

The Network Newsletter: tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries

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The Network's Website is at www.seapn.org.uk and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

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Did you see ...?

Adults Learning

The latest issue¹ focuses on the Election. It includes a number of interesting articles, particularly:

- Steve Mulligan “It’s time we made migration work”, which summarises the new NIACE paper – please see “Tackling social and digital exclusion – Other Agencies” below [pp28-29]
- Susannah Chambers “Family learning matters”, which argues that family learning must form a part of the new Government’s skills policy [pp30-31].

Access ...

The latest issue of *Access*² includes a number of interesting articles:

- Julie Walker “Bibliotherapy ... ‘So ... Not Bibles, then?’”, which introduces bibliotherapy work in Kirklees [pp3-5]
- Charlotte Self “Virtual networks – helping older people get online in Leeds” [pp21-23] – and please see below for further information about this initiative.
- Barbara Band “Public and school libraries: a match made in heaven?”, which looks briefly at examples of cooperation between school and public libraries [pp24-25]

Here is some further information about the Leeds initiative:

“Leeds City Council was one of seven partners from North West Europe taking part in the Seniors’ Network Support (SeNS) project, an innovative scheme looking at new ways to support older people to stay independent and healthy for longer. The council’s Library and Information Service and Adult Social Care department worked together to manage and deliver the project. The scheme was funded by European Regional Development Funding through Interreg IVB. Our aims for the scheme in Leeds were to support older people to live longer at home, have an active social life and feel part of their local community. One strand of our SeNS project was to use the internet to help connect older people virtually to their friends, family and local community.” [p21]

Rainbow Reading Blog: “The REAL purpose of libraries”

This blogpost³ has received quite a bit of attention. In it, Scott Bonner, the Director of the Ferguson Municipal Public Library, talks about his view of the real role of public libraries:

¹ *Adults Learning* 26 (2) April 2015.

² *Access: Journal of the Public and Mobile Libraries Group* (5) Spring 2015. Available to download as a pdf (2450 kb) from:
[http://info.cilip.org.uk/FS/2834/Documents/ISSUE%205%20\(FINAL\).pdf](http://info.cilip.org.uk/FS/2834/Documents/ISSUE%205%20(FINAL).pdf).

“What is a public library for? Well, books of course! FREE books, lots of books, big books, little books, from classics of western literature to Dr. Seuss, every book you might want. We love them so!

But, no, that’s not what a library is for. It’s one of the things we do, certainly, our most beloved service. But all those books are tools, one of the many tools that we use to achieve some ambitious goals. Libraries are the public institutions that exist to nurture cultural literacy, lifelong learning, and bringing its community together [...]”

He goes on to outline some of the community-based work they have undertaken:

“In Ferguson, one of the many programs we provided was the “School for Peace”. In August of 2014, when the Ferguson-Florissant School District announced it would be closed for a whole week, we did what we could to help by turning the library into an ad-hoc school. Professional teachers and skilled volunteers taught math, science, reading, and more. We served over 200 students per day by week’s end, overflowing into the nearby First Baptist Church. We helped students start school when school was not available, and helped desperate parents find a safe, nurturing place for their children.

For a community to grow and improve, it has to have a means to come together, someplace safe and welcoming, where no one is trying to sell you something, and no one will look down their nose at you for your class, race, creed, sexual orientation, politics, religion, or pop culture preferences. Libraries are that place. We welcome everyone, and encourage the hard work of community building. We have big meeting rooms for public events, small meeting rooms for private conversations, open and friendly spaces to chit-chat or quietly read together. All of these are ways to build community. Maybe it’s a garden club. Maybe it’s open sessions for city planning. Maybe it’s a parenting support group. Maybe it’s a knitting circle.”

Well worth reading the whole post.

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Culture and poverty ... [update]

This major review report⁴, published by the Welsh Government, was assessed in an earlier *Newsletter*⁵.

³ Scott Bonner. “The REAL purpose of libraries”, *Rainbow Reading Blog*, Apr 2015, <https://www.readingrainbow.com/blog/2015/04/16/the-real-purpose-of-libraries-by-ferguson-library-director-scott-bonner/>.

⁴ *Culture and poverty: harnessing the power of the arts, culture and heritage to promote social justice in Wales – a report with recommendations by Baroness Kay Andrews*

The Welsh Government has just announced that £2.7 million will be made available to implement the recommendations in the report. The press release⁶ says:

“The main focus of the funding will be to support museums, archives and libraries to deliver the recommendations made in Baroness Andrew’s [sic] report on culture and poverty, in which she made a compelling case for joint-working across the sector to ensure culture is accessible to all.

The funding includes £1million to modernise seven public libraries in Fishguard Ebbw Vale, Blaenavon, Porthmadog, Deeside, Cardiff and Powys. This is part of the Welsh Government’s Community Learning Library Capital Development Programme, which aims to establish libraries as community hubs, where customers can access a range of council services as well as the traditional library amenities.

The remaining £1.7million will be used to help widen access and encourage the use of Wales’ rich and diverse collections on offer at museums, archives and libraries across the country, including £235,000 for programmes to increase the number of users, particularly those living in Communities First areas. £255,000 will be used to establish a national Digital Library Service, allowing customers to access a free all-Wales e-books and e-zines service, as well as free audio books and free reference sources [...]

The funding will also support the further roll-out of Every Child a Library Member, deliver an enhanced Sharing Treasures Programme, where local museums work in partnership with larger museums, and matched funding for the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust to continue their work to preserve important cultural items.

Many of the programmes being funded will support the 2016 Year of Adventure initiative, launched by the Deputy Minister to promote Wales as the capital of adventure tourism, with activities, events and attractions across Wales taking part.”⁷

OBE for the Welsh Government. Welsh Government, 2014. Available to download as a pdf (988.36 kb) from: <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/drah/publications/140313-culture-and-poverty-en.pdf>.

⁵ *The Network Newsletter*, 156, Apr 2014, pp5-7. Available to download as a pdf (144.4 kb) from: http://www.seapn.org.uk/uploads/files/newsletter_ns_156.pdf.

⁶ See: <http://gov.wales/newsroom/cultureandsport/2015/150417-museums-archives-libraries-funding/?lang=en>.

⁷ Source: Museums Association email, 22 Apr 2015.

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Other Agencies

The power of reading: how the next government can unlock every child's potential through reading

This is an important new report⁸ from the Read On. Get On. campaign, which:

“[...] sets out the key policy priorities for the next government, and, in particular, in two crucial domains where national government has influence in England: in nurseries and in primary schools.” [p iv]

It looks at two key areas, investing early, and getting all children to be reading well by age 11.

In terms of investing early:

“We make the case for prioritising action to improve early language skills among the poorest children. Children’s early language skills have a major impact on the development of their literacy skills. Yet one in five young children in England are not reaching the expected level of communication and language skills for their age, rising to one in four children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

All three- and four-year-olds in England, as well as two-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds, are entitled to free part-time early education. Universal free early education provides a strong foundation for a world-class early education system that enables all young children to build good early language skills. There is a major opportunity to capitalise on this foundation by significantly strengthening the quality of the early education workforce.

Our priorities for early years education over the next parliament are:

1. Early education in every nursery in England to be led by an early years graduate by 2020, with government support initially focused on nurseries serving children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
2. Every nursery in England to have at least one non-graduate member of staff with an intermediate level qualification in young children’s speech, language and communication.
3. The creation of a cross-departmental early years minister to coordinate Whitehall strategy and delivery on early years services across health, education and local government.” [p v]

In terms of the priority, “Supporting schools and teachers to get all children reading well by 11”:

⁸ Kayte Lawton and Hollie Warren. *The power of reading: how the next government can unlock every child's potential through reading*. Read On. Get On., 2015. Available to download as a pdf (946.4 kb) from: http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/The_Power_of_Reading.pdf.

“Strong early language skills give children the essential foundation for learning in primary school. Once children reach primary school, the focus for policy should be to empower teachers with the skills and resources to build on this, or to help struggling children to catch up quickly.

Government should support the work of skilled professionals, with appropriate resources and access to the latest evidence on teaching practices, and hold schools to account for improvements in children’s attainment – particularly among children from disadvantaged backgrounds. We are not calling for substantial new resources for primary schools because we recognise the fiscal challenges of the next parliament and believe that the priority for any new investment is in the early years.

Our priorities in primary education for the next government are:

1. A new strategy for improving the teaching of reading comprehension, especially for older primary school children.
2. Working with schools to develop a new generation of school leaders for literacy, focused on primary schools serving disadvantaged children.
3. Focusing school accountability on children from disadvantaged backgrounds who are falling behind, by exploring reforms to the pupil premium.” [p v]

This report’s priorities have also been informed by the findings of this new research:

The link between childhood reading skills and adult outcomes: analysis of a cohort of British children

This briefing note⁹ from the IFS (based on research funded by Read On. Get On.):

“[...] investigates the link between children’s reading skills and adult outcomes using data from the British Cohort Study. It builds on previous work by Crawford and Cribb [...]¹⁰ – who explored the links between reading and mathematics skills at age 10 and labour market outcomes at ages 30, 34 and 38 using the same data [...]” [pp1-2]

The researchers report that:

⁹ Claire Crawford and Jonathan Cribb. *The link between childhood reading skills and adult outcomes: analysis of a cohort of British children*. Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS Briefing Note BN169), 2015. Available to download as a pdf (456.81 kb) from: <http://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/bns/BN169.pdf>.

¹⁰ Claire Crawford and Jonathan Cribb. *Reading and maths skills at age 10 and earnings in later life: a brief analysis using the British Cohort Study*. Centre for Analysis of Youth Transitions (CAYT) (Research Report REP03), 2013. Available to download as a pdf (538 kb) from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/190625/Reading_and_maths_skills_at_age_10_and_earnings_in_later_life.pdf.

“We find that reading skills are associated with significant increases in gross hourly wages and gross weekly earnings, particularly at older ages (ages 38 and 42), but less consistent evidence for strong links between reading skills in childhood and other outcomes in adulthood, including the likelihood of being in work, self-reported health status and the intergenerational transmission of reading skills. We also find some suggestive evidence that the link between reading skills in childhood and wages and earnings in adulthood is stronger amongst those from poor backgrounds. Overall, this note provides suggestive evidence that improving reading skills in childhood may be one route through which earnings potential in adulthood could be increased, although it should be noted that these estimates are associations rather than evidence of causality.” [p1]

Inclusive equality ...

Sally Witcher has had, in her own terms, “an erratic career-path” [p viii]. She currently works for Inclusion Scotland, a consortium of disability organisations, individual disabled people and social partners. “Her previous roles include, Director of the Child Poverty Action Group, senior civil servant and researcher. To add to these perspectives, she brings her life experience as a disabled person.”¹¹

This book¹² has been developed from her PhD thesis. It aims to focus on a ‘bigger picture’ and to attempt an holistic approach to avoid meaning “fall[ing] down the gaps between disciplines.” [p viii]

In doing so, Sally Witcher sets out to define what makes a socially just society, and then to tease apart the various elements of this. The book looks at:

- Social justice (in which she starts to define a just society)
- Poverty
- Discrimination
- Social exclusion.

She then looks at:

- Inclusive policy processes
- Relationships and identity.

Finally, in the Conclusion, she pulls together key themes from the literature; draws up a vision for inclusive equality; and looks (rather bleakly) ahead.

This book is, sadly, rather difficult reading, primarily because of the combination of ‘PhD language’ and a lot of references, and post-modern theory. It has a

¹¹ Taken from: <http://www.policypress.co.uk/display.asp?k=9781447300038>.

¹² Sally Witcher. *Inclusive equality: a vision for social justice*. Policy Press, 2013 (ISBN – hardcover: 978 1 44730 003 8).

number of important messages about society and the issues it is facing, but these are difficult to sort from the dense text.

After working my way through the book, I found the end result disappointing, in that the intention – “[...] to conjure up a vision of a more positive alternative and to indicate approaches to policy and practice that should take us in that direction.” [p216] – seems to me not to have been clearly achieved. What the author eventually does is describe a theoretical model of ‘inclusive equality’ – but also shows that it has severe limitations, and that the theoretical model may not work in ‘real life’. Maybe this does give us something to think about and work towards, but it feels a strange place to end what has been a very intense journey.

Making migration work: labour market and skills solutions

This new report¹³ from NIACE is the second in their “Policy Solutions” series.

“The NIACE Policy Solution Series brings fresh thinking and new ideas to key challenges in public policy. We focus on issues where learning, skills and employment policies can help achieve inclusive economic growth, better educational outcomes, higher employment, improvements in productivity, better health and well-being, social inclusion, tolerance and cohesion and community and citizen engagement.” [p2]

The report argues that there is strong evidence that migration contributes socially and economically to the UK, and has done so for many years.

“However, much of the discourse about migration focuses on the negative concerns about the level and impact of migration at the expense of reasoned debate about the public policies which could help maximise the benefits.” [p3]

It therefore calls for the factual information about the impact of migration to be more widely discussed, whilst, at the same time, public policy needs to tackle issues around pressure on local services and infrastructure.

In section 1, “How is migration working? The employment, learning & skills challenges”, the report lays out facts about migration, particularly links to employment and the labour market, and then goes on to look at benefits:

“Public policy on migration, over the course of this parliament, has tended towards assuaging public and media concerns about numbers. Over the past 12 months both the Government and other parties have proposed policy aimed at combatting perceived ‘benefit tourism’, in particular with the aim of reducing the eligibility of EU migrants to draw

¹³ *Making migration work: labour market and skills solutions*. NIACE (“Policy Solutions” no.2), 2015. Available to download as a pdf (1950 kb) from: <http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Making%20Migration%20Work%20-%20Labour%20market%20and%20skills%20solutions.pdf>.

down benefits. This is despite the evidence showing that less than 5% of EU migrants claim Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and less than 8% claim in-work benefits [...]” [p9]

The second section, “Falling short: how current policy measures up to the challenges”, looks at the “three main areas where policy-makers need to move the debate if we are to make migration truly work for all.” [p13]. The three areas are:

- Language barriers
- The need to recognise the skills that migrants have
- Issues arising from the cap on numbers.

To tackle this, the report calls for better policy to address perceptions and reality:

“The challenge for policy makers is to make policy which recognises the negative perceptions of migration as well as embracing and promoting the real benefits it brings.

As noted in chapter one, the often reported concerns that migrants benefit to the detriment of domestic residents (from increased access to employment opportunities, benefits, housing and other services) is largely false or very localised.

Despite the evidence, the perception that UK-born residents are missing out is real. With unemployment now falling, the perceptions are less about access to work and more focused on pay. Recent reports suggest that the UK has 5 million people on low pay and that it is very difficult to move from low pay into higher skilled work or to support improved productivity without skills and other support.” [p15]

The last section looks at “Policy solutions: employment, learning & skills policies that will maximise migration benefits”. It focuses on three areas, within which there is a number of recommendations:

1. Learning English for all

- Learning English should be a requirement of anyone in a household in receipt of any benefit.
- The number of English classes should be expanded to match growing demand.
- Personal Skills Accounts should be introduced to fund all ESOL learning above entry level ...
- Government should support the development of more language learning embedded into vocational courses.

2. Local solutions to improve opportunities for people and greater community cohesion

- Local areas with particularly high levels of migration should be supported to raise additional resource to tackle their specific needs.

- All people should have equal opportunities to get on.
- Leading by example – “Government should establish a pilot to improve English Language proficiency of workers in the publicly-funded Health and Social Care Sector through blended and work based learning. As well as improving effectiveness and productivity, this could inspire and inform similar activity in those sectors with a higher representation of migrant workers, such as the Hospitality and Food and Drink Sectors.” [p18]

3. Migrants, particularly those with high skills have a vital role to play in helping us to tackle our skills crisis

- Government should urgently review the migration cap to ensure that the UK has access to the students, entrepreneurs, and people with skills we need to grow and prosper [Taken from pp18-19]

The report concludes:

“It’s time for an informed, outcome-driven debate on migration, avoiding the negative rhetoric that sadly dominates much of the mainstream reporting of migration policy.

Employment, learning and skills policies have a critical role to play in helping to make migration work. It is imperative that we maximise the clear benefits migration has and does bring for businesses, communities, the economy and migrants themselves. Through more positive interventions we can:

- Unlock the talents of migrants to fill skills shortages and gaps and support sustained economic growth
- Support all workers to become more resilient and able to fill vacancies across all levels
- Build greater community cohesion across the length and breadth of the country.” [p21]

Abbreviations and acronyms

NIACE = National Institute of Adult Continuing Education

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