disability were non-fiction texts:

I don't know if it is just Early Years but I think that some of the fiction texts become a little bit too medical and the story is lost.

In her interview, Lily described how her initial training in the 1970s had included a module about SEN and that she had undertaken a later module on this subject as part of a BPhil. Ed. in 1990 but neither of these had made any reference to using picture books as a vehicle for inclusive practice. Despite her role as SENCO which involved considerable local CPD training, there had been no focus on using recommended picture books. She felt that those books that were in the nursery were not necessarily well-used and that they may not meet individual needs when it came to the specific issue of disability:

We are expecting a child in a wheelchair shortly and need to think about getting some related books.

Edith recalled how her initial training had included constructing picture books targeted at children with SEN, but that there had been no specific commercially produced books recommended for her to use. However, she explained that she felt she had a good understanding of equality issues because of her first degree in Social Studies which covered subjects like discrimination and stereotyping. As the SENCO, she felt that she had benefitted from ideas about using resources to promote inclusive practice she had gained through reading and research, rather than specific CPD. She also took some personal responsibility in staying up-to-date with resources, including books, as part of her role:

I have also learnt a lot about what is available from going to conferences and exhibitions about special needs.

She talked enthusiastically about the book that she had named on her questionnaire which she felt was a way of introducing children to the idea of disability through a good story. She had used this book successfully many times:

We use 'Lucy's Picture' a lot because it's about a little girl making a picture for her granddad who turns out to be blind – although you don't realise until the end. While the story is being read, the children make a collage picture so they can experience the different textures. I hadn't heard of Letterbox Library until the catalogue was sent by you– good to see some other books. It is very important to have books about disability – they are still really difficult to find.

Jane had identified that the provision of a wide range of picture books which reflecting the diverse needs of children needed improvement and subsequently this was identified as part of the school action plan. She also had experience as a SENCO in other schools but could not remember any significant course content around the provision and use of picture books in initial training during the 1970s or in subsequent CPD. She reflected that it was first of all an important task to audit the books already in the setting and to then consider buying new ones. She had not suggested any specific book titles relating to disability in her questionnaire response.

Julie's response to the initial questionnaire had included the titles of two picture books that broadly related to disability and she acknowledged in the interview that her knowledge of these relied on what the distributors provided:

I would only know of them because a) we use them or b) if people have got them already and recommend them. I don't think Waterstones have a special section- I haven't seen one in there.

She had been unaware of 'Letterbox Library' as a specialist distributor until receiving the third Research Bulletin and she felt that this may be partly because NS no longer get central information sent from the LA. Mel's questionnaire response revealed only one book that related to disability and in her interview she stated that finding books that catered for any minorities was difficult. She acknowledged that those books that she did have in the setting often poor in quality and so were not very effective, despite their content re disability themes:

Some of the books we have ordered have got put on the teacher's shelf because actually I think they are pretty staid. I don't think they get much of a message across really, a bit like the bi-lingual books published abroad.

Despite a long career working with young children in a range of EY settings, Debbie had not named any books with a disability theme in her questionnaire response although she stated that:

I do think it is important that the children are aware of it, you know that it does happen, but I can't think of any books that address the particular issue.

Helen reflected on why it was unusual to come across books with any disability related content apart from some that depicted wheelchair users:

I think because it's because disability is not that attractive it doesn't look good in illustration um maybe children in wheelchairs are more attractive than children with other conditions that are disabled. I have never seen any. I have seen books with children in wheelchairs, but not others. I think the bottom line is that the publishers forgot them

This view about the role of publishers was not expressed by any other EY participant but demonstrates the concern that invisibility of this group in children's books is longstanding and needs to be challenged. The extent to which this has been a deliberate or careless omission remains to be considered (Reiser, 1992; Matthew, Clow, 2007).

Reflecting the different discourses of childhood

Although views about childhood were not always explicitly stated in the interviews (and never expressed in terms of discourse terminology), the resulting data suggests that many EY practitioners subscribe to what is often perceived as the Romantic view of childhood that celebrates the child's need to 'be' a child and as a result they make efforts to provide picture books in line with this world view. This can be described as a benign but prescriptive approach that can also lead to the practitioner censoring those picture books that are perceived to be unsuitable or inappropriate in line with this

discourse (Hollindale, 1988; Watson, 1996; Nodleman, 2008; Hunt, 2009). The responsibility for selecting ‘appropriate’ books in terms of affirming the familiar and the safe was repeatedly mentioned by the practitioners. One good example of this urge to supply children with images of safety and security can be found in the category of books that helped with the difficulties of separation and transition from home to nursery, although the extent to which this confirms a Romantic discourse of childhood is questionable since it is clear that EY practitioners need to consider the emotional needs of children who are tentatively beginning to make relationships outside their immediate family. It is a professional requirement of EY practitioners that they should be sensitive to this difficult time and help children to manage a significant transition (DfES, 2007b:10). Whitehead (2010:1200 suggests that early encounters with picture books in an EY setting can confirm a feeling of security and warmth since they are often shared in a close , comfortable, physical relationship with an adult. She believes that these positive experiences also contribute to a later interest in books and whilst many children will also have this intimate experience in the home situation, a focus on books in the setting can foster ‘feelings of safety and comfort’.

For instance, Edith explains, young children need pictures and stories that convey a safe, secure world that reflects their own familiar and positive early experiences.

I use the book Owl Babies a lot because it is such a simple story that is appropriate for when the children start at nursery. It’s reassuring because their mother comes back.

Goodwin (2008:29) agrees that this particular book is a good example of an appropriate text for young children because it represents a familiar situation, allows involvement through inviting the child to create meaning through both words and pictures, and also provides an example of ‘literary’ language. Children like to return to familiar, predictable texts even if they may find ‘new insights and understandings at each reading (Jordan, 1992:114). Whitehead (2010:124) believes that these safe, recognizable contexts and situations provide a meaningful experience that ‘combine with bits of the child’s own daily life in rich and liberating ways’. Indeed, she suggests that the gaps created in picture books in terms of encouraging an active reader collaboration and co construction of meaning encourages them to ‘create connections between the books and their own lives and experiences (Whitehead, 2010:130).

However, Meek (1992:180) warns against this tendency to only seek out books that convey comfort and security and points out that less realistic, more surreal picture books, such as those by illustrators like Anthony Browne, are a vital part of the young child's reading diet precisely because they do not find them 'strange'. She warns against teachers restricting early experiences to 'the kind of realism by which takes life to the text and the text to everyday life'. Meek believes that children are capable of deconstructing complex texts and that they should be given the opportunity to do so.

A clear concern expressed by practitioners was that young children needed pictures that were appropriate to their perceived developmental needs and that these should be provided in a learning environment based around individual and which would nurture a positive disposition to learning, safety, confidence and independence (Siraj- Blatchford et al., 2002). As Lily points out, such tried and tested stories form a background of certainty and stability that deals with the daily concerns of young children learning to make sense of the world:

My own preferences include Bartholemew Bear –always successful with the children and one I used with my own children. This is really good for very young children as the illustrations are simple and the children can relate to the little bear, not eating/ sleeping/ being rough with animals etc.

Helen feels that children's books need to reflect their own lives as strongly as possible. Once again, she uses her favourite characters by Lauren Child as an example of this:

I think they identify, especially the ones with siblings, about having a younger sister who you know is a pain, a bit of a pain, but the way her voice is written- it sounds like a lot of the kids I teach. Um, a child who was distressed about crushed snails last week was saying 'stop them they are killing those children are killing those snail's lives', and it is just kind of that phrase that is what Lola would say and it is what kids really do say.

In this way, children can build bridges between their own experiences and those of familiar picture book characters and in doing so extend both their imagination and their ability to empathise (Goodwin, 2008). The extent to which picture books can reflect the 'being' child, in terms of providing for their perceived needs and interests, is highly valued by all the practitioners and seen as common sense. It underpins their

training about the need to be child-centred and is endorsed by developmental psychology as an important part of living a childhood in the developed west (Penn, 2005, Dahlberg and Moss, 2005).

However, the ‘being’ child is nourished in parallel with the ‘becoming’ child. NS education in England is often perceived as preparation for the next stage of schooling whereby children learn to behave and conform in order to become compliant pupils and citizens (Edwards, Knight, 1994). David et al (2010:35) discuss the current assumption that the EYFS effectively prepares children for school and propose that a more challenging question relates to whether schools are prepared to meet the needs of children who have been prepared through an EY curriculum that emphasizes choice, independence and relates to individual needs and interests. These writers cite research by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2006:13) that compares the EYFS unfavourably with a more ‘social pedagogic approach (a broad preparation for life and foundation of lifelong learning, as in the Nordic and Central European countries)’. In other words, it prepares children to a limited extent for the world of school and ‘becoming’ school pupils but not much else.

Despite this, the practitioners taking part in this study did not explicitly mention the role of EY education in preparing children for the next stage of schooling and focussed on the importance of developing broader skills like curiosity and imagination.

Eddie gave an example of how picture books could enable this kind of learning:

A lot of our project work here tends to focus on our fantasy play as you might imagine, particularly the unseen, the mystery of things we’re not sure about. Can we explain? Do we want to explain? Do we want to maintain the mystery? Equally things like ‘Grandpa’ –there’s a link there because you can interpret that text in many ways and seek meaning as appropriate and often it’s about the unseen the unsaid and I think that links closely to the fantasy play and the exploration of meaning.

Picture books, disability and the role of ideology

Wood and Attfield (2005:135) point out that: ‘All curriculum models reflect a set of beliefs and values about what is considered to be educationally and developmentally

worthwhile in terms of children's immediate needs, their future needs and the wider society'.

The overriding purpose of EY education was not overtly stated by any practitioners although the ways in which the subject of picture books and disability were discussed indicated strong beliefs in relation to meeting individual needs and providing enjoyable and meaningful experiences.

EY practitioners are, like all educationalists, required to be accountable for what, why and how they teach. Despite this, it was a little surprising that more was not made of the way in which meeting the imperative to establish equality initiatives in their settings also brings with it a need to audit resources, such as books, to ensure they have the right equipment to meet their objectives. This is particularly concerning since the EYFS (DfESa, 2007:9) clearly states the importance of the issue:

Providers have a responsibility to ensure positive attitudes to diversity and difference- not only so that every child is included and not disadvantaged, but also so that they learn from the earliest age to value diversity in others and grow up making a positive contribution to society.

This term 'providers' is an interesting use of language in indicating how the relationship between practitioners and children seems to have changed. This term did not appear in the earlier CGFS documentation, and perhaps demonstrates a relationship between services and the public that is increasingly associated with products and customers, whereby 'care and education have been commodified.... into businesses selling products to consumers and producing returns on government investment.' (Moss, 2010:12).

The emphasis placed on the concept of 'responsibility' seems to assume that the practitioners have sufficient expertise on the subject of 'positive attitudes to diversity and difference' to be able to adapt this to practice. Although this study is specifically concerned with the subject of disability, it would be interesting to investigate how training emphasises more general equality issues. Policy documents can be very vague when discussing these and there is perhaps a danger in over simplifying and condensing too many complex aspects and inadvertently suggesting that inequality can be solved by the action of individuals rather than acknowledging wider structural

constraints such as class, poverty and parental attitudes which require action to be taken a more collective and strategic level.

It is, of course, possible that the practitioner sample may be unfamiliar with the EYFS framework, which did not come into force until September 2007. However, they would all need to be conversant with the previous CGFS (QCA, 2000: 28) which clearly states the need to: 'Provide images in, for example, books and displays that challenge children's thinking and help them to embrace differences in gender, ethnicity, religion, special educational needs and disabilities'.

Once again, the language used in these guidelines is interesting. The term 'embrace' sounds very positive but is, it can be argued, far too vague to sufficiently direct the challenge of explaining difficult concepts like racism and discrimination with young children (Mohamed, 2006; Robertson, Jones Diaz, 2006). It can also be argued that the way in which the different equality issues are listed creates ambiguity, in that there could be an implication that they are mutually exclusive or place them in a 'league table' of importance. For instance 'religion' appears before 'special educational needs and disability' and could therefore be interpreted as having more significance. Interestingly, there is no reference to culture here although that term could be said to override all the others. These are potentially influential documents which are referred to on a daily basis in all EY settings and used as the starting point for the professional training of all practitioners on all courses. In terms of their value as guidance, they appear to be both limited and superficial in their acknowledgement of attitudes to equality and may even be contributing to the confusion of terminology which is often apparent.

The current legislation drawn up by DED (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2007) requires a move away from mere compliance to SENDA (Great Britain. DfES, 2001) towards 'an attempt to build a positive and sustained cultural change within schools' (Hodkinson, Vickerman, 2009: 137). The inclusion policy operated by the named LA and mentioned by several practitioners in interviews cites 'attitudes' as one of the criteria for self-audit and this is in line with the national guidance document, *Promoting Disability Equality in Schools* (Great Britain. DfES, 2006:15) which recommends that: 'Positive attitudes to disability can be promoted in a wide variety of ways in schools. This includes ensuring that there are positive images in school books and other materials'.

Whilst none of the participants acknowledged either of the above as a reason for using books to raise awareness of disability, Mel pointed out that it is important to recognize the power of literature:

I am a firm believer you can get a lot of messages through books and I think we do having said that I do think that looking at disabilities and attitude of mind. I think nursery nurtures that attitude of mind every day in every just the looking after everybody loving everybody and not just people but nature and looking after the world and that caring approach so I do think that without the books we could have a good time anyway but I do think maybe if that can reinforce the message as you would use it for nature or maths or anything else it can only be good.

This does not need to be at the expense of the curriculum but as an integral part of it. Alice also highlighted the importance of using books to foster empathy:

They help by showing the child who may be have a disability or has got difficulties that it is recognised and it helps other children to understand what it feels like to wear glasses or to have asthma or to be in a wheelchair.

Eddie explained the particular relevance of picture books in this respect:

I think because it is that subliminal learning for both adults and children I think it is there and I just think it needs to best represent the world that we are going to find ourselves in an illustration is clearly often far stronger with very young children than the message that is given through text.

Whilst the interview data did not make specific relevance to training about power of pictures in conveying messages with respect to training or curriculum guidance, it is clear from this example that it plays some part in picture book selection and use by some practitioners.

Summary of findings from EY practitioner interviews

The original questionnaire findings provided a useful starting point for the interviews which identified several clearly emerging themes in relation to the research questions. Individual practitioners demonstrated varying degrees of enthusiasm and commitment

to using picture books with young children in line with long established NS pedagogy. Those books that were named in the ‘ top ten ’ favourites by EY practitioners were selected on behalf of young children largely in terms of their instrumental value with regard to perceived developmental needs, alongside curriculum requirements ranging from mathematical understanding to the development of imagination and creativity. However, several practitioners also expressed the importance of fostering a love of story and illustration and providing ample opportunities for selecting picture books alongside other NS activities. The extent to which picture books were used as an effective inclusive tool did not appear to be a feature of initial or CPD training to any great extent. This was in spite of the recognition that there was a dearth of such books and a need for a better, more accessible selection in order to reflect the wide range of children experiencing mainstream inclusive NS learning environments.

Picture Books response questionnaire

This strand of the research included different EY practitioner participants and EY students in order to provide further data in relation to responses to four selected picture books with a disability related theme. None of the books provided for this strand of the research had been named by any EY practitioners in response to the other questionnaire which had asked for picture books with disability related content which may illustrate the earlier discussion on the limited availability of certain texts and the way others become predominant because they have distributors who are comparatively easy to access. However, further telephone research with the three named distributors cited in practitioner interviews indicated that it was in fact unlikely that all four texts would be available for browsing (see table 4.4) and consequently potential purchase or loan from any of the distributors may present difficulties, particularly since practitioners had expressed the need to look at books before making decisions about purchase.

Table 4.4 Availability of four selected picture books

Title of picture book	Availability from 3 named distributors
<i>Looking After Louis</i> (Ely and Dunbar, 2004)	1 and 2 3- not in stock but can be ordered
<i>Mama Zooms</i> (Cowen-Fletcher,1993)	1 and 2 3- not in stock but can be ordered
<i>Rolling Along with Goldilocks and the Three Bears</i> (Meyers and Morgan,1999)	None
<i>My Brother Sammy</i> (Edwards and Armitage, 1999)	Out of print

Despite the availability of two of the selected texts from three distributors, only one out of seventy participants (including many experienced EY practitioners) had heard of *Looking after Louis*, published in 2004, and only two out of seventy participants (including many experienced EY practitioners) had heard of *Mama Zooms*, an American book published in 1993, and widely available in England for many years.

After looking at each of these books, sixty six out of seventy commented that they would use *Looking after Louis* with EY children and all but one would use *Mama Zooms*. This would seem to suggest that many practitioners liked the books but are not always aware of what is available. As *Rolling along with Goldilocks and the Three Bears* was an American picture book, it would be understandable if it was unfamiliar to most of the seventy participants but it was more surprising however that ‘Letterbox Library’, a specialist distributor who includes a large stock of imported titles on their list was also unaware of it. This is a very good example of particular publications never appearing on the distribution ‘radar’ and consequently not being available for selection by EY practitioners.

This particular publication also highlights the way in which books with disability themes can divide the opinion of critics. When first published in the USA the book received very

mixed reviews. The reputable Horn Book Guide to Children and Young Adult's Books (2000:46) controversially described it as:

Well-meant but inept, this amateurish adaptation puts 'spunky little Baby Bear' in a wheelchair, turning the story into a lesson about disabilities. Numerous nonfiction picture books do that job better without crippling a favorite folktale in the process.

Such a review can be very influential in determining how widely a book is promoted because distributors do not make selections arbitrarily, a point which was clearly made in a telephone interview with Fen Coles (Argent, 2008), buyer for 'Letterbox Library'. Coles explains that the process can be exhaustive and following its initial selection as potentially publishable it would then be subject to a rigorous review process with a group that includes:

a primary school reading group, social workers, adoption workers, Inclusion managers, Early Years and primary school practitioners. All the reviewers include a range of ethnicities and cultures and have a wide and varied range of professional expertise and personal experience.

But, of course, this process is not a scientific one and it is dependent on the tastes and opinions of individuals who have been selected for the demographic they are assumed to represent and although this distributor has clearly tried to reflect a wide range of views in this process, they still remain individual opinions and a different set of reviewers may reach different conclusions. If this process of selecting books for publication and distribution is replicated across the industry it has to be acknowledged as a significant influence on decisions about which books are viable in the market place. However, this relatively narrow method of determining the viability of a publication can illustrate the ways in which the market can also fail to register value and interest from potential users. The fact that *My Brother Sammy* was not in print was interesting since it proved to be the one book that had unanimous approval from the seventy participants who considered it: four of whom were already familiar with the book and all but one saying that they would use it with EY children.

The findings from these questionnaires also highlighted how important the aesthetic response was to the books as objects of art. One of the questions asked of the respondents was about the style and impact of the illustrations, particularly because the sample books

had been selected to demonstrate a contrast of style. The individual aesthetic response to the illustrations in the first book were varied, but generally positive (see table 4.5).

Table 4.5 Responses to illustrations in *Looking after Louis*

Examples of positive statements	Examples of negative statements
<p>Bright busy and colourful</p> <p>Enjoyed the cartoon type images- children would relate to these</p> <p>Appealing; very child- centred; lots of detailed expressions on faces; not too 'busy'; eye catching; love the first page- you can identify different characters- reminds me of children in my class; subtle changes to Louis' facial expression indicated individuality</p>	<p>Don't like accentuated features; Louis is portrayed as different in an odd way with small eyes and mouth open; pictures not nice of children; not true to life; like Lola and Charlie- not realistic enough</p>

Concern was expressed by some participants that the illustrations were too much like caricatures and there was a danger of them being demeaning whilst others saw this as a positive characteristic as they felt that children would respond well to this kind of style. Another participant felt that, despite some reservations about the style, the illustrator had managed to convey a real subtlety of expression. The fact that the respondents have a very different responses to and interpretations of different illustrative styles shows how individual preference is being driven to some extent by aesthetic taste but also by perceptions of children's developmental needs.

The second book was generally very well received and the more critical statements were expressed by only two participants (see table 4.6).

Table 4.6 Responses to illustrations in *Mama Zooms*

Examples of positive statements	Examples of negative statements
<p>Big, bright , clear, bold and colourful</p> <p>Clever to show bits of wheelchair gradually</p> <p>Fantastic; emotive and engaging; enough detail but not too crowded; magical; nicely drawn</p>	<p>Pictures could be more prominent; a little too pale; looks dated; don't like the colour of the paper- makes my eyes go funny</p>

In both of the books mentioned above there was approval expressed for the brightly coloured aspect of illustrations, and this correlates with practitioner interview responses in terms of meeting young children's perceptual developmental needs. By contrast however, others expressed a concern that the pictures were too stylized and 'not realistic enough'. The view that young children can only respond to conventional representational style was interesting and conveys a particular view of development that believes that they are only perceptually able to differentiate between strong colours and to recognise well defined, familiar pictorial representations. Responses to the third picture book were more varied (see table 4.7).

Table 4.7 Responses to illustrations in *Rolling along with Goldilocks and the Three Bears*

Examples of positive statements	Examples of negative statements
<p>Colourful</p> <p>Loved the pictures; traditional style; lots of attention to detail</p> <p>Pictures presents Baby bear as a strong independent character; children would relate to this style; engaging</p>	<p>Bit too 'busy'; didn't like the pictures; how many bears have you seen in a wheelchair?, twee and unrealistic; children need to be able to relate to the characters in order to empathise /understand them-illustrations too 'happy' for them to do this; surprised that physical therapists were portrayed as humans working with bears – why not bears?</p>

Most participants were positive about the illustrative style in this book although another American reviewer had commented 'the crayon illustrations are reminiscent of a 1950s'

style and appear flat and prosaic.’ (Kelsey: 1999). However, there did seem to be some concerns over the way the animal characters were used in this particular story and it seemed to trouble one participant that it was ‘non- realistic’ to have a wheelchair using bear. However, the use of animal characters is common in children’s literature as they provide the opportunity to convey generalised messages since they are not historically, socially and culturally located in the same way as depictions of human characters. As Pinsent (1992:55) points out, the use of animals may also be a way for the child to encounter more difficult concepts:

I have the impression that more animal picture books are being produced than ever before partly because in a multi ethnic, multi-cultural society, they avoid difficulties, and may even, like David McKee’s ‘Tusk Tusk’, be used to preach tolerance.

More traditional portrayals of ‘The Three Bears’ story are part of a shared cultural heritage and do not necessarily threaten our understanding of the world whereas this version adds a challenging dimension of social realism through the depiction of modern support equipment and a physical therapy centre. Another participant was confused by the lack of consistency in the roles of humans and animals portrayed in the pictures. This is not unusual in children’s literature and other examples include Paddington, a bear character created by Michael Bond (1926-) who lives in an otherwise human world, and Rupert, made famous by Arthur Bestall (1892-1986), another bear character who seems equally at ease with a range of human and animal characters. It is interesting to consider to what extent the role ascribed to humans within the same narrative as animals is expressed in terms of power. For instance, Blount, (1974:308) suggests that Paddington combines the role of ‘mascot or toy, with pet and youngest son and has a privileged and independent life; but needs the [human] family before he can achieve reality’. As the writer of *Rolling along with Goldilocks and the Three Bears* was a physical therapist, she perhaps felt it was an opportunity to give important information about the ‘real world’ by using a human character.

The illustrator and the adult reader may well have very different interpretations of what an illustration means or does not mean and it is unlikely the illustrators view will be known to the reader. What is clear, however, is that the reader’s responses can

affect whether a picture book is well received and ultimately affect whether it is selected for use with children.

Some respondents also questioned whether the illustrations were ‘too happy’ to be meaningful with children. Responses to the fourth book were surprising since they contradicted the overall preference for bright and bold illustrations that were more a feature of the other three books (see table 4.8).

Table 4.8 Responses to illustrations in *My Brother Sammy*

Examples of positive statements	Examples of negative statements
<p>Dreamy, imaginative water colour style; open to interpretation; children often interested in mimicking this style- can be less intimidating when seeking to represent; easy on the eye; colourful – almost symbolic of someone with autism – sees the world differently e.g. mini beasts; emotive and calming; watercolour effect enhanced the story although subtleties of colour and style may need a small group; very appealing with clever use of black and white to illustrate negative emotions; pictures draw you in to what is happening in the story; soft and safe; beautiful use of colour; sent shivers down my spine as I hadn’t really thought about this before and the style of illustrations stimulated these emotions</p>	<p>Difficult to see</p>

It was interesting that the more subtle illustrative style used in this publication encouraged a more reflective response in terms of how the style itself could convey meaning. The extent to which the style could also be interpreted as a way of seeing the world through the eyes of an autistic child was considered because it was felt that this was an unconventional view. Another comment related to how children needed to see these kinds of illustrations to make links with the ways in which they painted pictures, both as a reflection of their own style as as an inspiration for others. Others recognised the value of helping children to looking at picture book illustrations critically. Some comments were made about needing to ensure that children could see the pictures if they were sitting in a

large group at storytime in the setting, but it showed how good organisation by practitioners might be key to this rather than only selecting more brightly coloured texts.

Summary of findings from picture book response questionnaire

These questionnaire responses highlight the limited reliability of the data that can be gathered through the use of questionnaires where there is no opportunity for further clarification. The questionnaires were also completed in an uncontrolled environment for the convenience of participants and in this case they took away the books to browse at a convenient time for them, sometimes over several days. All participants were known to the researcher either as students, colleagues or practitioners which also may have influenced the written comments.

It seems likely that responses to particular illustrative styles are the result of a combined reaction to whether they delight the reader aesthetically, help to convey the story content and have perceived pedagogical value. These are clearly important factors when selecting picture books to use with young children, something picked up by Alice in her interview:

You have got to come to books yourselves- you've got to like them and relate to them.

Returning to the themes outlined previously, this strand of the research has confirmed that many EY practitioners and students have a view about what young children are able to perceive and respond to in terms of visual complexity. It is interesting to consider whether an instrumental role for these books in terms of a child's perceived developmental needs interferes with the individual adult aesthetic response. This has to remain, at this stage, an open question because it is clearly difficult to separate responses to these books as an ordinary lay adult from those of adults in their professional capacities as EY practitioners who have a purpose linked to their response.

Who were the training institution participants?

Despite several approaches to a range of training institutions via letter, e mail and telephone calls, this sample proved to be the most challenging group of participants to establish. Due to the limited response rate of 6 from the first trawl of twenty training

providers, a second group of six were approached that covered a wider geographical region. Ultimately this resulted in a further four positive responses (see table 3.3) and those that eventually responded from this group were predominantly those that had a connection to the researcher via professional networks and colleagues. As several of the ten training institutions provided data about more than one course, this seemed to be sufficient to give a snapshot of how disability awareness was taught across a range of courses for EY students. The short online questionnaire would also determine whether this included discussion of how picture books could be used as a vehicle for inclusive practice (see table 3.12).

Only two participants, Ruby and James, offered information about the content of the PGCE course even though this course was offered at five of the training institutions (see table 3.13). Both participants reflected that this course was very crowded in terms of curriculum content and that it was challenging to give students an understanding of inclusion from a theoretical and practical perspective in a short space of time. Ruby stressed that the concept of differentiated planning to meet individual needs was emphasised throughout all aspects of the course and that students were provided with opportunities to explore a range of resources such as books throughout a variety of modules:

As part of Core subjects, it is an integral part of the programme, in particular English and Maths.

This particular course also included a whole module on the subject of inclusion although this did not specifically address using picture books in either case but concentrated more characteristics of high incidence disabilities in educational settings and associated practitioner coping strategies.

James explained that the PGCE emphasis was very much on familiarising the students with the legislative framework and how to build knowledge and confidence in using this in practice. At present there was only one three hour session in the course dedicated to the subject but despite this, he felt that opportunities for discussing issues like rights and meeting individual needs were embedded throughout the course. With respect to discussions of how picture books can be used to promote inclusive practice, he was unsure and explained that ‘This may be covered in core English ...’ [respondent’s emphasis]

Both felt that the course content had not significantly changed in the last ten years although up to date legislation was always included and they emphasised the importance of the teaching practice placements in helping students to understand the benefits and challenges of inclusion. The BA courses ranged from a teaching degree through to one with a specific management emphasis (see table 3.14) which makes it an interesting sample to consider since many students may go on to use the BA to commence a PGCE course or to undertake Graduate Teacher Training (GTT). If their initial undergraduate course had already covered the subject of disability awareness in any depth, then this could have an impact on their subsequent role as a teacher, even if the postgraduate course had relatively little content on the subject. This was evident in the interview responses of Lucy who had undertaken an ECS degree and felt knowledgeable and conversant with the subject of disability awareness.

Ruby explained that students on the EY Education and Teaching degree complete a specific inclusion module at level five and that, as with the PGCE course, it is embedded throughout the course at all levels. Kathy felt that the subject was well covered throughout the course with an introduction to the subject from a historical and rights perspective as part of a level four module and specifically addressing the inclusion debate at level six with a module that explored this in some depth. The possible ways in which resources, including picture books could be used to promote inclusive practice was embedded throughout the course module descriptors, but she added:

This does not necessarily mean they are taught in the best way- we need to think about how we can ensure that all academic staff themselves have knowledge and confidence in the subject- particularly if they have not had recent experience of inclusive practice.

Sarah felt that the subject was covered but could be improved considerably:

The programme at years 1 and 2 has disability embedded as part of 'Rights and Diversity' (mandatory year1) and 'Diversity and Inclusion' (optional year2). Additionally, we have 2 modules where disability could be covered, but as far as I know, it isn't. These are 'Play, Literature, Music and Art' (optional year2) which looks at the construction of children through Media and 'Multi-Disciplinary Studies' (mandatory Year 3) which look at images and how they lead to a construction of children.

She also stated that specific information on using resources like picture books was more likely to happen accidentally as a result of discussion as opposed to specifically planned module content. Tammy explained that, although she had taught on a wide range of different modules during her three years at the institution, she was not convinced that the subject was sufficiently covered on mandatory modules:

In my experience of teaching on the course, little stress is placed upon this area as a specific focus for discussion. Some of the optional modules address disability as a specialist area. During some of the lectures, inclusion is introduced and discussed.

She had no experience of using picture books to explore inclusive practice and was unaware of any colleagues covering this.

Fiona pointed out that several students are on a combined honours course which means they are able to study ECS alongside SEN and Inclusion and she felt that attention to equality and diversity was a priority in her university:

In relation to continuing professional development as part of each ECS team meeting agenda, we have a representative from the equality and diversity committee and issues raised from this are discussed. We also then consider how these issues are going to inform our future practice.

She also explained that the ongoing degree revalidation process was allowing the staff to look at disability awareness in what she described as a less 'bolt on' approach. She felt that picture books could be used much more effectively to help with this and welcomed the issue being raised through this piece of research as it had made her think about it.

Ruby explained that, as with all the courses at her university, disability awareness was embedded in the ECS course particularly in level four modules that had more practical application. A specific 'Policy' module did not make reference to the power of the visual image and she felt that this may be an aspect that could be included in the future from a more theoretical perspective.

Most participants felt that all these courses had changed significantly in response to emerging disability legislation and policy. However, Sarah made an interesting reflection on this point:

*No not significantly, rather the content has become implicit rather than explicit
Perhaps the embeddedness tends to provide a veneer of coverage perhaps without
real substance?*

The responses from FdA training provider participants demonstrated the range of courses provided for EY part time practitioner students (see table 3.15). Although these are two year courses, all offer the opportunity to continue study at level six in a related subject either at the same institution or equivalent. Those who ‘top up’ at a university that offers specific modules relating to inclusion will therefore receive this content, whereas those that join courses that only explore the issue at levels four and five will not.

Anna explained that the subject was discussed as part of the ‘Working with Families’ module but otherwise underpinned the whole course. She did not feel that a discussion of resources including picture books was covered, but was unsure:

It could be included in Communication, Language and Literacy, but so much needs to be included that it is not really a priority. Generally there is so much content to fit into each module that students have to pursue areas of interest / specialism at an individual level.

The fact that the subject of picture books was often perceived to be a lesser academic pursuit was discussed by Josie as a possible reason why it has not been regarded as priority:

The theoretical nature of a degree does not lend itself easily to discussions of picture books. This is perhaps more related to Level 3 teaching and learning; unless the student chooses it as a project issue.

This is a controversial comment given that this genre has high academic status in the field of children’s literature and demonstrates how differently it can be perceived by a trainer with different academic interests. As previously noted, different perspectives contribute to how particular knowledge is accorded value and which bits are regarded as appropriate for cultural transmission through the training given to those working with young children. These decisions are probably unconscious on the part of trainers and practitioners. Josie felt that resources were explored as part of ongoing discussion on the ECS course but was not sure whether using picture books as a means of raising disability awareness was covered to any extent.

Gina felt that the subject of disability awareness was addressed in different ways throughout the course:

Some modules lend themselves more readily to this topic. 'Creativity & play' incorporates discussion on resources including books. As does 'Working with children & families' where students can choose to discuss a child with SEN and how working with other professionals can support children & families. In this module students are expected to incorporate resources to be used with children with SEN including books. There is no provision for practical sessions in discussing/reviewing relevant books and resources.

From a management perspective, Polly explained that the purpose of the course is to generally raise awareness about areas for development in EY students' workplaces in order to improve quality. Although there appeared to be no direct teaching on the subject of using picture books as a tool for inclusive practice she added:

In terms of a module entitled 'Managing the Curriculum', we ask students to ensure that diversity and inclusion are featured in the indoor curriculum/ outdoor and the resources used.

Grace felt that the subject was well covered at all levels throughout the course and that picture books were critically evaluated in a level four module but that students were also encouraged to be aware of the dangers of tokenism:

The Play module has a session devoted to reviewing books, publishers, toys and other resources (Persona dolls for example) that promote images of individuals who are different or who have a disability. However there is also careful discussion about the risks of tokenism and continued marginalisation if certain attitudes towards resources are not challenged as well.

Once again, all the participants recognised the impact of more recent legislation on course content but more often than not found it was expressed in terms of ensuring that students understood the requirements of legislation and policy and subsequent confidence with using the Code of Practice. Josie felt that the needs of FD students may be different in learning about the subject of disability:

I think perhaps the FdA course is different from other courses in that the students are all practitioners, therefore more likely to raise issues around disability from their own experience, it perhaps does not need to be taught in its own right.

This comment demonstrates a widely held belief that many practitioners already know about the issue of disability without having to be taught it. It perhaps reveals a view that this is a subject best learned from experience, an unproblematic, common sense subject that does not require in depth analysis.

I also believe that due to the nature of early years, disability awareness has been there, now it has statutory requirements attached to it, there is increased training and more training available.

In other words, these practitioners were more likely to have received relevant CPD training on the issue as a result of changes to legislation, an experience of a kind of ‘just-in-time’ training that is common in many professions. There is also an assumption that increased access to training mirrors the experience of studying a subject at a more theoretical level in a degree course, which is not in fact true. Many practitioners working in EY settings are employed with a level three qualification although there have been attempts to encourage a more highly qualified workforce since the launch of the National Childcare Strategy in 1998. Because of this it would have been valuable to find out what was covered at this level of study but it was particularly difficult to get responses from the FE sector although in the end two participants did come forward to complete the questionnaire (see table 3.16).

Both participants explained that aspects of Equal Opportunities were central to the course and Zoe explained that these were embedded throughout as a national course requirement and were enforced through strict guidelines and sometimes very prescriptive recommended content:

All units of the Diploma include SEN awareness. ‘Anti-Bias/ Anti discriminatory practice’ is a unit which deals specifically with policy and implementation of good practice.

She described how the course included many opportunities to explore a range of good quality resources that reflected diversity but that students were expected to gain the most knowledge from their placements in EY settings which comprised a large proportion of

this vocational course. As Josie had indicated earlier, there was an implication that learning about these issues would be part of observing practice and both acknowledged that they were required to stay up-to-date with relevant information, legislation and policy on the subject.

Summary of findings from training participants

The training provider data contributed to the important theme of whose responsibility is it to educate EY practitioners about the issue of disability. It emerged that each institution had a different interpretation of how they should deliver training about the subject and whilst it was seen as integral to preparing students for working in inclusive environments, much of this seemed to be based around providing them with classroom coping strategies and knowledge of the legislation and their consequent responsibilities. These responses also demonstrated some variety of individual interpretation about the value of the subject of disability as a viable and mandatory course subject. There was also a lack of consistency reflected in the different courses about how picture books could be used as a vehicle for teaching about this subject.

This chapter has presented the findings from questionnaires and interviews and considered the extent to which the comments offered by participants have helped to answer the four research questions. It has demonstrated some powerful influences on picture book selection in an EY setting. It particularly highlights the influence of individual values, aesthetic taste and personal commitment and enthusiasm for picture books. What is clear is that particular picture books are not published accidentally and that market forces play a part in determining whether they are produced and distributed. The lack of books relating to disability used in NS would appear to be partly due to a lack of easy availability despite the evident need for a wider selection in order to comply with legislation, policy and curriculum guidance.

This suggests that some trainers and practitioners who are concerned at this lack of provision have a role to play in advocating for picture books with disability related content.

The next chapter reflects on the overall effectiveness of the chosen research methods and considers on how the research design may benefit from modifications if it were to be repeated or extended. It then summarises the overall findings of the research in relation to the four research questions.

Chapter five

Conclusion

This research set out to establish those factors which influence the way in which EY practitioners select picture books with a disability related theme for the use of the children in their settings. It was motivated by both personal and professional concerns that EY colleagues and students were failing to see the potential about how these books could be used to facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject of disability and suspicions that it was a limited knowledge of the range of books available that was driving this process. This concluding chapter firstly reflects on whether the chosen research methods were successful; it then focuses on the findings and how these contributed to answering the four research questions; and finally, it summarises how this piece of research has contributed to the debate about how picture books can be used as a tool for inclusive practice with some further recommendations.

Methodological review

This section will take a look at how well the research was conducted, focussing on both the things that worked well and analysing some of those areas where it may have been possible to improve the data collection. The research was based around a case study involving twelve EY practitioners from NS in one specific LA and initial trainers from a range of eight HE and two FE institutions. All of those participating shared a common interest in inclusive EY practice and how picture books might provide a vehicle for this; an approach endorsed in both CGFS (QCA, 2000) and EYFS (Great Britain. DfES, 2007a). The issue was further explored through questionnaires relating to the use of picture books which were distributed to seventy EY practitioners and students from a range of settings.

The initial questionnaires for EY participants were always intended to provide a context for the subsequent interviews and can be considered successful from this perspective as they set a clear agenda. They proved to be invaluable as a prompt for the interviews which, in some cases, were carried out a length of time after the questionnaire findings had been shared with participants.

The responses to the picture book questionnaire provided additional data from a convenience sample (Ritchie, Lewis, 2003) of experienced EY practitioners and students with respect to how choices are made as a result of an individual's aesthetic response and also provided further evidence of the links with the perceived instrumental value of picture books in terms of teaching children about disability.

The questionnaires completed by training providers added to the range of perspectives feeding into the research and the information gained from some of the training providers was detailed and reflective, highlighting the variation of emphasis placed on both the subject of picture books and how these might be used to influence inclusive practice. It may be that these providers were more accustomed to writing about these kinds of issues as part of their professional role in designing course content and so were confident to articulate and expand on this in writing. Whilst this provided valuable data in terms of summarising views, it is possible that more in depth information could have been gained from follow up interviews.

The three Research Bulletins played an important part in keeping the EY participants involved during the first phase of the research and maintaining the focus of the study. These provided an opportunity to communicate the questionnaire responses; stimulate some further interest in the subject of picture books through the inclusion of relevant reading; and alert practitioners to the 'In the Picture' project and 'Letter Box Library' distributors (see chapter three, table3:4). The subsequent EY practitioner interviews were central to capturing the views of those at the heart of this research. They provided an opportunity to explore the questionnaire responses alongside building a rapport between the interviewer and participant in a familiar work environment. It is possible that the perception of the interviewer by the EY practitioner interviewee (as an ex-EY practitioner, with what might be perceived as additional status as a University Senior Lecturer engaged in post graduate research) may have been influential in comments made in interviews. In a similar vein when undertaking research with trainee teachers, Shipman (1997:82) comments: 'I found that they had given me the answers they thought I expected of future teachers, not what they really believed'. At the same time, it could be argued that the experience and relevant professional knowledge held by the researcher was known to the participants and contributed to authenticity (Donmoyer, 2000).

In this case, the common professional ground was a positive factor in establishing a relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. Prior to all of the interviews, there had been a friendly exchange with regard to the researcher's own professional experience in the field and some inevitable reminiscing about change which was shared with those practitioners with similar memories. This was a device to relax the participants but also helped to negotiate a shared space and to provide some legitimacy to the encounter (Corbetta, 2003).

In relation to drawing conclusions from interview data in general, Silverman (2002) explains that an encounter is composed of multiple meanings; for example, an endorsement of some of the comments offered by EY participants (based on the interviewer's own age and time of training which corresponded to seven of the participants) may have influenced the response of those who shared these characteristics. Gillam (2000:31) rightly points out: 'Skilled interviewers are remarkable for the economy of what they say.' In this sense, there may have been an unconscious affirmation of some interview content through verbal prompts, facial expression and body language when experiences and views corresponded with those of the researcher (Robson, 2002). Radnor (2001:33) suggests that an effective interviewer is like a chairperson in a meeting in terms of learning to share power and control whereby 'the members of the meeting have not necessarily sanctioned the agenda and might not share the chair's priorities'. It is important to note the potential influence of the interviewer in all interviews, which did not become immediately apparent until the transcripts were analyzed.

Interviewer: Like you, I like 'The Owl Babies' for instance because I love the illustrations, - that's one of the reasons that you maybe chose that and I just wondered if you can say any more on why, what made you select those in particular. Was it the illustrations, or the content, or anything else?

Julie: A bit of both really - sometimes when we have used 'The Owl Babies' it's been perhaps when we have been doing day and night as a theme so we've had it as the story.

Shipman (1997:43) cites McNamara (1980) who describes this ‘outsider’s arrogance’ as inevitable in interview situations. He suggests that one of the problems of interpretative research is that it is never representing natural behaviour as the dynamics are always influenced by the presence of the interviewer. However, Corbetta (2003: 270) states that it is important to be confident about the need for maintaining focus when conducting semi structured interviews but, at the same time, this contradicts the assumption that in order to ‘grasp the subject’s perspective’ it is necessary to give freedom of expression to the ‘dominant voice’ of the respondent. The following extract from one of the later EY practitioners to be interviewed, Mel, demonstrate that, in this case, the interviewee was able to elaborate on particular points with only a minimal prompt that builds on what has already been stated:

Mel: And I have to say there are too many people working with children, not just teachers but TAs, students they do a story they pick up a book they have never read before and do it word for word and wonder why the children are rolling around the floor, I am mad about books so...

Interviewer: Do you think you have to be mad about books to make books work?

Mel: No I don't think you have to at all I mean I don't think my son has ever read a book. He has got a degree and I would be surprised if he has ever read a book - that is an exaggeration , but he can read a story to nieces and nephews and he is just wonderful because he has definitely got a gift for language and I do think you do need to have some energy, animation, be-able to adapt words and make it work, to make it work you need to know what is in the book and it is preparation that is what a lot of people aren't prepared to do, and I think we have moved away from books. I am surprised if anybody ever sells a book anymore these days because other than reading on the train I am not sure, because it is all gadgets which it is a shame

Interviews with more senior members of staff in EY settings were particularly productive, perhaps partly due to the interviewees being very confident about the subject. Seale (1999:110) has discussed the authenticity of research where researcher and researched share same social status but recognises that this does not necessarily guarantee good results. In fact he suggests that ‘people may find it easier to reveal secrets to strangers’. Cohen et al (2000:123) cite Limerick et al (1996) who suggest

that interviewees in powerful positions will assume that the interviewer has relevant up to date knowledge about the subject in question and that this will contribute to a feeling of reciprocity whereby 'power is fluid and is discursively constructed through the interview rather than being the province of either party'. Radnor (2001: 30) explains that this common culture alongside an interest in 'informal, personal and tacit theory about education' is a characteristic of many educational researchers with a critical theory approach and should not be underestimated in terms of its influence on an encounter.

In summary, the chosen research methods were successful in generating rich data from a group of people with related professional interests. Delamont (2002:51) reminds all researchers of the need to make the 'familiar strange' and goes on to suggest that 'the attempt to focus on a neglected, taken-for-granted feature of school life can highlight other aspects of it'. In this case, since all participants were interested in picture books, there had been an assumption that there would be a concern that these could contribute to inclusive practice, but the lack of awareness about availability of books with disability related themes rather contradicted this.

What did the findings demonstrate?

The overall findings demonstrate that some common themes can be identified, in particular in relation to the varying influence of childhood discourse, legislation and policy, instrumental factors, training and personal experiences. Whilst these provide an interesting picture of the structural and individual influences affecting their behaviour, it must be remembered that, as with all interpretative research, other case studies with different participants may highlight a range of other influences (Bassey, 1999; Delamont, 2002; Dressman, 2008). These results do, however, provide a valuable indication of the key issues influencing the way practitioners select books and it is likely that these will have resonance across a much wider professional cohort due to similarities in both training experiences and established EY pedagogy.

This research started from an unequivocally committed position which assumed that using children's literature as a way of conveying particular values was both desirable and progressive. This position derives from a commitment to what can be called a human rights perspective that insists representation should be provided to a range of

minority groups in all aspects of education, culture and wider society in acknowledgement of their right to be visible and to work against negative stereotypical representation (Troyna, Carrington, 1989). It has been suggested by Dressman (2008:122) that being involved in academic research should be viewed as 'joining a conversation about a topic that has been going on for some time before they arrived'. Around the subject of this research the conversation was, at best, happening at a whisper. Scope's 'In the Picture' project had highlighted the need for inviting publishers, distributors and illustrators to raise the volume of the debate and to produce more picture books with a disability related theme but what this research has demonstrated is that EY practitioners and trainers were left to discover this particular conversation largely on their own initiative because it was not easily accessible and certainly not highlighted in training or curriculum guidance. The fact that they didn't should not be a surprise because the data suggests that they were not aware of their potentially significant role in driving the production of more books with disability related themes. Although most of the sample were surprised by the relative lack of availability of these resources none were able to name more than a few titles and although they expressed some frustration about this absence of useful books, on the whole they did not seem to view it as a major concern or a significant lost opportunity, which was disappointing given the important role picture books can play in tackling difficult or neglected issues. This suggests that EY practitioners rely on those books that are more readily available.

What individual and structural factors influence picture book choices by practitioners in nursery schools?

The use of picture books as a vehicle for helping children to understand equality issues in a way that supports wider legislation and policy was not as prominently promoted in initial training and CPD as might at first be assumed. The absence of a coherent strategy to promote an understanding of these issues has been disappointing but nevertheless it does partly explain why many EY practitioners do not seem to have an in depth understanding of the subject (Browne, 1998; Lane, 1998; Siraj Blatchford, Clarke, 2000; Mohamed, 2006).

In the initial stages of the research the focus seemed likely to fall on the question of whether and how recent disability legislation had made an impact on the publication and subsequent use of picture books. This had also been the basis of the research undertaken by Quicke in 1985 that grew from a similar set of concerns in relation to the Warnock Report (Great Britain. DES, 1978) and the Education Act (Great Britain.1981). However, it soon became clear that this initial perspective was far too narrow and that the research would need to expand to look at the relationship between legislation and the production, publication and distribution of picture books with a disability related theme and if, how, why they are selected for use by EY practitioners. The idea that exploring the way in which social policy initiatives could influence the publication of particular books with disability related content was appealing and potentially transformative. However, it could also be interpreted as overly didactic and restrictive because, in focussing too heavily on the content of a picture book, this might underestimate the subtleties of artistic design and their effects on readers for which picture books are renowned (Arzipe, Styles, 2003; Anstey, Bull, 2009). So, in order to locate the debate in a much wider context, it was necessary to look at the role of children's literature in general and the extent to which it creates or reproduces particular discourses of childhood. It was through engagement with this debate that the four research questions emerged and the role of disability legislation and policy became only one, albeit important, locus for the study. This decision to broaden and deepen the study was subsequently justified by the findings which demonstrated that the legislative context did not assume the importance that was presumed for it at the outset of the research.

What is clear is that the factors influencing individual decisions that were made about picture book selection were created by a range of diverse issues, including, in all probability, a range of subliminal influences that remain unacknowledged and possibly unknown by the participant themselves (ref fig 6.1) and none of which are necessarily more significant than the others.

Fig. 6.1 Diverse influences on the EY practitioner book selection choices



The different fields of influence on decision making that are set out in figure 6.1 can operate in a kind of dynamic tension that makes it hard to isolate or quantify their individual significance. It is easy to see that whilst the EY practitioner is necessarily working within a regulatory framework defined by legislation and policy, a combination of the other instrumental, personal and training related influences may be more powerful than these legislative concerns when the individual makes their book selections. So, for example, although The DED (Disability Rights Commission, 2006) clearly states that disability-related picture books should be provided in EY settings, a serendipitous knowledge of a small specialist publisher recommended by a colleague or friend may be what drives the trainer or practitioner to discover and purchase these books.

Equally, a senior manager in the setting who has responsibility for ordering books on what is always a limited budget, may encourage an individual with a particular interest in picture books about equality and diversity to improve the range the setting holds; or personal aesthetic taste, views about appropriateness, complexity or whether they meet developmental needs can also be significant. For those with an interest in the transformative purpose of literature and the importance of providing young children with a range of positive images about disability, the important questions might be who can best give advice about what is available and, once these books have been identified, whether it is possible to get hold of them.

So, given that unravelling this knot of interactive influences is complex, it is important to consider some of these issues individually.

Legislation and policy

Although policy and legislation appears to be less influential on the way choice is exercised than might be imagined, they still have an important profile and a key role to play.

The emergence of CCs was specifically mentioned by two practitioners as an important initiative changing the way services are delivered and emphasising the way in which these are supposed to enable a more ‘joined up’ approach to delivering services. The central narrative presented by the government that these essentially organisational initiatives would address the effects of inequality was not always scrutinised as critically as it should have been. Hatcher (1997:123) points out that an

uncritical faith in centrally driven reforms can lead to: ‘a universal discourse of raising standards, in which the curriculum is seen as unproblematic and pupil cultures are irrelevant.... school effectiveness / school improvement is bidding to become the dominant discourse in education.’ Some of the NSs were already established as CCs and several others were in the process of becoming CCs at the time the interviews for this study took place and given the generous budgets associated with the change of status the transformation appeared to be welcomed in terms of increased resources, which, of course, also meant more picture books.

This process represented one aspect of what would be a considerable government investment into EY services following the 1997 election and resulted in a significant increase in provision designed to meet a concomitant growth in need (Pugh, 2010). All CCs are required to be inclusive settings and cater for a wide range of individual needs and the emphasis they place on early intervention and support has meant that there are now more children with disabilities and SEN in mainstream provision, which has driven the need for CPD to ensure that practitioners are well trained.

In many ways this research is predicated on the belief that legislation which is designed to improve the circumstances of the disabled should be influential on practice because its purpose is to be transformative. The Every Child Matters (Great Britain. DfES, 2004) agenda is a good example of a policy programme aimed at underwriting the all-round well-being of children and which should be responsive to the needs of all children whatever their social, economic or environmental circumstances. However, disability rights campaigners were concerned that this was not necessarily the case for the children they represented and pushed for an extension of these principles under the heading ‘Every Disabled Child Matters’ (Great Britain. DfES, 2006) in the hope that this would address their specific needs. This initiative has been very effective in raising awareness of entitlement issues and has driven some significant changes with respect to financial benefits and additional support. It has not yet explicitly addressed the issues relating to representation in a range of popular media including children’s books, although this is clearly important as well.

It can also be argued that SENDA (Great Britain. DfES, 2001) has had only a limited influence on practice in terms of meeting the individual needs of children with disabilities. Although most EY practitioner participants discuss the importance of

implementing the SEN Code of Practice, few highlight how this curriculum resource can be used as a tool for inclusive practice. The findings show that this is not emphasised consistently in either current initial training or CPD despite the fact that it is a clear part of The DED (Disability Rights Commission, 2006) and highlighted as desirable in the EYFS. The emphasis on compliance with legislation alongside the ability to plan for differentiated learning to meet individual needs is part of all training, but using picture books as part of a co-ordinated strategy relies on particular tutors having the knowledge, interest and vision to build it into the course.

There was an assumption at the outset of this study that recent developments in legislation and policy would have had an effect on practitioner knowledge and understanding of the subject of disability and that compliance with curriculum guidance would be a key feature. Logically, this should have represented a real market opportunity for publishers, distributors and illustrators providing them an opportunity to respond to the emerging legislation by providing the appropriate resources. Their initial lack of response might have been put down to the fact that they are trailing behind the prevailing policy winds rather than deliberately choosing to ignore the subject and it seemed fair to assume that once awareness of the potential market was raised, then appropriate publications would follow. However, this research demonstrates that the relationship between publishing and education which Nodleman (2008) describes as being traditionally aligned in the sense that educational publishing responds to what is required by the curriculum being taught in schools. In terms of Bourdieu's 'field positions' this is, in this instance out of synchronisation. What this study demonstrates is that instead of seizing the opportunity in front of them, publishers seem to be unaware of the concern expressed by EY practitioners, initial or CPD trainers that picture books with a disability related theme are very difficult to find other than via specialist distributors.

Scope's 'In the Picture' project aimed to make publishers aware of a potentially enormous market in terms of representing disability in more socially realistic picture books. A good example of this need to reflect the changing realities can be found by looking at the settings used for EY provision, which have changed considerably in recent years. CCs, for instance, are now in all LAs and these look very different to more traditional EY environments. All mainstream EY provision is now organised to include children with a variety of individual needs as a result of legislation and policy change and the significance of these changes were highlighted to publisher delegates at 'The Story so

Far' conference as part of the Scope project. It was proposed that using these new environments in books was an opportunity to reach more people and they would appeal to the staff as well as parents and carers and provide an addition to the many 'Starting School' picture books that appear every year. Delegates at the conference emphasised that those outside education, including publishers, needed to stay alert to the changing policy landscape in order to stay relevant and that even then it may take some time for any picture books to emerge that refer to CCs, even though they will have been a feature of young children's lives for many years.

Instrumental factors: using picture books to explore the curriculum

The curriculum has a significant impact on picture book selection in terms of what is seen to be relevant content. Recent moves to put proposed age guidelines on all children's books raises the question of whether this will have an impact upon the expectation that reading particular books will help towards achieving particular learning outcomes, and there is also the possibility that the curriculum will increasingly move beyond the classroom as books are recommended to parents for purchase for particular ages and purposes. The role of picture books in this changing landscape is interesting given the lack of emphasis on their importance in EY curriculum documentation other than as part of PSED. However, when a curriculum includes a strong emphasis on PSED, as evident in EYFS, this could make it very powerful in terms of influencing the development of social attitudes. There are also opportunities provided by a cross curricular approach that currently underpins Western EY pedagogy as this has the potential to influence children in every aspect of their learning by presenting these messages in a variety of different ways over a long period of time (Dahlberg, Moss, 2005). For instance, an exploration of diverse family lifestyles would not be restricted to a 'topic' run for just a half term but could be revisited throughout the two year NS experience using relevant picture books to help facilitate this.

The EY practitioner interviews and the practitioner questionnaire also revealed a belief that young children prefer, and are to some extent only able to respond to, bold, bright illustrations; a perspective very much in line with a developmental discourse that emphasises a staged approach to perceptual development (Nodleman, 2008). These results indicate that EY practitioners remain heavily influenced by the emphasis put on

the developmental discourse in their initial training and that this is reinforcing a particular view of childhood (Dahlberg, Moss, 2005; Penn 2005; Moss 2008).

Pedagogical framework and priority in the setting

The choice of NS settings used in the research retain, on the whole, a particularly strong EY ethos with a highly trained staff and democratic approach to decision making. This strong sense of identity and purpose was mentioned positively in questionnaire responses and elaborated further in interviews by several practitioners with respect to how decisions about books were selected. For example, Alice explained:

We are very much team players and we share. We decide on the strategies that we found that are working and we formalize them by writing them down and then showing the parents and staff. The staff and we share what's written down and then we all work consistently in the same way.

Another strong feature of these settings was the way that books were given a high priority within the budget by four of those interviewed and all others mentioned that they were central to the ethos of the setting. Although they must of course comply with Ofsted requirements, EY practitioners in these settings appeared to be in a somewhat privileged position with regard to external surveillance. Whereas colleagues in primary education may complain of over regulation and constraints with regard to a National Curriculum (NC), perhaps designed to cater for a national definition of childhood (James, James, 2002), these EY practitioners have retained a more traditional child centred approach. A desire to experiment, be innovative and find ways in which the curriculum can be more child-centred was clearly conveyed by several EY participants. One of the reasons for selecting a sample from NS was in recognition of their reputation and status (Sylva et al., 2003) as being relatively independent-minded and innovative. Despite the changes they are dealing with as a result of becoming CCs in line with government policy, they have retained the spirit of the original EY pioneers in terms of pedagogy. In many cases they have been able to capitalise on ideas like Margaret McMillan's Garden Schools (Steedman, 1990) and they established the value of working in effective partnership with family and community well before it became a current feature of policy. The value of play as a vehicle for learning, child centred practice, and the importance of providing a

safe, stimulating and well-resourced learning environment are all at the heart of traditional NS provision and the way in which this is skilfully managed in these settings is acknowledged in the EPPE research: ‘The most effective pedagogy is both ‘teaching’ and providing freely chosen yet potentially instructive play activities’ (Sylva et al, 2003:3).

The data collected from practitioners in this study clearly reflected the importance of this when describing how the learning environment was organised and managed. Once children are in the reception class there is very little time for ‘free choice’ activities outside the planned curriculum but the NS environment is more likely to actively encourage children to look at books, even though there is also the lure of other activities for them to choose from. Gillian explained that although children are given a menu of choices, it is the role of the practitioner to intervene and support and extend their learning:

What’s happened is that this afternoon is that it is purely child initiated – I’ve gone and sat myself down with the children and said ‘will you read a book to me’ and we’ve sat and talked about it .

The way in which this environment is organized allows the opportunity for the practitioner to be available to give value and time to looking at books with children if that is an area that is deemed important. Whitehead (2010) suggests that this is an ideal opportunity for fostering a positive attitude to books that should not be missed as it could lay the foundation for an enthusiasm that is not just about achieving learning outcomes in relation to reading.

Alongside the more traditional features of NS practice there was acknowledgement that practice was evolving and changing as a result of international pedagogical influences like the ‘Reggio Emilia’ approach (Rinaldi ,1995) which has led to many EY settings reorganising the layout of the learning environment. It has also resulted in the use of more natural resources and colours, increased emphasis on the outdoor environment and an acknowledgement of the need for opportunities to be creative and artistic. However, despite this increased commitment to creative stimulation, there was only one practitioner who discussed how picture book illustrations might naturally enhance this strand of learning and also provide a vehicle for developing aesthetic awareness. Whether children are actually being given the chance to make the links between their creative learning and picture books remains open to question however because it must be remembered that the environment is still ultimately controlled by adults. In this respect, those picture books

provided (or not) by the adults and the way in which they are used (or not) remains significant (Nodleman, 2008; Lancaster, 2010).

The strong emphasis on working in partnership with parents demonstrated in the interview data also correlates with EPPE findings that show there are advantages to children's learning when 'parents support children at home with strategies that complemented those being undertaken in the pre-school' (Sylva et al, 2003:4). The important role books have in helping to forge links with families is acknowledged by all those interviewed because it is seen as a key way in which the literacy of their child can be encouraged and it is commonplace to have gifts of books used to mark special occasions like Christmas and the transition to Infant school. However, this view has to be tempered by the acknowledgement that the provision of these picture books does not necessarily indicate that they will be used in the home and Brooker (2002) outlines the potential for parents to be confused by what is expected of them by the school. For instance, the value of using picture books with their children may be dominated by a view that these are less important than books with written text. The wider benefits of encouraging children to experience and enjoy books as challenging cultural artefacts in their own right may not be emphasised. – which is likely to also be true when it comes to using picture books with their children. Having said that, it would appear that these NS practitioners, in this research sample at least, are very keen to provide the necessary guidance and support for parents and most of the settings, as Alice explains, encourage books to be taken home on a regular basis:

I send out before they (the library loans) start, a literacy pack talking about the value of reading with your child and the do's and don'ts like trying to find somewhere quiet, make sure you are not pressured for time and turn the television off, make it fun, don't worry about getting it right or wrong and just a few ideas and how to get the best out of it really.

Age may be a factor in explaining why the practitioners interviewed for this research retained their confidence and enthusiasm about the teacher/parent partnership. Those trained prior to the Education Reform Act (Great Britain, 1988) and CGFS (QCA, 2000) seem to have remained 'beneath the radar' in terms of the way government legislation has had an impact on their behaviour. This may be due to the non-statutory nature of EY provision that has historically been a complex mix of private, statutory and voluntary

sector (Pugh, 2010) and individual staff may have retained some of the original enthusiasm and belief in child-centred learning that was at the heart of The Plowden Report (Great Britain.DES, 1967). Working with a non-statutory age group may well have allowed them, whether consciously or not, to ‘subvert’ NC guidelines and to challenge the standards-driven agenda.

The influence of training

Initial training for teachers is currently heavily influenced by an instrumental, developmental discourse that is confirmed through current curriculum guidance that, at best, focuses on using picture books as a stage in learning to read and, at worst, discourages young children from enjoying picture books until they have an understanding of how words work (Goodwin 2008; Whitehead, 2010).

The data from this study confirms that there had been very little attention paid to the subject of picture books as a tool for inclusive practice in initial training although several EY practitioners were able to show how CPD had enabled them to gain specific training with regard to understanding the needs of children with particular disabilities. The fact that so many of the sample were very positive about their disability awareness training may well be a tribute to the way this particular LA undertakes this element of staff development. The CPD training included courses about ASD, behaviour management and supporting medical needs and in almost all cases, these were in response to a child about to be admitted to the setting and were usually attended by those who held the role of SENCO. The training was then cascaded to other staff as soon as possible. Some also made reference to learning strategies to facilitate inclusion; for example, training in the use of Makaton sign language and there was also mention of training in relation to fulfilling legal requirements, for example SENDA, and these were again, largely perceived as the responsibility of the SENCO and senior management staff.

The data from training providers indicated that PGCE courses were concerned with providing information about the more common SEN and understanding these in the context of classroom coping strategies. Non-teaching training routes had a stronger emphasis on equality awareness training in general and some had embedded the

subject throughout several different modules. All of this indicates that the disability awareness content on different courses continues to differ in emphasis despite recent legislative and policy changes and the expectation that most practitioners will work in inclusive settings. Several trainers seemed unsure about the extent to which the use of picture books to enhance an understanding of disability was covered and which modules included this aspect.

The experience of practitioners confirms the wide variations in the content of the initial training and was dependent to some degree on when it took place, the particular course that was being studied and the particular interest of trainers. Partly due to the fact that several of the participants were experienced senior staff, it emerged that half of the initial training had taken place during the 1970s, prior to the Warnock report of 1978 which meant that there may have been little emphasis on the subject of disability on their courses.

The impact of personal preferences and interests

A strong personal interest in picture books, in terms of their aesthetic and transformative value, appears to be a real advantage in terms of making them a priority in the NS. However, if individual EY practitioners do not include some of the less available titles in their personal collection, colleagues, parents and children may never become aware of them. This adds an additional problem in that when they eventually leave or retire, there is no guarantee that they will be replaced by another practitioner with a similar commitment. Some of these issues are articulated clearly in the interviews and are expressed as opinions in individual responses to the four picture books used in this study and a significant body of wider literature exists to support these concerns.

There has been, over recent years, a political and ideological shift towards standardising the purpose of education at all levels and with that has come requirements to adopt practice which conforms to national guidelines (Skidmore, 2004). A good example of this might be the debate around the teaching of synthetic phonics which, despite its contested status, has come to be regarded as a kind of 'industry standard' for the way the teaching

of reading should happen. The implications of conforming to a dominant organisational discourse which may conflict with a practitioners personal beliefs is not always immediately obvious and may not play itself out overtly in the way they see their role developing. A good number of EY practitioners resist the idea that they are instruments of political or ideological reproduction and regard their relationship with children as straightforward and non-political (Robertson, Jones Diaz, 2006, Mohamed, 2006) and consequently, when they are selecting books to use with the children, they are unlikely to be consciously choosing those stating an overt or passive ideology (Hollindale, 1992).

What are the perceived circumstances affecting availability of picture books with a disability related theme for use in nursery schools?

The sources most commonly used for obtaining books and which are cited by several participants do not currently include on their roster a range of picture books with an obvious disability link. These are the most accessible outlets in terms of convenience and competitive prices and so it seems unlikely that busy practitioners will seek out more obscure sources. The findings in this study have shown that if children in NS have access to particular books relating to disability, it is largely because individual staff have sought them out or seen them used by other practitioners and this appears to be down to whether individuals have either a particular responsibility for books as part of their professional role or because they show an enthusiasm for the job.

Despite the lobbying arising from projects like Scope's 'In the Picture', these books still remain difficult to access. The relative commercial power of larger publishing houses that can offer larger discounts means that smaller, more specialist publishers and distributors will always be at a disadvantage in terms of effective marketing. For instance, 'Letter box Library' has been in existence for over twenty years but only five EY practitioners were aware of it despite the fact that the central library service and the main LA distributor order some books from this source.

This research may have had an impact on awareness in its own right and, as a result, individual EY practitioners will be more aware of the issue and may ask for further guidance from the library service. Senior staff, in their turn, may decide to focus on improved resources as part of their NS improvement plans or seek out specific training.

Training providers have indicated that there was a lack of content on some courses and have therefore expressed some interest in improving disability awareness for staff and students. The impact of Scope's 'In the Picture' project has also had some effect on the way in which illustration is now taught to prospective new illustrators in some art colleges in the sense that representation of disability is considered as an important component of the course. The project had already highlighted the need for an awareness raising campaign and over a three year period (concurrent with this research) it achieved a great deal in legitimizing the issue and making it an important debate.

How do picture books transmit ideology and culture?

The findings confirm that picture books are highly valued cultural objects in NS and are an acknowledged feature of the learning environment. The EY practitioners all emphasise their importance in different ways. The interviews demonstrate a passion and enthusiasm for using picture books that was not always in relation to stated curriculum areas but seemed to be concerned with fostering enjoyment and pleasure. Children are provided with a learning environment that underscores the importance of books and are encouraged to see how these can affect other areas of their learning. Eddie explains that all staff are sensitive to how the children respond to the books they are given:

We are noticing and getting better at noticing where the children are using their prior knowledge of books and giving further opportunities for children to re-engage in that learning. Perhaps before we had not noticed when a child had literally picked up a story or seeks out a book or talked about a story character.

The fact that children are building on their prior experience of books is clearly recognised and the willingness of the practitioners to acknowledge this demonstrates a respect for this process. Edith explains that practitioners are responsive to the interests of children and also recognise the need to work alongside them to extend their knowledge and understanding:

We try to follow the children's interests so for instance, one little boy is very interested in dragons at the moment so we are looking for books about dragons. The children seem to choose to look at books a lot during free choice time and there is often a member of staff timetabled to be based in the book area so that they can

look at them with children. They also have a group time at the end of every session when they often have stories read to them.

Because of the status and prominence books are given in NS their influence on practitioners, children and parents ideas about childhood is powerful. Messages are conveyed through the story and picture content which often confirm a conservative, predictable world view where problems are resolved and happy endings predominate. This content is not arbitrary and is informed by what authors and illustrators, publishers, distributors and, in turn EY practitioners judge to be appropriate for consumption by young children in NS settings. Chapters one and two discuss the battle of ideas between competing conceptualisations of childhood and how these shift and change as a result of historical and cultural climates. This study has shown that alongside the powerful developmental discourse that shapes professional practice through training and curriculum guidance, it is the romantic discourse that has most popular resonance in terms of constructing views of childhood. Indeed, Nodelman (2008) suggests that the perpetuation of the idea of childlike innocence that characterizes much of children's literature is an invention by adults in order that they themselves may be able to indulge a nostalgia that allows them return to that state. The creation of a market for this kind of nostalgia has also turned into a major commercial opportunity so that the perpetuation of a particular idea of childhood is in itself exploitative. The fact that so many children's picture books reflect, reinforce and reproduce the idea of childhood as a special protected space demonstrates the power of this discourse. What a practitioner thinks 'childhood' is or what it is 'for' can, often sub-consciously, direct the kind of resources they select to use with children. So, if the role of these picture books in the setting is to confirm dominant ideas rather than challenge them, EY practitioners need to be mindful of the messages being transmitted.

Can picture books be seen as contributing to alternative constructions of disability?

The subject of disability does not fit easily into the romantic discourse of childhood and demonstrates the way in which, if equality issues more widely are to be adequately represented in books, there needs to be a different approach adopted by the big, influential publishing houses. Some smaller, specialist publishers ('Tamarind' and 'Barefoot Books') have tried to break out of this narrow discourse to convey particular messages in

relation to equality and diversity through both the subject matter and the illustrations. The distributor 'Letterbox Library' represents an example of how books with a diversity theme can be relatively well marketed, although this is challenging when in competition with more influential distributors who have access to NS and thus influence picture book choices. Knowledge of these small publishers and distributors still relies on 'word of mouth' rather than advertising and the potential influence of initial and CPD trainers is an aspect to be considered here. However, if using picture books as a vehicle for inclusive practice does not feature on these courses, as the trainer data suggests, then there is another missed opportunity for broadening the choice.

Publishers, distributors and illustrators are themselves influenced by the dominant ideas of childhood that shape the views of wider society and there is clearly a problem when this is not necessarily in tune with the potential market for books relating to the theme of more diverse childhoods, including those of disabled children. The vast majority of picture books that are easily accessible are inevitably concerned with perpetuating a 'universal' childhood that often fails to acknowledge what sociologists and educationalists have identified as diverse and varied (eg. Butts, 1992; James, James, 2004; Cunningham, 2006; Collins, Safford, 2008).

Even when diversity is acknowledged, there is still the danger of tokenistic representation and a narrow interpretation of children's different circumstances. It is still rare to find picture books that represent the family life of a child with a dual heritage, a lone parent, or a same sex parentage, never mind acknowledge that many children may have more than one of these attributes. Indeed, the possibility of having a child from an ethnic minority with a disability was raised at the 'Story so Far' conference in 2006 and the way that publisher delegates responded to this question indicated that this kind of eventuality had not really been anticipated as something they might need to respond to since none was able to name one that was currently in print.

A casual examination of children's books in any bookstore would be enough to quash any expectations that a reader might have of encountering a range of picture books that represented the lives of children with disabilities, or even acknowledged that disability was now a feature of everyday life. Indeed Matthew and Clow (2007) suggest that this absence is actually to be expected because it reflects the real world and as Hollindale (1992:32) points out 'a large part of any book is written not only by its author but by the

world the author lives in'. Wilkie –Stibbs (2007) expresses the view that this is a state of affairs that we may have to get used to because people with disabilities will always be more 'othered' than other groups and there does seem to be evidence to support this view. After all, despite the rhetoric of inclusion, the continued existence of segregated educational and other provision implies the need for separation from mainstream society if their needs cannot be adequately met, or when 'reasonable adjustments' cannot be made.

It may be that the relative lack of picture books that depict disability-related content also confirms this separateness. The research demonstrates that the continued invisibility of such content is due to a number of factors but that it is a shared responsibility to challenge the lack of visibility, particularly as it contradicts the experience of so many children who attend inclusive EY settings. It would be reassuring to believe that if EY practitioners were more aware of what was *not* available in terms of range of images, they may put pressure on publishers and distributors to do more to fill the gaps. However, in reality they have very little power in terms of influence and although the EY practitioner is at the heart of the process that determines whether books with a disability related theme are provided in NS, these research findings suggest that the relationship between the different 'spheres of influence' is more clearly represented by placing the publishers at the centre (see fig 6:2). Publishers are profoundly influenced by global and national markets and only minimally affected by campaigning and pressure groups. 'The Story so Far' conference organised by the charity 'Scope' aimed at children's publishers held in October 2006 highlighted the concern about minimal portrayal of disability in children's picture books. A much larger conference 'Diversity Matters: Growing markets in children's publishing' held earlier the same year was organised by the Independent Publishers Guild with many prestigious speakers. This was convened in order to discuss how publishers could address diversity, with a particular emphasis on ethnicity, but notes from a conference steering committee delegate suggest that 'we don't know the market and we don't know how to address it' (Atkins, 2006). A closing statement from Gary Mckeone, Director of Literature, Arts Council, England is noted: 'We can create children's literature that reflects the worlds we inhabit' (Atkins, 2006).

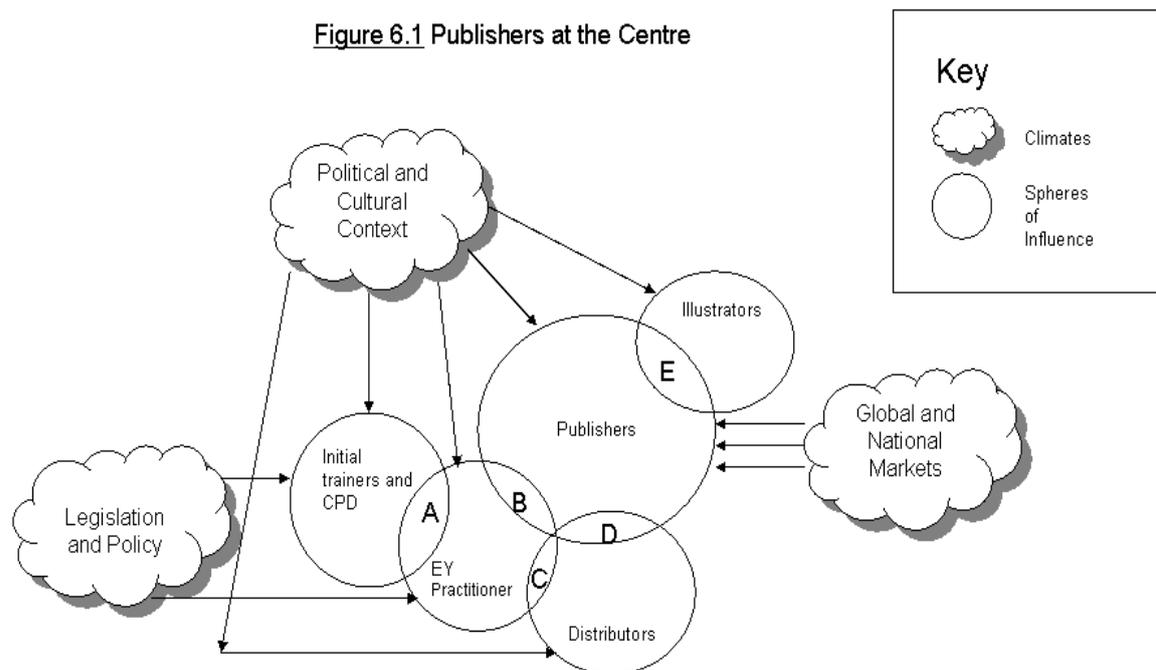
Neither do publishers appear to be at all influenced by legislation and policy which is a dominant climate for Trainees and EY practitioners although they are inevitably influenced by the political and cultural climate which includes how childhood is defined

and depicted. Figure 6:2 suggests that there is no obvious interface between some of these spheres. For instance, although there should be some relationship between trainers and publishers, this is not clear from the findings.

There is a wider concern here with respect to the influence that practitioners and academics have on education policy in general. The EYFS (Great Britain.DfES, 2007) was controversial when it was being written as many felt that it was over prescriptive and driven by a developmental discourse (Dahlberg, Moss, 2005). Another more recent example of this has been the debate about the limitations of the synthetic phonics approach to reading. Despite the reliability of the original research being questioned (Wyse, Goswami, 2008), it has been demonstrated through reviewing the EYFS document that this has become the dominant approach towards teaching very young children to read and also contradicts what SENDA recommends in terms of the need to consider individual differences in providing differentiated approaches.

This raises the question of the value of dissenting voices if they have little impact on policy. Shipman (1997:35) explains that it is important to use research to understand the power of knowledge in terms of ‘what it is, how we get it, how we recognise it, how it relates to truth, how it is entangled with power’. In recognising that EY settings act as agents of cultural and ideological hegemony (Apple, 2004), this piece of research aimed to explore whether a sample of EY practitioners were aware of and concerned at the relative lack of picture books with a disability related theme. Educational research is meaningful precisely because it raises difficult questions and potentially disturbs taken for granted power relationships through a variety of means that include ‘giving or getting a voice; guiding and influencing policy change; engaging in political processes of change in education,’ Griffiths (1998:3).

Figure 6.1 Publishers at the Centre



A Initial and CPD trainers provide an important context with regard to giving status to how picture books can be used as a tool for inclusive practice. They may have limited impact in terms of when the training took place and the focus of the training which may be predominantly in relation to compliance with legislation.

B Publishers have an impact on practitioner selection in terms of what they produce for consumption. Smaller publishers have limited influence due to relative lack of visibility. The findings demonstrate that this is largely a one way relationship and that, although EY practitioners recognize the need for more books, this is not communicated to publishers.

C Many EY practitioners are dependent on a limited range of distributors when they are selecting books. This is largely due to convenience and marketing. Smaller distributors have limited access to practitioners and rely on recommendations.

D Distributors respond to what is published. The library service has expressed the need for more picture books relating to disability but with little impact.

E Illustrators are usually commissioned by publishers but can submit proposals.

Concluding remarks

This research has demonstrated that the decisions taken by EY practitioners about the provision of picture books with disability related content for children is subject to a wide range of competing influences. Whilst legislation and policy appears to have a limited impact on these decisions, personal commitment, individual taste and a desire to teach children about equality issues all seem to play a key role. However, the practitioner is not ultimately in control of what is out there to use and if publishers do not produce books relating to this subject and they are insufficiently advertised and marketed, then they are unlikely to be made available to children in NS. Ultimately, however, this is not just a matter of supply and demand. There are political and ideological reasons why picture books featuring disability are not produced in the sort of numbers that makes their selection easy and convenient and so challenging this process becomes, itself, a political act. Seale (1999:9) points out that ‘the quality of research should be judged in terms of its political effects rather than its capacity to formulate universal laws or apparently objective truth’.

It is a frequently expressed opinion that politics should be external to pedagogy, and that it can even be potentially damaging to children, which is an argument that seems to have an impact on the extent to which practitioners are committed to choosing particular picture books. Returning to the theme of the seminal paper by Hollindale (1988), his notion that a ‘passive ideology’ effectively enables characters from a particular minority group to be omitted from books is a key concept. By not recognizing the potential omission, Naidoo (1992:16) suggests that a practitioner is in reality signalling a very clear political perspective: ‘Literature is political and one’s choice of literature is political, although the reader may of course ignore, or simply not see, the meanings that are there’.

Those working with very young children play a particularly powerful role in developing attitudes and values and as part of this, Pinsent (1992:97) suggests that adults ‘must be a facilitator’ in helping children to understand the effects of inequality. This may challenge some widely held public perceptions about the role of EY practitioners and which may be shared by some staff themselves. McGillivray (2008:245) is amongst those writers who suggest that low self-esteem alongside compliance with a current public discourse ‘that is construed as caring, maternal and gendered, as opposed to professional, degree educated and highly trained’ contributes to a self-definition that emphasizes the delivery of a

curriculum framed by principles of protection and care. She further suggests (2008: 252) that this important but essentially limited role is still endorsed by influential populist newspaper writers such as Liddle (2006) who ‘believes that being an early years practitioner is the same as being a parent, and are dismissive of the need to promote the status and training of the workforce.’ This very narrow interpretation of their job may contribute to a lack of confidence in the practitioner when it comes to actively promoting what may be regarded as political views. This is where Gramsci’s notion of ‘traditional’ intellectuals, who are conformist and conservative in their approach, and ‘organic’ intellectuals, who are more creative and unorthodox, comes in useful (MacNaughton et al., 2007). It may be that EY practitioners are more likely to behave in as ‘traditional’ academics in the way they interpret their role. Despite the previously noted flexibility and relative creativity associated with NS practice, they are working within a regulated and increasingly competitive sector that places emphasis on efficiency, standards and preparation for statutory schooling.

However, it would be wrong to suggest that the situation is without shade and depth. There are reflective ‘organic’ EY practitioners who are looking for ways in which to stimulate curiosity and debate with children and they may view picture books as effective vehicles in what Rinaldi (2005:183) describes as ‘a place of encounter’ where meanings can be challenged and redefined and provide ‘complex sites of social action’ (Nodleman, 2008:125). Despite the relative difficulties of getting hold of good resources it requires EY practitioners at a micro level to use the books that they have got in a more creative way. For instance, by using traditional stories like *Rolling along with Goldilocks and the Three Bears* in a way that requires children to shift their point of view it is still possible to have an impact on attitudes. In the interviews Gillian explained that this flexibility of interpretation is already a feature of good EY practice:

I do try and find books that give a slightly different slant on them when I can, when I am working with small groups, and also using them on in a different way for work for example at the moment one of the activities I am doing with Goldilocks and the Three Bears is to get the children to design a new chair for baby bear for xmas because it was broken.

The initial and CPD training that practitioners get could do more to introduce them to the potential power of picture books as complex cultural artefacts especially if it picks up on

the academic writing which has emphasized how picture books can develop young children's cognitive skills, allow them to engage with possibilities, in-depth analysis and problem solving, and most importantly, enable an opportunity to challenge the status quo and construct new meanings (Stephens, 1992; Knowles, Malmkjaer, 1996; Lewis, 2001; O'Neill, 2001; Nodleman, 2008). There was little discussion by the practitioners interviewed for this study about this aspect of their value, other than by Eddie who had experienced initial training that explored this aspect in considerable depth. Once again, this emphasizes the way in which a combination of individual interests and training can come together to, almost incidentally, produce a practitioner who can make the most of a resource like picture books. What is important here is that this process should not be accidental but a planned part of all practitioner training.

This requires all initial and CPD training providers to familiarize themselves with the range of picture books available as part of helping future EY practitioners to understand how the implications for promoting disability equality in schools (Great Britain.DfES, 2006) relates to all aspects of the curriculum, not only ensuring that students understand the implementation of the SEN Code of Practice (Great Britain.DfES, 2001). As Flear and Robbins (2007:105) suggest, this concern about practitioner responsibility needs to be first explored through training and implies 'the need to use new lenses'. Further evidence identified in research by Cremin et al (2007) that demonstrated the lack of practitioner knowledge about books in general and this also needs to be acknowledged and acted on if practitioners are to become confident in terms of picture book selection before they can be used as an effective tool for inclusive practice.

It would seem that there is minimal congruence between illustrators, publishers, distributors, training providers and EY practitioners when it comes to producing and providing picture books that reflect a world in which disability is visible and, more to the point, practitioners are not at the centre of the debate. Ideally this research would have painted a picture in which all of these agents were working together to provide EY children in NS with powerful, transformative experiences of literature relating to the theme of disability which was endorsed by legislation and policy; but, in reality, they are clearly working in parallel or in opposition to one another because of different underlying purposes and priorities and this relationship is represented by figure 6.2. It is the publishers who have emerged in many ways as the key players in whether picture books with a disability related theme should be made more readily available and whilst it is

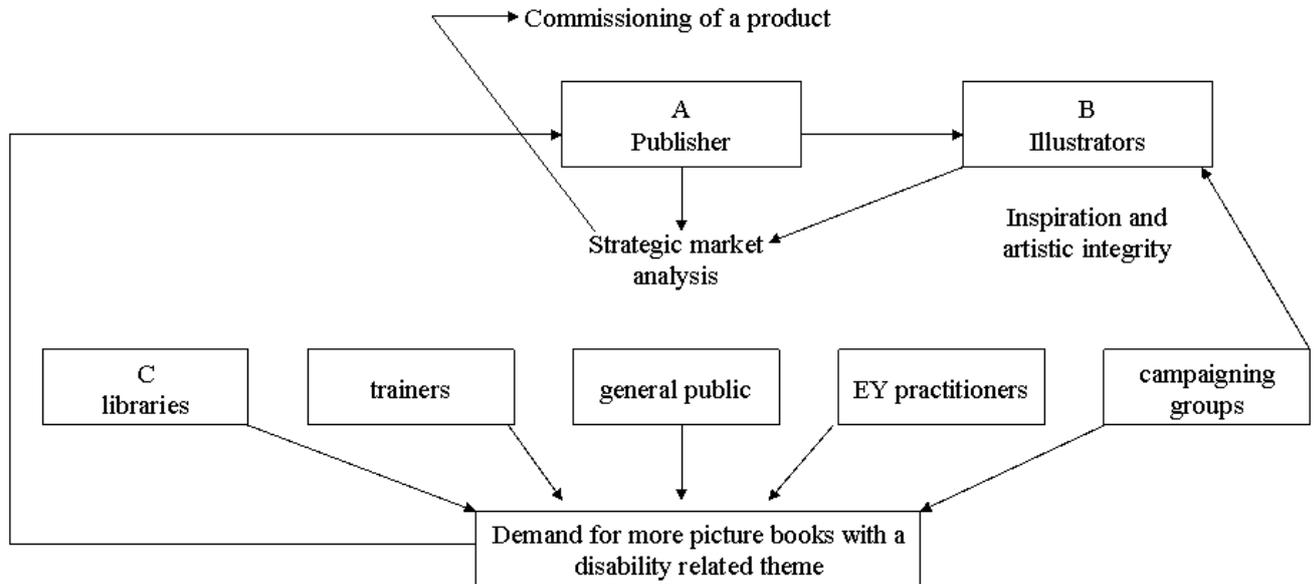
possible to speculate about the social and economic pressures that create this situation further research with a sample of participants from these organisations would be beneficial in order to understand why they, the illustrators and distributors they work with are not addressing this issue.

However, the focus of this research has been on the role of the EY practitioner in terms of how they have responded to the challenge and opportunities of using picture books to promote a wider understanding of disability and equality. What is clear is that picture books can contribute to alternative constructions of disability if they are given status beyond a limited instrumental role and their potential in informing a critical reading of reality by young children has been well established (Arizpe, Styles, 2001; Saltmarsh, 2007; Nodleman, 2008; O'Neill, 2010). In order for this to happen, practitioners need to be aware of this potential and this can best be done through initial and CPD training. Practitioners can also play a significant role alongside training providers, libraries and other distributors, and campaigning groups in alerting publishers to the need for more picture books with a disability related themes (see figure 6.3). However, to get this kind of change practitioners need to become more vocal about what is needed rather than just about the volume of material they have or their perceived shortages. As Vandembroeck (2007:26) suggests: 'Power is not a property of a group or an acquired privilege but rather the general effect of strategic positions that is also influenced by the position taken by dominated groups as power also invests in those groups'.

This research has tried to take forward a conversation about an issue that is, for most of the time, inaudible. The problem seems quite easy to state but, as we have seen, much more difficult to analyse and understand. EY practitioners are charged with the important task of introducing children to a complex set of ideas around what we know now as equality and diversity and the resources they have to do that job are crucial. What this research has demonstrated is that disability is an issue that is very poorly reflected in the content of children's picture books and, as a result, practitioners are not easily able to use this medium as a gateway for children to encounter the disabled world. The reasons why these books are not being produced are complex and multi-dimensional and difficult to resolve but it is clear that there will be no resolution unless the quiet conversation becomes more of a clamour and it is the contention of this study that this debate can and should be led by the practitioners themselves. There is every

reason to believe this is possible if we are prepared to recognise that an EY educational setting 'is not a passive mirror, but an *active* force (Apple, 2004: 39).

Figure 6.2 Recommendations



A The publisher is acknowledged as central to the process but has a more dynamic relationship with all those groups concerned.

B The illustrators are powerful in the sense that they must translate and interpret in a meaningful, sensitive way what results from the strategic market analysis. It is suggested that they may need to consult with and be responsive to all those groups concerned.

C All those with vested interests in providing children with more picture books with a disability related theme will work together more effectively in recognition of the need to combine forces. The EY practitioners are crucial to this. This in turn will inform the commissioning of products that, through effective, creative interpretation by illustrators will meet the needs of the market in response to the requirements of legislation and policy. It is suggested that this is a potentially lucrative market.

List of Appendices

1. Letter to Head teachers
2. Questionnaire to EY practitioner participants
3. Instructions and Questionnaire to participants about picture books
4. Training Provider completed questionnaire example
5. EY interview questions
6. Twelve point checklist

Appendix 1

Dear Head teacher

Research into Picture Books

I have agreed with the University of Leicester to undertake research into how picture books are used in Early Years settings and would be very grateful for your co operation.

I am investigating how picture books are used by practitioners with 3-5 year olds in Birmingham. In order to do this, it would be beneficial to gather initial data from all nursery schools in the city. This would involve a named member of staff completing a brief questionnaire relating to the following:

1. a list of picture books most frequently used by the practitioner with children in the setting
2. information relating to initial and subsequent training on the use of picture books with young children

Please complete the attached proforma and return in the enclosed S.A.E. or via e mail by 19th March 2007. If you are willing to participate in this initial stage of the research, I will send out the questionnaire at the beginning of the Summer term.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at k.m.argent@newman.ac.uk

Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely

Karen Argent

Senior Lecturer in Early Years Education Studies

Newman College of Higher Education

Bartley Green

Birmingham

B32 3NT

Research into Picture Books

Name of setting:

will/ will not participate in the initial stage of the picture book research.

Contact details for named member of staff if appropriate:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Please return by 19th March 2007.

Thank you.

Appendix 2

Name of the setting:

Role in the setting:

Questionnaire

- 1. Please write your own personal ‘top ten’ of picture books that you currently use with children and/or would recommend for use with children aged 3-5 in your setting. These need not be in order of preference.**

Title of book	Author and/illustrator (if known)

Please complete the following questions by ticking the relevant boxes (more than one can be ticked if appropriate):

2. How are picture books made accessible to children in your setting?

Free access throughout the session	At the end of the session	To take home on loan
At the beginning of the session	At group times	Other (please give details)

3. Where are picture books used in your setting?

Throughout the indoor environment	Entrance hall	Throughout the outdoor environment
Displays	Role play area	Other (please give details)

4. Who is responsible for selecting the picture books that are used in your setting?

Headteacher	Literacy Co ordinator	Parents	Students
Deputy Headteacher	Children	Library service	Other (give details)

5. From what sources are they selected?

Library service	Charity shops	Car boot sales	Book reviews in professional journals	Book reviews in newspapers
Bookshops	Publisher's Catalogues	Parents	Staff	Other (please give details)

6. Did your initial professional training explore the issue of disability?

Yes	No
-----	----

Briefly describe the topics covered:

7. Has your in- service professional training explored the issue of disability?

Yes	No
-----	----

Briefly describe the topics covered:

8. Are you aware of any picture books that address the issue of disability?

Title of book/s	Author/illustrator (if known)

**Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.
Please return in the enclosed S.A.E. by 17th July 2007.**

Appendix 3

My PhD research investigates what shapes the decisions made by Early Years practitioners in providing children with picture books that relate to a theme of disability.

Part of this involves looking at individual responses to 4 selected picture books.

Instructions for participants

Take time to look at the enclosed picture book.

**Complete the enclosed proforma as fully as possible.
Continue overleaf if necessary.**

Return the completed proforma and book to the folder.

Thank you for your valued contribution to this piece of research.

**If you would like further details please contact Karen Argent at
k.m.argent@newman.ac.uk**

Title of book <i>My Brother Sammy</i>		Author and illustrator Becky Edwards and David Armitage	
Publishing details 1999 London: Bloomsbury Publishing ISBN 0-7475-4654-1		Publishers synopsis: Sammy is not like other brothers- he doesn't play the same games, or go to the same school- because Sammy is autistic. But Sammy does not need special love for he is just like any other brother and needs understanding, patience and acceptance. A wonderful and heartwarming book about brotherly love, with beautiful art and lyrical text.	
Amount of text			
Style of illustrations			
Overall content			
Have you heard of this book before?			
Any other comments			
Would you use it with Early Years children?			

Please circle accordingly

Current EY practitioner	EY practitioner before 2001
EY Student	EY practitioner before 1995

Thank you

Appendix 4

PhD research on Picture books

Questions to Initial Training Providers

Please complete a separate form for each individual course that applies to your organisation /institution.

Please bold/ circle accordingly:

BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies BA (Hons) Early Years Education and Teaching 3-7 age range

PGCE Primary 3-7 age range FdA Early Childhood Studies FdA Children and Young People's Services

CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Childcare and Education Other

1. In what ways is the subject of disability awareness covered during the course/ as part of continuing professional development?

2. Has this changed significantly in the last 10 years?

3. Does the course include discussion of resources e.g. picture books relating to disability awareness to be used with young children?

Thank you for completing the above information. If you have any further questions about this research please do not hesitate to contact me. _____

Karen Argent

PhD research student at Leicester University k.m.argent@newman.ac.uk

Confidentiality agreement

Thank you for providing this information. Please note that you reserve the right to withdraw from participation in this piece of research at any future stage before anticipated publication in January 2009.

Please bold/ circle accordingly:

Extracts from this data may be used in the final PhD thesis, related conferences and publications.	Agree Disagree
--	-------------------

Please indicate if you are willing to have the source of the data acknowledged.	Agree Disagree
---	-------------------

Name

Signature:

Date:

Appendix 5

EY practitioner participant semi structured interview questions

Introduction

My research about picture books in nursery schools is looking at what influences selection with a particular emphasis on books with elements about disability. I am hoping that the interview will give me a bit more information about your individual responses.

It should take no more than 20 mins

Do you have any objection to it being taped?

1. What influenced your selection of the top ten picture books?

Prompts:

(Find one of those listed on questionnaire response that I like/ know myself and give brief example of why)

Refer to list- maybe 3 examples?

Eg.

- Familiarity/ nostalgia
- Training / recommendations
- Success with children
- Illustrative style

1. How are picture books made available in the setting?

Can you tell me a bit more about this (refer to questionnaire responses).

Have there been any changes in the ways books have been used in the setting?

2. Where are picture books used in your setting?

Why these places? (refer to responses)

3. Who is responsible for selecting the picture books that are used in your setting?

What do you feel about this? (refer to responses)

Would you like to be more involved in the selection?

4. From what sources are they selected/

I see you have ticked several sources (refer to examples from responses)

How happy are you with these different sources. Could these be added to?

5. Did your initial training explore the issue of disability?

Can you tell me when you trained and what course/ college you were at? Would it have been useful to have more emphasis on this? Did it include any information about legislation / policy?

6. Has your in- service professional training explored the issue of disability?

Can you provide a bit more information about this – was it recent/ extensive? Did all staff attend it? Was it useful?

Did it include any information about legislation / policy?

7. Are you aware of any picture books that address the issue of disability?

Do you feel it is important for children to have books that relate to this issue?

Thanks plus information about sending transcript for confirmation and next stage of research.

Appendix 6

Twelve point checklist

- Do the materials show a variety of lifestyles?
- Do they show regard for, and acceptance of, people with disabilities?
- Are people with disabilities featured as part of everyday life?
- Are there characters with whom special children could identify?
- Are such characters portrayed in a positive manner?
- Do they show evidence of the ability to make decisions about their own lives?
- Is there evidence of stereotyping concerned with disabilities?
- Does the language convey prejudice ('four eyes' 'dumbo' etc.)?
- Are events only seen from the able- bodied viewpoint?
- Are people with disabilities blamed for their conditions?
- Are people with disabilities patronized?
- Is the image of the able or able- bodied as having all the power reinforced (through text or illustrations?)

Source: Leicester (1992) quoted by Lewis (1995: 61-62).

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