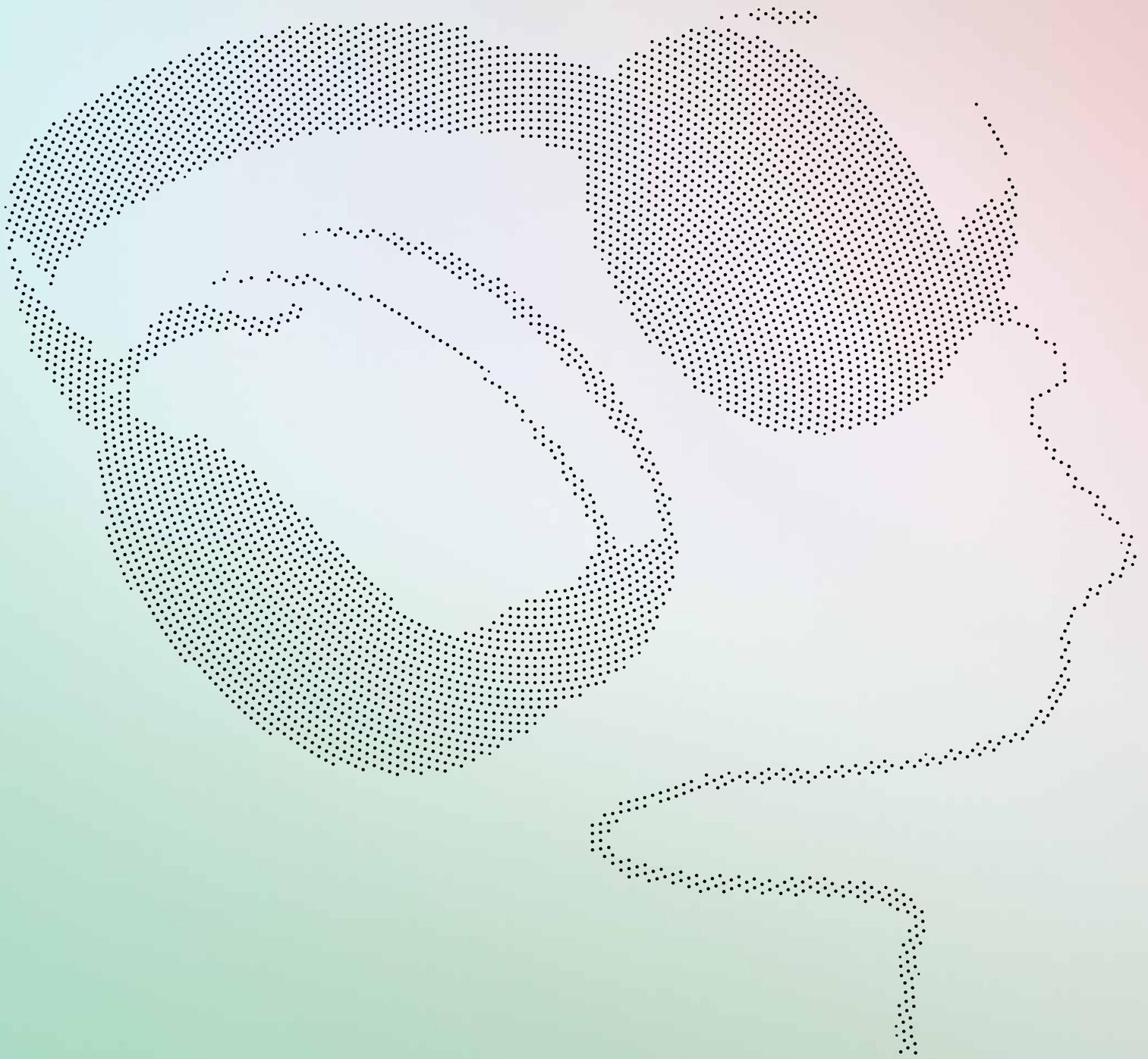


Talking books and reading children

Children describing their use of talking books





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Children describing their use of talking books

ANNA HAMPSON LUNDH

WITH FOREWORD BY JENNY NILSSON

TRANSLATION SPRÅKSERVICE SVERIGE AB

© Published 2013 by the Swedish Agency for Accessible Media (MTM), Johanneshov

ISBN: 978-91-981060-3-9

Original title: Talande böcker och läsande barn – barn berättar om talboksanvändning

Text: Anna Hampson Lundh

Editors: Jenny Nilsson, Mia Snygg

Photo: cover: Marita Forsberg; insert: Elliot Elliot

The children in the photographs have not participated in the survey.

Graphic design: Gudfar

Layout: Marita Forsberg

Printing: TMG Tabergs AB, 2013

Foreword

FROM THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD:

Article 12 Freedom of opinion and the right to be heard

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body [...]

The Swedish Agency for Accessible Media, MTM, is a State-run agency that works towards providing persons with reading difficulties with literature in an accessible form. Up until the end of December 2012, the Agency was called the Swedish Library of Talking Books and Braille, TPB. MTM has adopted a comprehensive strategy to ensure that the work to make literature accessible to children and young people with reading difficulties is structured, goal oriented and long-term.

The basis for MTM's work with accessible media for children and young people is formed from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the norms, valuations and principles it expresses. Additionally, it is formed from MTM's tasks set forth in official documents and ordinances.

MTM therefore wishes to know what children think about the products and services that are offered. The talking book is the form of accessible literature that the most children read. Talking books are still mainly borrowed from local libraries, even though more and more children are using the 'Personal download' service. An investigation into talking books in particular has been prioritised in the strategy.

The investigation will find out what children think about the design, range and provision of talking books from MTM. It will also deal with the way the children are received by the local library. In Sweden, we have chosen a talking book model, where the local library supplies talking books to the library users who need them. It is therefore important that the reception of the children who require talking books is as sensitive and knowledgeable as possible at the local library.

MTM has chosen to conduct the investigation using focus groups. These provide a source for detailed, qualitative discussions that help us to understand the needs and wishes of the children. Of course, this is also an advantage to children with reading difficulties, as it is a 'spoken' investigation.

I conducted focus group interviews with users of talking books between the ages of 9 and 16. For five of the groups, I had the help of MTM's then young person's librarian Anna Fahlbeck and in the remaining groups, my colleagues Lena Boqvist and Gun Olsson. This was conducted in cooperation with county/regional libraries in four counties: Stockholm, Halland, Västerbotten and Värmland. This provided a good geographical spread that reflected the different relationships in different parts of Sweden; in rural areas and large cities. In the library focus groups, there was no group of children with visual impairments. Therefore, the investigation was complemented by a focus group of children who were members of Synskadades riksförbund (The Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired). In total, there were nine groups including 30 boys and 21 girls.

I began initial early contact with Anna Hampson Lundh at the University of Borås, as she has the research expertise that MTM lacks. Her doctoral thesis, *Doing Research in Primary School* (Lundh, 2011), about children's knowledge construction in the early school years had many links to the areas we wished to investigate. In the report, she provides her reflections on the material.

I would like to thank the county/regional libraries in the counties of Stockholm, Halland, Västerbotten and Värmland for ensuring that we were able to contact municipal libraries that wished to organise focus groups. A big thank you goes out to the municipality libraries concerned (Malå, Umeå, Vallentuna, Solentuna, Arvika, Kungsbacka and Falkenberg) and to Synskadades riksförbund. Thanks to colleagues and to Emma Åstrand, who transcribed all the recorded focus group discussions.

A particular thank you for Anna Hampson Lundh who, by creating this report, provides us with a valuable analysis to help us develop the way we design and distribute talking books.

However, most of all I would like to thank the 51 children who participated and generously shared their thoughts about talking books.

Jenny Nilsson

children and youth librarian.

Swedish Agency for Accessible Media, MTM.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Swedish Agency for Accessible Media for entrusting me with writing this report, in addition to the children that volunteered in the focus groups conducted by MTM with great merit.

A special thank you to the project leader Jenny Nilsson for the constructive dialogue throughout the entire collaboration. Thanks also to Åse Hedemark at Uppsala University for enabling the contact between MTM and me.

The Swedish School of Library and Information Science (SSLIS) at the University of Borås provided me with the space needed to write this report in late 2012, whilst at the same time the Children and Youth Research Centre and the Information Ecology Discipline at Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia provided me with the opportunity to work at not just one, but two workplaces during this period. My thanks goes to these institutions.

Also a warm thank you to Keith Hampson for his editing of the English abstract.

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Abstract

Talking books and reading children: Children describing their use of talking books

The purpose of this report is to provide an enhanced understanding of young users (under the age of 18) of talking books and, with a basis of this understanding, to create a foundation for the further development of Swedish library services to this target group.

This report is written on behalf of the Swedish Agency for Accessible Media. The study background is formulated in the Agency's Children and Youth Strategy for 2012–2014, in which the implementation of a children's perspective in the organisation is emphasised. Through this report, the Agency wants to explore how young users of talking books describe four themes 1) reading as an activity; 2) talking books; 3) ways of finding talking books; and 4) the services of their local libraries.

The study is based on nine focus group conversations that were conducted by the Swedish Agency for Accessible Media and organised by four county libraries, and The Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired. A total of 51 children participated, including 30 boys and 21 girls aged 9 to 16 years. All participants had some form of print disability, such as dyslexia or visual impairment. The size of the groups ranged from 3 to 10 participants, and interviews lasted between half an hour to an hour and a quarter.

The focus group data was analysed in three phases: first through an initial coding based on the four themes set out by the Agency; second by compiling how the groups described the themes of *reading*, *talking books*, *ways of finding talking books* and *libraries*, and identify similarities and differences in each theme. The results of this part of the analysis is presented in a separate chapter and illustrated with quotations from the conversations. The third phase of the analysis entails a discussion of the themes based on three theoretical concepts: *the materiality of reading*, *remediation*, and *affordances*.

Three overall conclusions on how Swedish libraries could further develop its services to young users of talking books are drawn from the analysis:

1. To further develop their services to young users of talking books, Swedish libraries could focus on enhancing their work on children's *use* of talking books.
2. One way to further develop the services to young users of talking books is to, on a national as well as a local level, encourage a critical discussion on *why* children should use talking books.
3. Finally, to further develop the services to young users of talking books, the importance of a professional approach to each individual encounter with potential and future users of talking books needs to be continuously emphasised.

Terms and abbreviations

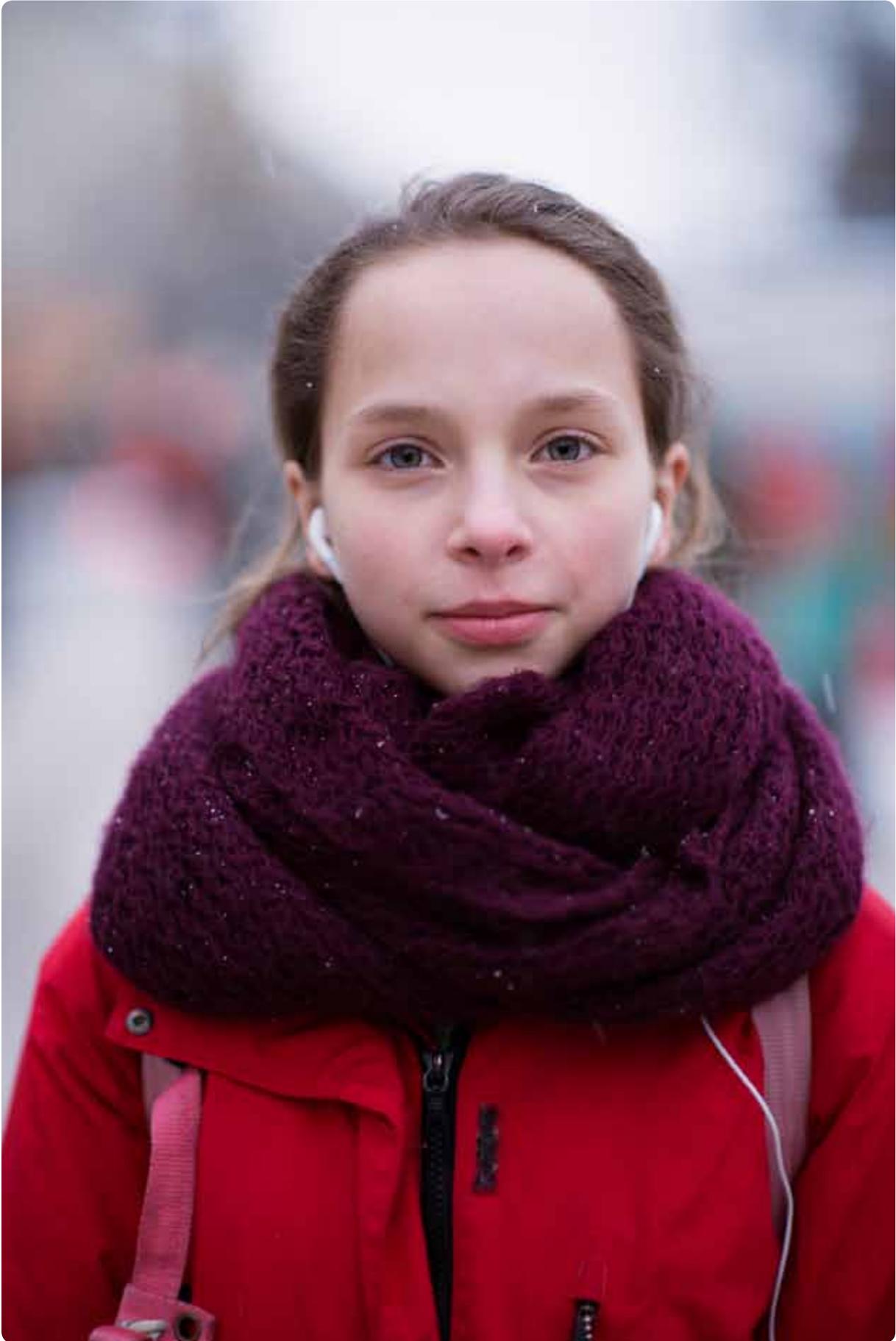
| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Daisy | A digital format for the recording of talking books. DAISY is <i>the Digital Accessible Information System</i> . The format simplifies the navigation of a recording, by allowing the user to flick between pages and titles, place bookmarks etc. DAISY books can be read with the help of a range of different media, such as special players, mp3 players and specific computer programs. (Helmersson, 2012; Nilsson, 2008; TPB, 2011). |
| Daisy audio | “DAISY audio is a talking book that is simply a sound recording. It does not contain any text, except for titles and page numbers.” (TPB, 2012a, p. 9) |
| Daisy text and audio | “DAISY text and audio is a talking book that contains text and sound in addition to any illustrations. It has previously been known as full text DAISY” (TPB, 2012a, p. 9) |
| Personal download | An MTM service that makes it possible for users of talking books to download them to their own computers, via their local libraries. (TPB, 2012b). |
| Talking book | A recorded book for commercial use in accordance with the Act on Copyright in Literacy and Artistic Works (Helmersson, 2012; Nilsson, 2008). |
| Reading difficulties | “Difficulty reading printed text due to an impairment.” (TPB, 2012a, p. 9) |
| MTM | Swedish Agency for Accessible Media, previously The Swedish Library of Talking Books and Braille, (TPB) |
| Nota | National library for persons with print disabilities, the Danish equivalent of MTM. |

**Printed book/
plain printing**

Term used for printed books and text, differentiating these from talking books as well as Braille books and braille (Interview with Jenny Nilsson of MTM, 15/10/2012).

Talking book

“A recording of a published book. The production rights and usage are regulated by Section 17 of the Act on Copyright in Literary and Artistic Works May only be borrowed from the library by persons with reading difficulties. (TPB, 2012d).



Introduction

Swedish Agency for Accessible Media (henceforth MTM), previously known as the Swedish Library of Talking Books and Braille (henceforth TPB) is a Swedish State-run agency whose task is to ensure that persons with reading difficulties, such as reading and writing difficulties/dyslexia and visual impairments, have access to literature in the form of accessible media (TPB, 2012c).

MTM has implemented a strategy for children and young persons (TPB, 2012a) for the period 2012 - 2014, where the following intentions have been formulated: “TPB’s starting point is that children with reading difficulties shall be given the same opportunities as other children to benefit from children’s literature” (TPB, 2012a, p. 3) In the strategy, the importance of integrating a children’s perspective into operations is emphasised. This can be understood as work towards “safeguarding the children’s conditions and working towards what is best for them” (Halldén, 2003, p. 14). The term ‘child’ refers to persons under the age of 18, as per the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (TPB, 2012a, p. 2).

One way to adopt a children’s perspective, according to the strategy, is to conduct a number of specific efforts, including user surveys. These user surveys shall be viewed against the backdrop of the rapid technical development that is expected to occur with adapted

media between 2012 - 2014. (TPB, 2012a, p. 6ff). The present report, commissioned by MTM, is one aspect of these strategic efforts.

The basis of this report was inspired by the report *Barn berättar [Children describing reading and libraries]* (2011) written by Åse Hedemark and commissioned by the Swedish Library Association workgroup for children and young people’s reading. The task was formulated in a consultancy agreement, as ‘Analysis and project report based on transcribed focus group interviews with children who use talking books’. This was further specified in a project directive, where the following aims and objectives were formulated: “TPB wants to find out what children think of talking books and the services linked to them, by conducting an investigation at public libraries in the early 2012. The opinions of the children regarding the design of talking books and TPB’s services will be included in future procurements and in the development work of TPB. [...] The objective is to find out what children with reading difficulties believe and think about

talking books, the services for talking books and how they are received by the local library.”

However, the aim of the study developed and expanded over the year that it was conducted. From discussions with the project owners, leaders and project group at MTM, the aim and research questions presented below were developed. It can be noted that the project group shifted its focus from MTM as an organisation onto the children themselves and their descriptions of talking books.

Aims and research questions

The purpose of this study is to provide an enhanced understanding of young¹ users of talking books and, with a basis of this understanding, to create a foundation for the further development of Swedish library services to this target group.

The study was guided by four more specific questions and a fifth overarching question:

1. How do young users of talking books describe their reading?
2. How do young users of talking books describe their use of talking books?
3. How do young users of talking books describe the ways in which they find talking books to use?
4. How do young users of talking books describe the ways in which they are received at the library?
5. Based upon these descriptions, how could Swedish libraries further develop their services for the target group of young talking book users?

The questions are answered in this report through analysis of nine focus group discussions with 51 young talking book users. These discussions were conducted by MTM in the spring of 2012.

Outline of the report

After this introductory chapter, **chapter 2** follows.

This chapter contains a brief review of previous studies on users of talking book. The procedures for conducting the focus groups are described in **chapter 3** and thereafter, in **chapter 4**, the theoretical tools used in the report are introduced. The analysis itself is presented in **chapter 5**. The report concludes with **chapter 6**, where the results of the analysis are discussed with the help of concepts introduced in **chapter 4**. In the same chapter, conclusions that can be made from the study are presented. Finally, suggestions for topics for further study in the area are made.

1 In this context, the term ‘young’ refers to persons under the age of 18.

Previous research

In this chapter, a small number of studies and reports of relevance to the present report are presented. All these studies attempt to understand the conditions, needs and wishes of users of talking book and were carried out from 2000 onwards. The aim of this review is to provide a background to the study. Therefore, it does not claim to create a comprehensive view of research on the use of talking books. For example, the review does not include literature from pedagogical research where the focus lies on reading development, rather than reading as an activity with an intrinsic value.

For those interested in the working methods of libraries in relation to talking book users, I refer to Sandin (2011) and Rydsjö (2012). These texts contain analyses of Swedish and international language-stimulating and language-developing projects, including those designed for children with reading difficulties.

Studies of children's use of talking books

It seems that research on the use of talking books from a children's perspective is limited. Internationally, it is difficult to find peer-reviewed studies within the area. One of few examples is a study by 'Niran Adetoro (2012) which shows in a Nigerian context that young Nigerians with visual impairments prefer the talking book format to braille books. The study was based on a survey and in-

terview investigation with 104 participants, all of whom were students at the equivalent of a Swedish upper-secondary school. Adetoro (2012) claims that the results of the study confirm previous international studies that show a certain decrease in the use and preference for the braille format amongst users of all ages with severe visual impairment.

Simultaneously, it must be underlined that the study was designed in such a way that the participants had to choose one format over another – there was consequently no opportunity to express the opinion that both formats complement each other. At the same time, the differences between braille books and talking books as regards first-hand preference were not large in the study. Amongst those who preferred the talking book format, reasons expressed in the study were that they are easier to understand and that

it is difficult to learn braille, especially without good support (Adetoro 2012, p. 93). In the case of braille, advantages were mentioned, such as the fact that the reading experience is similar to that of reading printed material: “reading in the real sense rather than listening” (Adetoro, 2012, s.93).

In a Nordic context, it is also possible to find user studies conducted by the authorities who are in charge of access to adapted literature for library users with reading difficulties. In 2010, MTM published a survey of their users (TPB, 2010) and in 2008 a report was published regarding a project into pupils’ use of what was then the new DAISY text and audio format (Hildén, 2008). Amongst other things, the survey showed that the number of users of talking book increased in Sweden between 2007 and 2009 (TPB, 2010) despite the fact that the number of users of talking book under the age of 18 decreased slightly. However, the data that this was based on does not include statistical information from school libraries. Therefore, information about the younger users of talking book should be interpreted with caution.

The study of DAISY text and audio (Hildén, 2008) included 52 pupils at secondary schools and schools for pupils with learning disabilities and their teachers/remedial teachers. All of the pupils had some form of reading difficulty and together with an educator they tested at least one of six different books, using the program(s) Amis and/or EasyReader. The study provides suggestions for aspects such as the recording speed and use of images. It also noted that all educators and the majority of pupils would like to continue using this format once the project is complete.

User studies in Denmark

The Danish equivalent of MTM, the National library for persons with print disabilities (Nota), conducted a number of user studies between 2010 and 2012. Taken together, these studies provide a clear picture of users of talking book in Denmark, particularly of the younger users with reading and writing difficulties/dyslexia. Below, some of the results that are of relevance to this report are presented.

One of these studies (CEDI, 2010) includes the combined Nota user groups, including children over the age of 11, and is built on telephone interviews with 500 participants. The report contains a part that focuses especially on the use of talking books. The study shows that the type of reading difficulty seems to be connected with how and how often talking books are used. A comparison of users with reading and writing difficulties and users with visual impair-

ments showed that the latter group use talking books on CD-ROM to a greater extent than the former and additionally, they use talking books more frequently and spend more time using them than the users with reading and writing difficulties (ibid, p. 15ff). Furthermore, users with visual impairments to a greater extent use the DAISY player to access talking books, whilst the desktop computer is the most common tool for users with reading and writing difficulties. This led the authors of the report to issue a call for further studies to find out whether younger users with reading and writing difficulties/dyslexia find the DAISY format useable (ibid, p. 26).

Other results of interest to the present study include talking books often being used in solitude (ibid, p. 20); for 50 per cent of talking book users, the use of talking books is often combined with other activities (ibid, p. 19); that users of talking books are satisfied with the availability of novels, but less satisfied with the availability of non-fiction, children’s and youth literature (ibid, p. 21); and that the recordings are of significance for the reading experience for around 80 per cent of the respondents (ibid, p. 22).

Nota has also conducted four studies with focus on the growing user group of young people with reading and writing difficulties and dyslexia within the framework for the project ‘*Unge ordblinde i hele landet*’ [Young people with dyslexia in Denmark] (Epinion for Nota, 2011; Nota, 2010; 2011; Windfeldt & Hundevadt, 2010). Furthermore, they have published three short essays on the potential that exists for this group in new types of media and tools (Nota, 2012). In 2011, the four part-studies within the project were evaluated by the library and information scientist, Niels Ole Pors.

All in all, the project provides a rich and detailed picture of the conditions for children with reading and writing difficulties/dyslexia in Denmark, in relation to home, school and library settings. Of particular interest, though at the same time rather distressing, is the illustration of the obstacles met daily by young people with reading and writing difficulties/dyslexia and the coping strategies they use as they perceive their reading difficulties as being stigmatised (Windfeldt & Hundevadt, 2010). Another important result is the comprehensive conclusion drawn by Pors (2011): that the talking books are generally viewed as something very positive by the young users, their parents and their pedagogues. Many of the results from the Nota studies that have been highlighted here are also recognisable in the present study, the results of which are presented in the two concluding chapters. The bases of these two chapters are presented in the following section.

Methods

A predetermined condition for this report was that the study would build on focus group interviews. This choice of method, mentioned in the foreword by Jenny Nilsson, was made in order to create good conditions for the children to be able to share their stories of using talking books. In this chapter, the possibilities and limitations of the method are discussed, in addition to the process used for collecting material and conducting analyses. Finally, a discussion is raised about whose perspective is given priority in the analysis.

Focus group interviews

In recent years, focus groups have become an increasingly popular method for development work within Swedish public libraries. Focus groups build on organised group discussions that explore a specific theme or question (Marková, Linell, Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2007, p. 32). One distinguishing feature of focus groups as a method is that discussions are not aimed at reaching something that is defined beforehand; instead it is the conversation itself which is of interest to the analysis (Lundgren, 2009). Carrying out focus groups with children who use talking books enables a deeper understanding of these groups; their stories of reading, talking books and libraries.

The design of the study

The present report is based on nine focus group discussions conducted by MTM in the spring of 2012.

Each focus group was led by a moderator, who in each case but one was accompanied by an observer, whose task it was to take notes about the interaction in the group and to facilitate future transcription and analysis. An overview of the nine focus group interviews can be found in Appendix 1.

The focus groups were conducted in four different counties, where MTM had the help of the county/ regional libraries and the Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired

to find young users of talking books who could consider participating in a focus group interview. In this way, groups were created from different areas of the country and from different types of municipalities– from rural to urban. In total, 51 children participated, of which 30 were boys and 21 were girls. Participants were aged between 9 - 16. All participants had some form of reading difficulty, such as difficulties reading and writing/ dyslexia or visual impair-

ment. The groups varied in size from 3 to 10 participants and the discussions lasted for approximately half an hour to an hour and fifteen minutes.

Before each interview, the children's parents/guardians were informed of the study in writing, and gave their consent to the child's participation via a form (see Appendix 3). The children were given oral information about the aims of the study, what the discussion would be about and what it would be used for. They were also guaranteed confidentiality at the start of every interview. During the discussions, the moderators paid attention and continuously ensured that the children consented to participation. On one occasion, a participant was not feeling well during the discussion, and so it was paused. The interview continued once the moderator was sure that the participant wished to continue.

The moderators used an interview guide (see Appendix 2), that had been produced by MTM in consultation with me, Anna Hampson Lundh. The interview guide was used by the moderators to give structure to the discussions, whilst simultaneously creating the opportunity for flexibility at each individual interview. The interview guide was used by the moderators to ensure that the discussion addressed the four themes formulated by MTM, namely 'Reading', 'Finding something to read', 'Experience of libraries' and 'Talking books – selection and design'. Once the discussions concluded, the library/organisation that organised the interview gave each child a gift of cinema tickets, sweets or talking books as thanks for their participation.

Each recording was transcribed in its entirety by an MTM employee. The transcriptions have been adapted into conventional writing and therefore do not provide any further indications of aspects such as tone, pausing, expressions in dialect, overlapping speech and so on. They have also been translated from Swedish by Språkservice Sverige AB. Each child has been given an alias and the names of places and organisations have been replaced with 'NN' to ensure anonymity in the extracts in chapter 5. The transcriptions then formed the basis for the analysis in this report.

User perspectives and children's perspectives

The purpose of the study is to create a deeper understanding of a certain group of users of talking book. To achieve this purpose, the analysis has sought to adopt a *user perspective* since the users in this case are children, it could also be called a *children's perspective*. This stance means that the analysis has been conduct-

ed from two basic starting points. Firstly, this means that the children's stories of their use of talking books are understood based on the contexts and practices that the children are part of. Secondly, it means that the children participating in the study are deemed to be qualified to share stories in the group discussions of their experiences of reading, talking books and libraries.

The idea to adopt a user perspective stems from a research tradition within Library and Information Science known as Information Needs, Seeking, and Use (INSU). This tradition is characterised by the ambition to try to study the way people seek and use information, focusing on the persons, or users, based on their starting points (e.g., Case, 2012). According to this tradition, in order to understand people's use of certain information systems, institutions or media formats, an understanding of the purposes behind the use of these information systems, institutions or media formats is needed.

Whilst the meaning of a user perspective has been discussed in Library and Information Science, the meaning of children's perspectives has been discussed within the childhood research that has developed from the research tradition known as the 'New Sociology of Childhood'. The meaning of children's perspectives varies in different contexts (see Halldén, 2003). In this study, a children's perspective is used as a methodological concept, meaning that children are viewed as reliable participants when they are asked about their experiences. Great emphasis is also placed on creating conditions that enable the children to talk about their lives.

The meanings of both a user perspective and children's perspectives are debated within the respective research field. For the purposes of this study, the most important meaning of these perspectives is that the analysis is characterised by trying to understand the children's stories as logical and rational from the children's perspectives and consequently to avoid viewing any identified problems as based in the children. One concrete example of this is how to understand sections in certain interviews that led to the moderator having to explain the work of MTM to those children who were not so familiar with it. One way that the focus group as a method in a library context differs from how it is commonly used within the social sciences is that it is possible for focus groups to partially function as a marketing tool for the library (Lundgren, 2009, p. 27). In cases where the moderator explains the work of MTM to the children who are unfamiliar with it, this is viewed as an attempt by MTM to market themselves and not – as may have

been the case – identify the child’s unawareness of MTM as a shortcoming of the child.

Conducting the analysis

Focus groups can be conducted based on a range of different purposes, and depending on the analytical starting-points, they can also lead to different types of results. Another important question is what the focus group discussions are seen as an expression of when they are analysed. One way in which to understand a focus group is to view it as a social situation which in itself is interesting to study, for example with focus on the interaction between the participants (see Marková, Linell, Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2007, p. 48ff). Another way to analyse the discussions is to focus on the theme in question, where what is important is not *how* something is expressed but rather *what* the participants express. This study is positioned somewhat in the middle between these two analytical starting points. The primary interest in all stages of the analysis focused on *what* was expressed by the participants in relation to the four interview themes. However, this *what* is understood based on how and in what context this *what* was expressed.

The focus group analysis was conducted in three steps. Initially, an overview of the material was created through a coding of each transcript. I, Anna Hampson Lundh, carried out this coding based on the four themes included in the interview guide. After this initial coding, Jenny Nilsson, the project leader, was interviewed in order to clarify the details in the discussions that were unclear to me. These details related to words and expressions I was not familiar with and the interview conditions in addition to questions regarding two of the themes coded in the first step of the analysis. The questions asked are presented in Appendix 4. Some of the questions were answered in writing, whilst others were discussed during a Skype conversation. I recorded and transcribed this conversation in its entirety.

This was followed by the second step of the analysis, where each of the four themes was focused on in turn across the interviews (see Thomsson, 2002, pp. 152 - 160). By compiling what and how the group discussed *reading, talking books, finding talking books and libraries*, the similarities and differences within each theme could be identified. The result of this part of the analysis is presented in chapter 5. The final step of the analysis forms the basis of the discussion in chapter 6, where the analysis of the results is viewed in the light of the three theoretical concepts that are presented in more depth in the following chapter.



Analytical starting-points

To be able to create a deeper understanding of young users of talking book, their reading and use of talking books and descriptions of libraries based on the empirical material, the third step of the analysis uses a number of theoretical concepts. These concepts are taken from varying theoretical schools, although they have all previously been used to analyse and understand reading and conditions for reading within Library and Information Science. They all emphasise reading as an activity and the significance of physical tools and artefacts used in this type of activity. At the same time, it should be noted that this study has not been based upon a set definition of 'reading'. The definition of talking book reading is therefore an empirical question that has been approached using the theoretical tools.

The fact that the subject of the discussions is talking books – and not just printed books – is assumed to play a role when the children describe reading activities and when they describe how others perceive these activities. The children use talking books because, for various reasons, they have difficulties reading conventional printed books. Therefore, talking books can be viewed as a method to overcome these difficulties. For this reason, the descriptions of talking books must be understood as talking books being a type of document that in some respects can be said to borrow recognisable functions from printed books. At the same time, talking books can be said to offer other possibilities,

and also limitations, in comparison with printed books.

The materiality of reading

Often when reading is discussed in relation to children, the cognitive and communicative abilities of the child are discussed regarding alphabetical, printed text in addition to the importance of literature for a child's intellectual and emotional development. In a chapter about children's reading as a historical phenomenon, the Library and Information scientist Mats Dolatkah (2010) points out that reading cannot simply be reduced to a cognitive and emotional activity: it must also be viewed as a material activity.

He states that reading “is also a physically and materially manifested operation that is based on the idea that a body (the reader) manipulates an object (e.g. a book) in a space” (Dolatkhah, 2010, p. 109).

With this quote and what is developed in his thesis (2011, p. 78ff), Dolatkhah emphasises the *materiality of reading*. This report focuses on the significance of the central objects manipulated in reading activities being of a certain kind, i.e., talking books. These books differ from conventional printed books in many ways. A foundation for the analysis of the children’s discussions of their use of talking books is that these differences are of significance to their reading.

What do these differences consist of? Just as printed books, talking books are a type of document. One difference between conventional, printed books (not e-books²) and talking books is that talking books can be used through different kinds of media such as DAISY or mp3 players and different types of computer programs. Another difference is related to modes of representation³. Talking books can now include text, numbers and images but they also contain a different mode of representation: recorded sound based on a written text⁴.

How can these differences be understood in terms of materiality? In relation to a discussion of information literacy – which in many cases is viewed as including reading ability – the Library and Information scientists Olof Sundin, Helena Francke and Jack Andersen (2009) emphasise the material aspects of digital texts and documents. In this discussion, the authors introduce three levels of materiality. The first level is the hardware through which a digital document is mediated. The second level relates to the software needed to use the document, in addition to the architecture and built-in functions of the document. The third level represents the institutional context where the document is used (Sundin, Francke & Andersen, 2009, p. 182f). This institutional level can be compared with what Dolatkhah refers to as a ‘social level’ (2011, p. 78ff), where the social and institutional framing of reading activities are assumed to be connected with how reading activities are shaped and experienced.

In relation to the present study, these three levels of materiality apply to 1) the device used by the children when reading talking books 2) the way in which the recording is stored and marked up 3) the institutional and social practices of which reading activities are a part. In the analysis of the discussions about the use of talking books, focus is placed on the children’s descriptions of how they use the talking books and what tools they use; how they describe the importance of the recordings and the functions that are built-in to different recording formats; in addition to the descriptions of the situations and contexts where they use talking books. In order to understand the children’s descriptions of their reading, we must take the materiality of the talking books into consideration as a starting point for the analysis.

Remediation

As stated in the introduction, one of the reasons for conducting this study is that the design and distribution of talking books have changed during the digitization process of recent years. Within research on the history of books and reading, certain researchers focus on the significance that new techniques of document production and distribution have for reading activities. One example is Roger Säljö (2009) who states that throughout history, demands on an individual’s reading and writing ability has changed within Swedish society as a result of both technical and social development.

Säljö (2009) uses the example of how different media formats within various social and historical contexts have led to different types of reading. In particular, Säljö highlights how, from a historical perspective, reading activities have shifted from collective reading aloud to silent, independent reading (2009, p. 25f). This is also discussed by Dolatkhah (2010, p. 111f) who suggests that nowadays, silent reading is often viewed as the most common way to read, whereas in earlier eras, material and social conditions in addition to the access to texts led to reading aloud being the norm.

However, there is reason to be cautious when thinking of new media and new ways of creating, presenting, organising and storing documents as having arisen from a social and technical vacuum. In the above mentioned text by Sundin, Francke and Andersen (2009) regarding the materiality of documents, *remediation* is also discussed and is described in the following terms:

2 For a discussion on the relationship between codex books and e-books, see Dahlström (2002).

3 For a more detailed discussion regarding the concepts medium and modes of representation, see Francke (2008).

4 A digital book can of course be read with the help of speech synthesis. However, the differences discussed here relate to those between conventional printed books and talking books.

New media do not arise from nothing; rather they build upon previously existing media. In relation to these, similarities and loans are carved out so that users recognise the new medium to a certain extent – and that they perhaps can conduct the same activities with this new medium as with previous kinds. [...] But the relation between media is often characterised by a competitive situation. To motivate its existence, a new medium must show that it offers something new or better than existing media. (Sundin, Francke & Andersen, 2009, p. 184)

The concept of remediation can be an aid to understanding a new media format in comparison to another previously well-known variant. For example, digitized talking books borrow characteristics from cassette books. Furthermore, all talking book formats borrow properties from conventional, printed books. One way of highlighting the materiality of reading in the analysis is to focus on the meanings ascribed to the similarities and differences between different book formats.

The concept of remediation also points to the tension that can be said to exist between a new medium and its predecessors. In the above quotation, Sundin, Francke and Andersen indicate that a new medium must be reminiscent of previous media, whilst at the same time – in order to survive – it must offer new possibilities. A further concept which will be used in the analysis is discussed below. This concept touches upon what different media offer their users based on their material form.

Affordances

Paying attention to the material properties of books does not mean that what arises between the book and the reader during reading activities is ignored. Dolatkah (2010; 2011), who stresses the materiality of reading, also emphasises that reading is an activity that generates experiences and creates meaning. Therefore, by highlighting the materiality of reading, he emphasises that the experience of reading is intimately connected with the material – and consequently social – contexts in which reading occurs.

In the analysis of the focus groups, the children's descriptions of their reading experiences are understood with help from a concept known as *affordances*, originally introduced by James Gibson within psychol-

ogy of perception (Gibson, 1986 [1979]). This concept has been used in a number of studies on the use of different media, documents and techniques and has been translated into the Swedish concept *meningserbjudanden* (Qvarsell, 1998).

The concept refers to the offers perceived by people in a specific, physical environment that includes the tools that we as people create and have at our disposal (Gibson, 1986 [1979]). Different types of objects in our surroundings invite different types of actions that depend upon the object, the person perceiving the object and the situation where the object and person meet.

The concept of affordances is used in this study to understand the significance and meaning that the children ascribe the talking book as a media format. The analysis is aimed at the manner in which the children describe the affordances they perceive in talking books, and how these affordances both differ from and are similar to those perceived in other types of books.

It is important to remember that all tools, including talking books, do not just offer possibilities but also limitations (Wertsch, 1998, p. 38ff). The possibilities and limitations that are offered relate to what is physically possible, but also to what is perceived as possible or impossible, depending – for example – on the confidence in one's own ability or what is perceived as socially sanctioned. Consequently, both the possibilities and limitations arise *between* the tool and its user. Furthermore, all tools can prove to have and allow for "unexpected affordances" (Bomer, 2003), which were not foreseen by the designer of the particular tool. For this reason, studies of how people actually use a certain tool are important so that these tools may be developed further.

In this chapter, three concepts have been introduced: *materiality of reading*, *remediation* and *affordances*. In the following chapter, the children's descriptions of their reading and use of talking books will be presented based on four themes and will later be discussed in chapter 7, with help of the three theoretical concepts.



The discussions

This chapter will provide an empirical description of the nine focus group discussions. It has been organised into four themes, each of which corresponds with the first four questions presented in chapter 1. Each theme is illustrated with quotations from the transcriptions. The child's name has been replaced with a code containing one letter to represent the group and one number to represent the person speaking (in terms of age and gender), in accordance with the details in Appendix 1.

The first theme applies to the children's descriptions of how they experience reading as an activity, regardless of the media format, whereas the second theme specifically addresses the reading of talking books. The third theme deals with how the children describe the ways they find books to read, but also the difficulties that may arise when it comes to finding literature. Finally, the children's descriptions of their library experiences are presented.

Experiences of reading

In the discussions, reading was described as an activity that occurs in different contexts and locations and that involves different media formats and includes various types of experiences. One theme that was raised in the interviews was about the experience of reading as an activity. Even though the moderator asked questions specific to talking books, the discussions would refer to both reading talking books and other types of books.

The descriptions of the reading experience also include aspects such as the physical location where reading takes place. The home and the children's own rooms were frequently mentioned as places to read; however, reading at school and during journeys such as those by public transport or by car was also mentioned. Many stories were about positive reading experiences, where the physical surroundings, such as the place they were sitting/lying, also played a role in how the activity was perceived. Many children stated how they enjoy lying in bed when they read and one child explained how he uses books to help himself relax before sleep.

Moderator: No. Where do you usually listen to talking books? Do you lie in bed or sit at the desk, or?

B3: At school, for example.

B2: Yeah, at school.

Moderator: At school.

B3: Like, when I go to bed, yeah, when I go to bed.

Moderator: And when you go to bed.

B3: When, like, I need to relax. Sleep better.

Moderator: I see! Is that something you've discovered on your own?

B3: Yeah.

The children also explain the advantages of the location, in addition to its practicality for the reading activity. An example of this is the following extract where a girl describes how in the summer, outdoor reading also means that she can sunbathe:

F9: Outside, if it's really warm, on the trampoline.

Moderator: I can imagine it can get a bit warm when you lie there?

F9: Nah, it's good, you can get a tan.

In this instance, it is unclear which type of book she reads when out in the sunshine, but in other instances, the children point out that talking books make it possible to move around and do things around the house whilst they are reading/listening. However, the majority of the stories about where they read seem to involve the children lying down or sitting still.

The children were asked to talk about specific books that they particularly like, as well as the books that they do not like as much. In the discussions, specific books and best-selling series such as *Twilight* and *Wolf Brother* were described as both good and bad. In some cases, there was disagreement between the children regarding whether a certain title is good or bad. The majority of titles and genres named were fiction rather than non-fiction and school books. One may assume that a reasonable explanation for this could be that the interviews took place in public libraries that the children primarily associate with reading fiction.

Even though the questions about reading that were introduced to the groups mainly concerned the love of reading and books that children like, the discussions also began to examine the less positive aspects of reading. The children's descriptions of reading experiences were characterised by difficulties, resistance and displeasure. They explain how they become tired of reading and how they struggle with texts that are difficult to understand. Some children claimed that they simply do not like reading, without further explanation.

Many of the stories of less positive experiences were about the difficulties reading printed text for the

children who had the possibility to do this at all. In the following excerpt, two children talk about their experiences of reading long, thick books and books with small text when asked what they dislike about reading. Although it is unclear what type of books A8 is describing, it is clear that A7 is talking about printed books.

Moderator: [...] if you were to say some book, now you've talked a little about the ones with a thousand pages where nothing happens, that sounds terrible, but, when we're talking things you don't like to read? When you've felt this way, or like this, maybe especially if you're thinking, I mean you are allowed to say regular printed books too, if you, well, talking books. Yeah? Let's...

A8: Long books that like, never end.

Moderator: Mhm.

A8: I can't think of any now but...

Moderator: No no, that's fine...

A8: Long ones, with never ending pages, yeah the ones you can't get out of, yeah it's difficult then.

Moderator: Mhm, I see, yes.

A7: I don't like it when there's lots and then it's not fun at all. Lots of pages and small text.

Moderator: Yeah.

A7: Then they're pretty difficult, if you don't, if it's not good at all.

Moderator: OK, when you say 'small text', are you talking about a printed book?

A7: Mhm.

Moderator: OK. I understand.

It is evident from this extract that the contents of a book are deemed boring if they are presented in a way that makes it inaccessible, i.e. with 'never ending' pages (that could either be printed or recorded) or printed text that is too small. This extract and other descriptions show how reading can be a complicated activity due to reading difficulties that cause problems when reading printed texts. Earlier in the interview, when asked about what is fun about talking books, A3 says the following:

A3: I just don't like reading in general. I realised when I started to read that it was, that it was so hard, but I still don't like reading, but it is much nicer to lis-

ten to a talking book and some books, I think they're so good so I, the last book I listened to was *Robinson Crusoe*.

In this quote, reading printed books is initially described as difficult and tedious, without any reference to a particular book. Thereafter, listening to talking books is described as well as the positive experiences A3 has of these. An example is also given of a specific title that A3 found especially good, as he had listened to it as a talking book. It is interesting to note that here, A3 also describes the advantages of talking books and how he makes the difference between *reading* printed text and *listening* to talking books. These two aspects – the activity of using a talking book and its advantages – are further discussed in the next section.

Using talking books

A large portion of the interviews specifically dealt with using talking books and the advantages and disadvantages the children associate with this. MTM views the use of talking books as *reading*. Therefore, this was adopted by the moderators during the focus group discussions. For the children, however, it was not as obvious to describe their use of talking books as reading. In the discussions, the children use the expressions both of *listening* to a talking book and *reading* a talking book. The fact that talking books are characterised as recorded sound in contrast to printed books was raised in many of the discussions. One significant example can be found in the following extract that starts with the moderator asking the children what they associate with the word 'talking book':

Moderator: [...] Yes, yeah and the first thing we're going to do might fee..., seem a little strange, but I am going to say a word and I want to know what you think or feel when I say the word. Do you get my drift? [many say 'yes'] OK, and the word talking book... [many begin to laugh] Is there anyone who thinks or feels anything when they hear that word? G1?

G1: Book that talks.

Moderator: Yeah?

G2: Same thing.

Moderator: OK, books that talk.

G3: I just think 'listen'.

Moderator: Mhm, OK.

G1: It's a talking book [laughs].

Moderator: Do you think, what do you

think then? Do you see a picture of a book talking with a mouth, a mouth on kind of?

G1: Yeah a book with a mouth and eyes and nose.

In this discussion, the audio aspect of talking books is emphasised and the verb used to describe the use of talking books is *to listen*. Later in the interview, one child objects to the moderator's choice of words and points out that talking books are something you listen to:

Moderator: [...] where do you like to be, sit, lie when you read talking books? How do you usually..

G2: I don't read them, you listen to them.

This clear attitude is however not a common feature of all the interviews; instead both terms are used and sometimes seem to be used interchangeably. In the group of participants with visual impairments, where the option of reading printed books is not available at all to most of the participants, a discussion is created around how the activity of using talking books can be described:

D6: I say that I've read books, even though I've like, listened to them. [everyone agrees]

D1: Yeah, you do that, you don't say 'I've listened to this book'.

Moderator: No, you say.

D2: That's what I usually say to my friends though.

D3: Yeah, sometimes you say it.

In this passage, the ambivalence when describing the use of talking books as 'reading' or 'listening' is clear and here it is not as important to maintain that talking books include listening as it is in the groups where the participants have other forms of reading difficulties, such as dyslexia. In many of these groups, the actual listening – as compared to reading – is described as something positive that helps their lives. However, these descriptions may also include an ambivalence regarding how the activity is to be described, as when A4 describes the relief of not having to read a printed book whilst at the same time she describes how reading talking books may sometimes feel 'pretend'.

A4 I think that, like, am I going to read this book or am I going to listen to it? And then I sort of get the feeling of... it's almost like it's a bit fake because listening to a book isn't real. But it's difficult to explain because it's like, this fake. It's not the real book, it's something else. It's like, nice. It's nice to like, lie like this and listen because then you kind of don't have to read.

Both the above extracts and also the following extract emphasise the freedom of not having to read printed text, but still being able to take in the text, as one of the main advantages of talking books.

Moderator: Yeah, yeah, OK, mhm. Yeah, I get what you mean. Is it something you feel then? Is there some feeling that goes with talking books?
H1: Yeah, that you don't need to read.
Moderator: Yeah. So what kind of feeling would you say it is then?
H3: Good!
H1: Good feeling.
Moderator: Ah well good.
H1: A relief.

Many children describe how it is easier to understand a book when it can be listened to, sometimes whilst following the printed text. In these descriptions, but also in others, the possibility to change the narration speed is pointed out as useful. Another advantage of talking books that was mentioned in the previous section is that it is possible for the user to participate in other activities at the same time as they are reading/listening:

D2: But it's more practical to read talking books really, you can do lots of other stuff at the same time.
D1: You can eat.
D2: Clean the room and...

Something that was emphasised as both positive and negative – and in some cases led to lengthy, charged discussions – was the recording. How the narration was made was in some cases the deciding factor for the reading experience, and was vividly described by B4.

B4: The different tones, different tones of voice on a word can change the emotions of what's being said.

The narration is thus described as important, but it was not possible to reach a consensus of the characteristics of a 'good' recording. However, many groups suggested that series should have the same narrator for each part and that recordings made with feeling are preferable to monotonous narrations.

The children also describe problems encountered when using talking books. Some children explain that there have been technical problems with certain types of software, or that certain players lack certain functions. Another problem was the difficulty in navigating the talking books, where the talking book format restricts a type of reading which is common for printed books. In the following quotation, the children discuss the placement of the text on the back of the book. They believe that it should be at the beginning of a talking book, in contrast to a printed book, or 'black and white' book, which is the term used in the quote:

D3: I was thinking about the thing with talking books, how they're made and stuff, I know this might sound really weird, but I think it's so good with the text on the back, I think that it's really good if it's done at the start of the book, because even if it's sort of at the back, it's just weird when it's at the end, or, yeah, I personally think it's good.

D4: I agree.

D2: But with some black and white books, with black text, you always read the back page first, so that's good in that way.

D4: It's difficult to do that with a talking book because you have to skip through everything.

D3: And it's a pain to have to listen to the whole book and then get to the text on the back page. [everybody laughs]

D1: But are there talking books like that? [someone says yes and everybody laughs]

Moderator: You should know that some people think like that, that they want it, now I'm getting to the thing that some people think it's a little too revealing, in which case you can skip to it, but you can also skip to the text on the back page if you want. [everyone talks over each other]

D5: But then you've got to jump forward and then you have to jump backwards.

Another example related to navigation in talking books are the difficulties in skim-reading or skipping past the title page information which in talking books includes information about copyright law, year and narrator.

The children also describe other difficulties, which do not necessarily relate to the technical aspects. In one group, they discuss how the use of talking books is viewed by others and how this can form less positive experiences of using talking books. The following quotation is an extract from a long discussion of how classmates often point out and wonder about the use of talking books in school, which the children find disruptive:

E3: There are loads of people who ask 'what's that?' during the lessons, even though I've told them like, a hundred times.

Moderator: Mhm, I see, yes.

E1: When I have a DAISY talking book, I mean, I have no idea how many times someone's asked 'can I listen? can I look?' like, I just, do it and we'll swap, we can swap information so you get this thing, because, I promise you'll get sick of it because I did after a while, I wanted to like, I want to be able to read a normal book like everyone else, but now it's much easier with the phone because it's just headphones, so you can put them in and nobody notices anything.

Moderator: No.

E1: For example 'what's that there?', just a great big machine.

The problems described here and in the continuing discussion relate to how the social situation and the way others perceive reading difficulties can lead to displeasure in relation to reading activities. The attitude of others towards the reading of talking books can therefore be an important factor for how the activity takes shape. The following section further presents how other people are of significance when the children look for and choose books to read.

Pathways to and from talking books

A characteristic feature of the children's descriptions

of how they find books and talking books to use is that this process often involves other people. When asked how they find books to read, the majority of the children immediately explain how they are given suggestions from parents, friends, teachers and librarians. People close to them thus appear to be important for the children's path to finding books. In one interview, there is an example of children indirectly suggesting books for each other during the interview, when I2 talks about recordings that he has particularly enjoyed and I1 responds saying he too wants to read these books:

I2: Because there's, I've got all 'Doctor [inaudible]' on talking book and they're good because they don't speak too fast or too slow, it's perfect I think.

I1: I should read 'Doctor'.

The children also state how another way to find books is through other media. Some children describe how social media, such as blogs and Facebook, as well as magazines, advertisements and television can give them ideas about books to read. Another way of finding books was to go to a school or public library and look through the shelves and read the back pages.

The MTM website, including the part of the website specially designed for children, and book download charts published on the websites and in the catalogue were also mentioned in the interviews. Some children explained that it can be difficult to search through the catalogue as they may find spelling difficult or it provides unrelated hits. However, these problems are seldom described as 'acute' or too frustrating. In one example, a boy points out that imprecise searches in the MTM catalogue can lead to useful finds:

A5: Yeah, so sometimes you can't find certain books but it takes you to other books anyway.

Moderator: OK.

A5: So I think it's good that you can still get to other books that are similar or have the same name.

To summarise, children mention many paths that lead them to talking books and other books to read. The accounts also express what is known in literature about information seeking as 'serendipity' (Case, 2012, p. 101f). This can be described as stumbling upon a document that turns out to be relevant and useful, even if it was not actively being searched for.

Consequently in the accounts, the search for books does not appear to be a carefully planned activity, nor does it appear to be a particularly troubling activity.

Nevertheless, the children express a certain amount of frustration related to the search for books. For example, this may be when the children look for books that have not yet been recorded, or they are unhappy with the selection at the local library. However, it is important to note that these problems were described by those groups who also explained in more detail how they actually find books. The groups that had the least to say about how they find books also seem to have little to say on difficulties finding books.

During the discussions, the children described how they used talking books through a variety of different media such as special DAISY players, mp3 players and various computer programs. They were asked specific questions about whether they used the MTM service 'Personal download' and also if they knew they could request that titles be recorded. Answers to these questions varied and in certain instances, the moderator told the children about the MTM services in this respect. As a result, this gave the interviews an informative function in addition to the investigative function.

Experiences of libraries

During the interviews, as mentioned above, the children explained that they had found literature via different types of library, both school and public libraries, as well as via the MTM service 'Personal download'. In the interviews, the participants were also asked what they associate with the word 'library' so as to create an understanding of how they perceive the library institution (rather than individual libraries) and to encourage accounts of their experiences of and at libraries.

The accounts vary between children and also within the groups, both with regard to how comfortable they are in a library environment and how often they visit libraries. For example, two boys (G1 and G3) state that they seldom visit the library, whereas one girl (G4) in the same discussion tells of how she visits a library several times per week in addition to the library's function for her:

G4: I usually, it's a sort of community. You meet up at the library and read or do homework or play chess.

In many of the interviews the library is described in a rather traditional sense, as a calm and quiet place filled with books, as in the following extracts:

Moderator: OK, now we're moving on to the library. I was thinking of doing the same thing as with talking books, namely, say 'library' and ask you about what you think and feel?

I2: A boring place where you go and sit and read and study.

Moderator: Yeah.

I1: Yeah, a place where you can like, read and be quiet, you get peace and quiet and stuff.

Moderator: OK.

I3: Like, borrow books, read and...

In this quotation, the library environment is described as dull, but also that the library is a place for peace and quiet. This peace and quiet was mentioned in many interviews as something positive and in one discussion the opposite – a lively school library – was described as problematic.

Many children also describe how they appreciate being met in a calm manner by the library staff. Examples of good experience include the librarian taking the time and actively showing where the book being looked for is located. Helpfulness and interest for their younger visitors is described as important, as in the following quotation:

Moderator: OK, B3 then? How do you think the staff should be?

B3: Nice, friendly, y'know, care about the kids.

Moderator: Mhm.

B3: And give good book tips.

At the same time, some children in a different interview state that they do not want the librarian to give them help and suggestions when they haven't asked for it, or that they point out inappropriate book choices.

Moderator: [...] OK, but how would you like the staff to be when you meet them in the library?

D2: Happy and helpful.

D4: I think that it's good at the NN library, that they still try to help, that they don't like just, because when I was there once when I was younger one said 'are you really going to read that?' so that they well, like it is now, that they

are really positive and are like 'yeah! you can read this!', that they're just helpful.

Moderator: Mhm, mhm.

D2: Like in a shop when they come and ask, like if they think it looks like you're trying to find something.

Moderator: Mhm.

D2: And then they come up and ask and want to help find the book and stuff.

D1: Interested.

Someone: Mm.

D6: But that they help with the right things and don't try to insist on, well, loads of other stuff.

Moderator: OK, can you tell me a little bit more, D6? What are you thinking of?

D6: No, you know, often when I'm trying to borrow a book, they don't want to get it out or like, no, not as much anymore, but before, they tried to be all 'no, read these instead' and you're like 'no, I wanna read this'.

In summary, it can be said that the children explain that they have both positive and less positive experiences of how they are treated at different types of libraries; they appreciate attention, tips and help when they need it, but not when their choice of book is 'corrected'.

The interviews also provide reasons as to why libraries are not visited very often. A few times, one problem raised is that loan periods are too short while longer loan periods are appreciated. A couple of children say that they prefer buying books, so they can keep them for as long as they need them:

A8: But sometimes we buy them so I can take my time reading them.

Another reason for few library visits that was mentioned by some children was that they feel that they no longer need to physically visit a library since they started using the MTM 'Personal download' service. As is clear in the following quotation, however, it seems to be possible to still identify oneself as a library visitor by using this type of service, as MTM is described as a type of library:

B4: Yeah, I think that when you say 'library' I think about many libraries, I also think of TPB a little bit like a library.

Moderator: Go on?

B4: It... it's like a talking book library.

Moderator: Mm.

The quotation above also shows that children do not necessarily make distinctions between library institutions with different principals. It also became clear from the interviews that they do not always make a distinction between different staff categories, for example librarians or school personnel. This suggests that the conclusions drawn in the next chapter have bearing on many personnel groups and types of libraries.



Discussion and conclusions

This final chapter consists of three parts. The first section discusses the analysis of the discussions in previous chapters based on the three theoretical concepts introduced in chapter 4: *materiality of reading, remediation, and affordances*. The second section then builds upon this discussion and provides a number of suggestions based on the fifth and final question of the report. Finally, the third section discusses a number of questions that cannot be answered by this study and introduces suggestions for further studies.

Discussion

In the previous chapters, descriptions were provided of how the interviewed children discussed their reading, their use of talking books, the way in which they search for them and their library experiences. In this way, the first four questions of the report have been answered. The following will discuss the interview results from the theoretical starting points of the report, in such a way as to deepen the understanding of the children's accounts and set the foundations for answering the fifth and final research question.

In chapter four, the idea of the *materiality of reading* was introduced, which can be understood on (at least) three levels: a hardware level, a document level and a social and institutional level. The children's accounts in the interviews can be said to move across all three levels.

The first level regarding the tools used to use talking books, the children's accounts illustrate the *affordances* that are connected with the type of playback device used by the children.

The digital development of recent years has made it possible for talking books to be used with a number of different tools. The various media discussed by the children offer possibilities as well as problems. One aspect that differs between the various playback media is what is offered in terms of physical space. Whilst a desktop computer with a playback program requires the talking book user to sit by the computer, or at least be close to one, smaller players with downloaded books offer greater mobility. In principle, the children are therefore able to use talking books wherever with help from the smaller mp3 and DAISY players in a way that could be compared to reading a paperback.

However, in contrast to reading a printed book, it is possible to combine the use of a talking book with other activities, as the reading activity does not necessarily need to involve sight.

According to the children, smaller playback media is also believed to offer the opportunity to make the use of talking books a private activity. This can be compared to silent reading of a printed book. Indeed, stationary and larger players can be used alone, but smaller players with earphones allow for greater flexibility when choosing a place to use a talking book alone. One aspect of the advantages of smaller players is that, in contrast to their larger counterparts, they do not attract attention from others. During the discussions, the children exchange accounts of the issues that result from their reading difficulties, and some of the children explain how they feel stigmatised for using talking books in social situations where printed books are the norm. By making the use of talking books less visible and more similar to listening to music for example, this enables a normalisation of the activity.

However, the smaller players do not always allow for all of the built-in functions of the talking books to be used. For example, using an mp3 player to listen to a talking book means that many navigation functions cannot be used. Nor is it possible to access the text and images that are included in the DAISY text and audio format.

The DAISY audio and DAISY text and audio formats comprise properties reminiscent of printed books. The *affordances* offered by these formats include the second level of materiality introduced previously, i.e. the document level where storing and formatting of audio, image and text is of significance to the possibilities of talking book use.

The children's accounts of how they utilise – and do not utilise – the built-in possibilities of talking books, in addition to the accounts of how they may lack certain functionality, can be discussed in terms of *remediation*. Many of the functions included in the DAISY format can be viewed as a way to attempt to borrow or imitate properties of the conventional printed book. When used with a certain type of player or software, the DAISY format allows the user to flick through the different parts of the book, navigate the different headings of the text and place bookmarks. However, with DAISY text and audio that also includes the recorded text in full text, the user can follow the written text whilst they listen to the narration. However, from information provided in the group interviews, it appears as though the children barely make use of these functions and they find them difficult to use. Based on the

information from the interviews alone, it is difficult to judge why this is the case, but the children's accounts certainly raise questions about the DAISY format (see CEDI, 2010, p. 26)

One question raised relates to the significance that the children ascribe to the *remediation attempts* included in the DAISY format. A clear difference is made between printed books and talking books in the discussions, something which is expressed using the verbs *to read* and *to listen*, as was discussed in chapter 5, subsection "Using talking books". It is also clear that the children attribute a list of possibilities to talking books, including the possibilities to overcome their reading difficulties and use texts which for various reasons they struggle to use in printed format. The talking books are consequently given a compensatory function. Simultaneously, an advantage of talking books seems to be that they are something else than a conventional, printed book.

The analysis of the discussions shows that the children ascribe the talking book with *affordances*, which lead in two different directions: on the one hand towards the type of medium, the printed book, which the talking books *remediate* but on the other hand towards a media format that can be viewed as more standalone. The children's accounts show that, via their use of talking books, they can realise – but also ignore and go beyond – a number of the possibilities built into the DAISY format. The relationship between talking books and the printed book may consequently be said to be dynamic, in the sense that it changes through the actual use of talking books.

Chapter four emphasises that the use of talking books, just as all media, takes place within the framework of institutional and social practices, which is described as the third level of materiality. It is apparent from the children's accounts that the social contexts in which their use of talking books occurs are significant for how these activities are shaped. A clear theme in all the accounts is that the people in the children's surroundings, such as family, friends and different professional groups, have an impact on the way in which the children find talking books. Even if the use of talking books is often described as an individual rather than collective activity, social and institutional frameworks nevertheless play a part in how the activities are shaped. It is possible that the individual use of talking books can be viewed as an expression of a socially created idea that reading is an activity that should primarily take place alone (see Dolatkah, 2010, p. 111f). By using headphones, this type of use becomes possible and talking book use therefore becomes similar to reading printed books.

However, an important question applies to the meaning ascribed to the use of talking books by people and institutions in the children's environment. To a certain extent, the interviews point to the idea that the compensatory role of talking books – rather than their distinctive nature – takes precedence in the social and institutional practices that the children are part of (see Adetoro, 2012, p. 93). The ideas expressed by the children – that the use of talking books cannot be viewed as reading and that it may perhaps be viewed as a type of shortcut or cheating – suggest that they perceive reading printed text as an ideal, despite the fact that it may be unattainable for them. At the same time, the children see the *affordances* of talking books which take them beyond the conception of reading printed text as the norm. Suggestions for the meaning of this, as well as other identified aspects of the materiality of the use of talking book, are presented in the following section.

Conclusions – suggestions for further development

The fifth and final question in this report deals with how Swedish libraries can further develop their service for the target group of young users of talking book, based on the children's descriptions of reading, their use of talking books, the way in which they find talking books and their library experiences. The term 'Swedish libraries' refers to all forms of libraries that young users of talking books encounter; this includes public libraries, school libraries and MTM. The answer to this question is formulated in the following three connected suggestions.

The first suggestion is for a shift in focus for the libraries' outreach and the marketing of talking books. It became evident from the focus groups that the problems concerning talking books described by the children relate to their use rather than the access to and search for talking books.

To further develop their services to young users of talking books, Swedish libraries could focus on enhancing their work on children's use of talking books.

Naturally, the basis for this use is a well-functioning system for the accessibility and provision of talking books, but a well-functioning system for storing and searching for talking books cannot in itself lead children to use talking books.

The second suggestion concerns the talking book's role in relation to that of the printed book. In the children's accounts, two ways of understanding the use of talking books may be identified: either as a compensatory activity or as an activity in its own right. One way does not necessarily need to be viewed as being generally more usable than the other. However, it is important that the professional groups whose task it is to distribute and support the use of talking books can encourage both points of view.

One way to further develop the services to young users of talking books is to, on a national as well as a local level, encourage a critical discussion on *why* children should use talking books.

It is evident from the focus groups that the social surroundings are of great significance to the ways in which the children use talking books. If their use of talking books is allowed to be understood in a range of different ways in addition to them being of a compensatory nature, the activity of using talking books could be upgraded both by the children themselves and by the institutions involved in the process of providing and making talking books accessible.

The third suggestion may appear banal, but at the same time it is the most significant suggestion, as it emphasises the importance of each individual meeting between the professionals – librarians, library assistants, teachers and others – and the children who are users or prospective users of talking books. In the children's accounts, there are many examples of how a less positive experience may be difficult to forget, even if it occurred many years previously.

To further develop the services to young users of talking books, the importance of a professional approach to each individual encounter with potential and future users of talking books needs to be continuously emphasised.

One consequence that arises from the realisation that other people and social contexts are of great importance for children's reading experiences is that the meeting that occurs between persons in connection with providing talking books should be valued higher.

Unanswered questions

The methods chapter discussed the type of knowledge we can achieve – and not achieve – using focus group interviews. This study is not a study of the use of one single specific information system: this would require other methods. Because of the selection procedure of the study, is it not possible to draw any far-reaching conclusions regarding the general wishes of children and young persons in relation to, for example, the design of talking books, software and catalogues. At the same time, wishes regarding such technical aspects were expressed in the interviews, along with suggestions regarding how the recordings are best made and which titles the children would like to be recorded. This suggests that a further study based on a representative selection as well as studies of specific players and types of talking books could be conducted to further develop MTM's services for this target group.

When designing the study, it was not possible to fully anticipate that the interviews would predominantly address works of fiction. In order to better understand the young users of talking books and their experiences of non-fiction literature and their use of talking books in a study context, further studies would need to be conducted. This could possibly lead to a different understanding of the activity of reading talking books and the particular nature and compensatory function of talking books. Gaining access to and using non-fiction could presumably be viewed as an activity that differs from using talking books for fiction.

As stated in the title, the study presented in this report builds upon the children's discussions of using talking books. Their actual use and the way this use unfolds in various contexts have consequently not been studied. Where one of the three comprehensive conclusions of the study emphasises the importance of *using* talking books, it seems reasonable that further studies of the way children use talking books – the way in which these activities are shaped in different contexts – could create a deeper understanding for this use and how it can best be supported.

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Appendix 1 – Focus group overview

| Group | Date | Moderator | Participants |
|-------|------------|--|--|
| | 15/02/2012 | Jenny Nilsson (Anna Fahlbeck present as observer) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Girl aged 11 2. Boy aged 9 3. Boy aged 11 4. Girl aged 13 5. Boy aged 14 6. Girl aged 12 7. Girl aged 10 8. Girl aged 12 |
| | 27/02/2012 | Anna Fahlbeck (Jenny Nilsson present as observer) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Girl aged 11 2. Boy aged 11 3. Boy aged 11 4. Boy aged 12 |
| | 28/02/2012 | Jenny Nilsson (Anna Fahlbeck present as observer) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Boy aged 12 2. Boy aged 11 3. Boy aged 10 4. Boy aged 13 5. Boy aged 12 6. Boy aged 12 7. Boy aged 13 8. Boy aged 13 |
| | 10/03/2012 | Jenny Nilsson (Gun Olsson present as observer) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Girl aged 14 2. Girl aged 16 3. Girl aged 15 4. Girl aged 14 5. Girl aged 13 6. Boy aged 13 |
| | 21/03/2012 | Jenny Nilsson (Anna Fahlbeck present as observer) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Boy aged 11 2. Boy aged 12 3. Girl aged 13 4. Girl aged 9 |

| | | | |
|--|------------|---|---|
| | 07/05/2012 | Jenny Nilsson | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Boy aged 10 2. Boy aged 11 3. Girl aged 15 4. Girl aged 15 5. Boy aged 15 6. Girl aged 13 7. Girl aged 15 8. Girl aged 15 9. Girl aged 15 10. Boy aged 13 |
| | 14/05/2012 | Jenny Nilsson (Lena Boqvist present as observer) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Boy aged 11 2. Boy aged 11 3. Boy aged 11 4. Girl aged 12 |
| | 15/05/2012 | Jenny Nilsson (Lena Boqvist present as observer) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Boy aged 11 2. Boy aged 14 3. Boy aged 12 4. Boy aged 13 |
| | 15/05/2012 | Jenny Nilsson (Lena Boqvist present as observer) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Boy aged 12 2. Boy aged 12 3. Girl aged 9 |

Appendix 2 – Discussion guide

Begin with a short introduction of the task (2 min)

Explain:

that TBP would like the children's opinions of talking books

that it is important to hear their ideas because TPB has talking books for them

that there are no incorrect answers

that they should start with what they think

that this collection of ideas and thoughts is being made to develop talking books

that what they think can lead to us changing things, but it is not guaranteed that we will do exactly as they want

that everything said is anonymous and nobody will know who says what

Introductory round: (5 min)

Everybody says their name and something they enjoy doing in their spare time

Association exercise (3 min thinking/writing + 5 min talking)

If I say talking book, what does that make you think and feel?

Everybody gets to think about this and if they want they can write down a few words. After this, everyone takes turns to share their thoughts after which they can all discuss the thoughts and feelings that have been expressed.

1. Reading (10 min)

What makes you want to read, what makes it fun to read a talking book?

Tell us about a talking book you like!

What type of books do you read?

Tell us about the type of books you do not like to read.

Do you read talking books in any other languages than Swedish?

Where do you like to be/sit/lie when you read talking books?

Does anyone read out loud to you or tell you stories, either now or when you were little?

2. Find your reading (10 min)

Do you have anyone that gives you tips about reading; parents/friends/teachers/the library?

How do you get hold of your talking books?

Do you find reading tips online? (Children's TPB, KP, bookshops etc.)

Do you talk about reading talking books with anyone? Who?

What do you talk about when you talk about reading talking books?

Are you allowed to read the talking books you want?

3. Library and reception (10 min)

If I say library, what does that make you think and feel?

How often do you go to the library?

Say what you do at the library, when where you last there – what did you do then?

What do you usually borrow from the library?

Who do you go to the library with?

How would you like the staff to act when you meet them at the library?

What would you like the staff to help you with?

4. Talking books – design and selection (10 min)

What do you use when you listen to talking books? Computer? Mp3 player? DAISY-player? Other? (Amis?)

Do you use special functions such as placing bookmarks, looking up a specific page or changing the speed of the reading? Other?

How would you like the text and images to look on the screen?

How would you like the recording itself to be? Do you have any favourite reader?

Are you ever unable to find the talking books you want?

Do you miss any type of books? – fun, exciting, scary, about horses, dragons, sport?

Do you know what you need to do if you would like a book recorded as an talking book?

If TBP wants to make more children interested in using talking books, what should they do?

Conclusion (5 min)

Summarise the most important aspects of the discussion. Complete the list of participants with email addresses for feedback and give the children the gift.

Appendix 3 - Consent form



talboks- och
punktskriftsbiblioteket

Datum
2011-11-28

Vår referens
jn

Tillstånd från målsman

Talboks- och punktskriftsbiblioteket, TPB, är en statlig myndighet som bl a arbetar med att producera och förmedla talböcker.

För att talböckerna och servicen kring dem ska bli så bra som möjligt vill vi ta reda på vad barn tycker. Vi samarbetar därför med bibliotek i landet för att få träffa barn i fokusgrupper. I fokusgruppen får barnen vid ett tillfälle diskutera med andra barn vad de tycker om talböcker. Barnens tankar sammanfattas sedan bland annat i en rapport och i den är alla barn anonyma.

TPB hoppas att du vill ge ditt tillstånd till att ditt barn är med i en av dessa fokusgrupper.

Med vänliga hälsningar
Jenny Nilsson
Barnbibliotekarie
TPB

Ditt barn är välkommet till fokusgruppen om talböcker på

Bibliotek:.....

Datum:.....

Postadress
Box 5113
121 17 Johanneshov

Besöksadress
Palmfeltsvägen 5

Telefon
08-58 00 27 00

Telefax
08-58 00 27 70

E-post
tpb@tpb.se

Härmed ger jag mitt tillstånd till att mitt barn är med i en fokusgrupp för att berätta vad hon/han tycker om talböcker.

Barnets namn:.....

.....
Ort Datum

.....
Namnunderskrift

.....
Namnförtydligande

Appendix 4 – Interview questions

Questions before Skype discussion 15/10/2012 Anna Hampson Lundh interviews Jenny Nilsson.

The questions address the way the interview is carried out, the themes and the details of each interview.

Questions about the implementation of the focus groups

1. I have created an overview of the empirical material below. Are these correct? For example, I am unsure of the details of who observes each discussion. It would also be good if information about the 'place' could be completed with more specific information – in one or two of the interviews it sounds as though they were conducted at/near a school. Is this correct?
2. How can I describe the selection procedure in the report? How were the participating children selected? What were the selection criteria?
3. Do we know the native language(s) of the children? I am under the impression that the majority (all?) were native speakers of Swedish.
4. May I have access to the latest version of the interview guide? I only have the draft we discussed before conducting the interviews.
- 5.

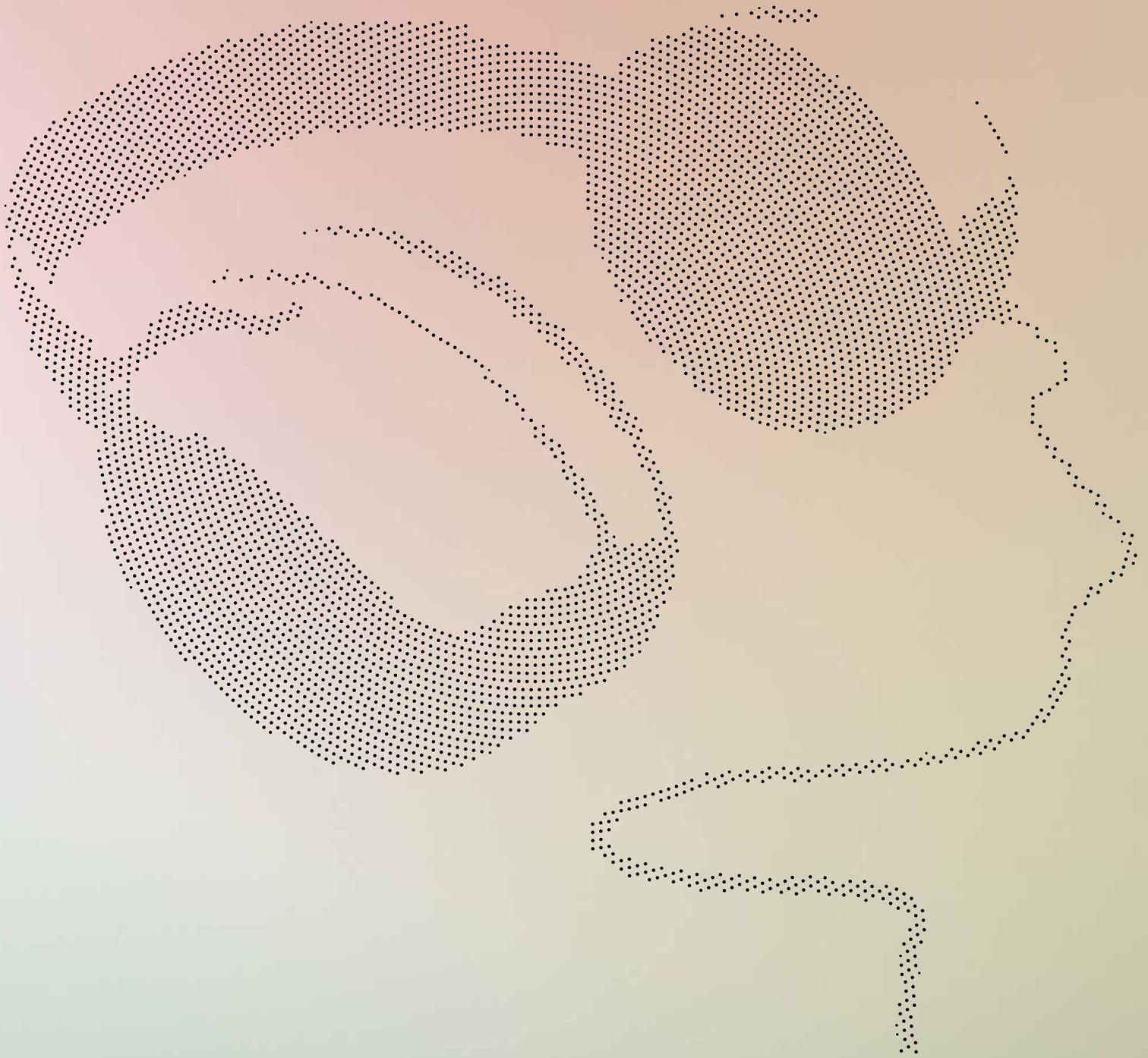
Questions about the content of the focus groups

1. One issue that I wish to discuss is the basic concept of reading, which represents the activity that the focus groups discuss. During the interview, when questions are asked about reading, what do you think is being referred to? Are there types of reading that cannot be included in the questions being asked?
2. One interesting theme in the discussions deals with the differences between reading

talking books and reading 'ordinary' books. In the interviews, as a rule, the moderator uses the expression 'to read talking books', which occasionally leads to discussions. The children use both *read* and *listen* when they discuss talking books.

How do you view this? Is it important for TPB to maintain that talking books are something you read? If so, what are your reasons for this?

3. In some of the focus groups (e.g., interview B pp. 17-18; interview G, p. 17) the children discuss, if I understand correctly, that the introductions to talking books are a little tedious. What is this about? Is it about the title page information?
4. Many questions are asked about Amis during the interviews. Could you explain a little more about the program? Is it desirable for TPB that the program is used?
5. KP as a source for book tips and potential advertising channels was suggested by the moderators in the discussions. Why did questions arise about KP?
6. If I understand correctly, interviews C and E were a little slow. What was the cause of this, do you think?
7. In interview B, an app 'Boken i örat' [the book in the ear] was mentioned. Do you know what kind of app this is?
8. In interview C, a boy speaks through an interpreter. What language does this boy speak?
9. What is 'O'boy' that they talk about in interview D (p. 6)?
10. Interview D mentions 'black and white text' and 'black and white book'. Am I correct in assuming that these are terms for non-braille and non-braille books?



Talking books and reading children

Children describing their use of talking books

This report from the Swedish Agency for Accessible Media presents a study on how Swedish children perceive talking books and the library services directed to them. The study background is formulated in the Agency's Children and Youth Strategy for 2012-2014.

The study is based on nine focus group conversations that were conducted by the Swedish Agency for Accessible Media and organised by four county libraries, and The Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired. A total of 51 children participated, including 30 boys and 21 girls aged 9 to 16 years. All participants had some form of print disability, such as dyslexia or visual impairment.

The purpose of this report is to provide an enhanced understanding of young users (under the age of 18) of talking books and, with a basis of this understanding, to create a foundation for the further development of Swedish library services to this target group.