

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.

Contents List

Did you see ...?

- *School Libraries in View* – page 1
- *ARC Magazine* – page 2
- *Books for Keeps* – page 2

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Other Agencies

- *Ageism: what's the harm? Exploring the damaging impact of ageism on individuals and society* – page 3
- *Cracks in our foundations: addressing the longstanding attainment gap in England's primary schools* – page 5

LGBTQ+ issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

- Banning of LGBTQ+ books and other library materials [continued] and Protests against Drag Queen Storytimes – page 6

Abbreviations and acronyms – page 10

Did you see ...?

School Libraries in View

The Jan 2023¹ issue includes:

¹ *School Libraries in View*, 47, Jan 2023,
<https://londonslq.files.wordpress.com/2023/02/sliv-47-1.pdf>.

- Teresa Cremin “Reading for pleasure” [pp6-11], which “[...] looks at the latest research on reading for pleasure and how it can be used to benefit school libraries.” [p6]
- Caroline Roche “Censorship and intellectual freedom in the school library” [pp19-22], which looks at a number of recent events, including the cancellation of Simon James Green’s talk at a Southwark school. The article concludes:

“Our young people deserve not to feel unsafe in their school, or feel that they are firmly shoved in their closets with the doors locked tight in school. As an older Education Policy stated ‘Every Child Matters’, and this is something that, as school Librarians, we firmly believe in.” [p21]

The article also includes the “Interim joint position statement on censorship and intellectual freedom”, drawn up by CILIP, the SLG and SLA.

ARC Magazine

The Jan/Feb 2023 issue² has, as usual, a wide range of articles, including:

- “Huddersfield’s Holocaust education centre rebrands to assume larger northern role”, which looks briefly at its rebranding as Holocaust Centre North:

“The Centre will now work with survivors across the whole of the north of the UK, assume a larger educational role and become the only specialist resource in the region dedicated to helping future generations learn about the genocide of European Jews during World War II.

It plans to mark the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 2025 by increasing the size of its archive by 50 per cent and safeguarding at least 10,000 fragile and rare items.” [p29]

Books for Keeps

The Jan 2023 issue³ includes:

- Eve Ainsworth “Why working-class voices matter” [p3], which makes the case for working-class authors being represented in children’s books:

² *ARC Magazine*, 390, Jan/Feb 2023.

³ *Books for Keeps*, 258, Jan 2023, <https://booksforkeeps.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/BfK-258-January-2023.pdf>.

“I just hope, that one day in the future, articles like these will no longer be necessary and working-class and other underrepresented voices will be fairly represented.”

- “New Year predictions 2023” [pp4-5], in which key individuals and organisations look at what they year may bring. A theme that runs through this – apart from the lack of resources for libraries and schools – is one of representation – as Dawn Woods (SLA) says:

“One challenge in libraries which will be increasingly important in 2023 will be questions around representation in books from underrepresented parts of society – books dealing with issues of race, gender, sexuality, and identity. Our society is a diverse population, all deserving representation in our literature without censorship.” [p4]

- Beverley Naidoo “Witness literature”, in which the author (in an article to mark the publication of her latest book⁴) argues that we need to peak the truth to young readers [p11]
- Darren Chetty and Karen Sands-O’Connor “Transitions” (“Beyond the Secret Garden” column), which looks critically at depictions of two 75th anniversaries, 2022’s anniversary of the partition of India, and 2023’s anniversary of the arrival of the Empire Windrush to Britain [pp16-17]

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Other Agencies

Ageism: what's the harm? Exploring the damaging impact of ageism on individuals and society

This is an important new report⁵ from the Centre for Ageing Better.

“Ageism is often dismissed as being harmless, but evidence shows that it causes significant damage to individuals, the economy and society.

Ageism causes people to be excluded from society and its institutions; it also leads people to limit their lives, activities and aspirations, damaging their health and wellbeing. And the ageism that is engrained in our culture and institutions means that people are devalued and marginalised as they get older, creating divisions and inequalities in society.” [p2]

The report outlines three types of ageism:

- Institutional ageism: “[...] when ageism is embedded in laws, rules, social norms, policies and the practices of institutions. We see this in

⁴ *Children of the stone city*. HarperCollins Children’s Books, 978-0008471743, £12.99 (hardback).

⁵ *Ageism: what's the harm? Exploring the damaging impact of ageism on individuals and society*. Centre for Ageing Better, 2022, <https://ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-02/Ageism-harms.pdf>.

employment practices, where older workers are less likely to be employed, less likely to be offered training and frequently subject to stereotypes concerning their ability to do a job. Institutional ageism can also be found in healthcare with older people less likely than younger people to be offered some treatment options.” [p2]

- Interpersonal ageism: “We see it play out in everyday conversations and relationships, for example, people patronising and infantilising people older than themselves, making pejorative assumptions about people based on their age or commenting negatively on their (older) appearance.” [pp2-3]
- Self-directed ageism: this occurs when “[...] a person internalises ageism due to repeated exposure to ageist messages and, as a result, modifies their own thinking and behaviour. Examples are when people believe themselves too old to progress at work or that they’re too old to learn and train. People can also come to believe that old age means reduced physical and mental health with a corresponding tendency to engage in unhealthy behaviours such as smoking, drinking or being physically inactive. People who internalise self-ageist attitudes have worse medication compliance and are less likely to seek healthcare and to go for check-ups.” [p3]

The report also notes that, at an individual level, ageism has an impact on someone’s mental and physical health, as well as their financial wellbeing.

The report then briefly explores the impacts of ageism, looking at how widespread it is (“One in three people report experiencing age prejudice or age discrimination.” [p8]); the effects of mass media and stereotypes; ageism and health and employment; ageism at home and in the community. It then looks at the implications of all this for society – for example, the large number of vacancies that could be filled, but where older people are not given an opportunity.

Finally, the report has a set of recommendations for:

- Filmmakers, TV producers, advertisers and marketers who need to look particularly at the representation of older people
- Employers who need to demonstrate that they recognise the value of older workers
- Healthcare providers: “. Older adults like everyone else should be able to expect care and treatment that is based on an objective assessment of their health needs – not their age.” [p29]
- National government who “[...] should establish an Older People and Ageing Commissioner for England to act as an independent champion for older people and ensure that policy and practice across government considers the long-term needs of people in later life and the implications of our ageing population on society.” [p29]

- Local authorities and homebuilders “[who] should ensure all new homes are built to higher accessibility standards, and collect more data on the accessibility of homes to make it easier for people to find a home that meets their needs.” [p29]
- Local authorities and communities “[who] should sign up to become Age-friendly Communities – these are places where people of all ages are able to live healthy and active later lives.” [p29]

Recommended.⁶

Cracks in our foundations: addressing the longstanding attainment gap in England’s primary schools

The Centre for Social Justice [CSJ] has produced a series of reports since its establishment in 2004; some were party-political-led, some were outstanding assessments of particular issues (such as their major report on children in care⁷) – this one⁸ also falls into this category.

It begins by setting out what it has identified as key issues:

“England’s primary school system has a long-standing problem: each academic year thousands of pupils leave primary school without reaching expected standards in foundational skills. These children go on to secondary school ill-equipped to engage in further learning and unable to reach their true potential [...]

While the government is ambitious about improving education and life chances for young people, teachers fear that they are not on course to achieve their aims. The idea that 90 per cent of all children in 2030 will leave primary school reaching these expected standards is a far cry from reality.

Our polling reveals that at the just 40 per cent of teachers said that they were confident that most of their pupils would meet expected standards in 2023. Even starker, just 17 per cent of teachers are confident that this will be true for most of their disadvantaged pupils.

Our education system needs to ensure every child leaves primary school with a strong grasp of foundational skills, at the very minimum.

⁶ Source: *Later Life AGEnda*, 7 Feb 2023.

⁷ *Couldn't care less: a policy report from the Children in Care Working Group*. Centre for Social Justice (“Breakthrough Britain” series), 2008, <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CouldntCareLess.pdf>.

⁸ *Cracks in our foundations: addressing the longstanding attainment gap in England’s primary schools*. Centre for Social Justice, 2023, <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/CSJ-Cracks-in-our-Foundations.pdf>.

Foundational skills are essential for future education, work, and wellbeing.

This report sets out an ambitious plan to create an education system which allows all children to secure the foundational skills they need to thrive.” [p6]

The report argues that changes should be made in three key areas:

- Seeing parents as partners in education
- Fixing the damage of Covid
- Strengthening the school system.

and makes 15 important recommendations.

It particularly wants to strengthen the teaching of key skills (literacy, numeracy, oracy) and argues a very strong case around the importance of reading – for example:

“Levels of foundational skills impact all aspects of adult life. Everyday activities such as reading labels on medicine, filling out a job application, or finding key information on the internet are a challenge without them [...] Children who have poor language skills aged 5 are more likely to fail to reach expected levels in literacy by Year 6, which in turn makes them three times more likely to experience mental health problems as adults [...] The lifelong consequences of poor foundational skills development are far from purely academic.

Low levels of foundational skills can even increase the likelihood of interaction with the criminal justice system. As Andrea Ellison, from the Leeds Library service, told the CSJ: *‘I strongly believe that if we want to keep our children in Leeds out of long-term poverty and the criminal justice system, we need to make sure they can read.’*” [p15 – italics theirs]

This report is important and well worth scanning, just to see how the work we do can fit into this framework.

LGBTQ+ issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Banning of LGBTQ+ books and other library materials [continued] and Protests against Drag Queen Storytimes

“Librarians threatened with jail if they stock LGBTQ+ books in North Dakota”

According to a story in *PinkNews*⁹:

⁹ Chantelle Billson “Librarians threatened with jail if they stock LGBTQ+ books in North Dakota”, *PinkNews*, 23 Jan 2023, <https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/01/23/north->

“Librarians in the US state of North Dakota could face jail for stocking books containing depictions of sexual or gender identity – which is considered “sexually explicit” under legislation currently under consideration by state lawmakers.

On Tuesday (17 January), the Republican-dominated state House Judiciary Committee heard arguments about the proposal which critics say is ‘steeped in discrimination’. No vote was taken.

The proposal suggests charging offenders with a class B misdemeanour, with a maximum penalty of 30 days in jail and a \$1,500 (approximately £1,200) fine for librarians who refuse to remove books deemed offensive.

It also specifies 10 things that library books cannot visually depict, including ‘sexual intercourse,’ ‘sexual preference’ and ‘sexual perversion’ — although none of those terms are defined.”

“Voters Oppose Book Bans in Libraries”

This is an interesting – and noteworthy – article¹⁰, drawing on:

“[...] key findings from a survey conducted by Hart Research Associates and North Star Opinion Research on behalf of the American Library Association among 1,000 voters and 472 parents of children in public school. The survey was conducted March 1 to 6, 2022, and the sample is demographically and geographically representative of U.S. voters and parents.”

The headlines are:

“Large majorities of voters (71%) oppose efforts to have books removed from their local public libraries, including a majority of Democrats (75%), independents (58%), and Republicans (70%). Most voters and parents hold librarians in high regard, have confidence in their local libraries to make good decisions about what books to include in their collections, and agree that libraries in their communities do a good job offering books that represent a variety of viewpoints.”

In Dublin, “Dublin libraries to keep books by trans author despite attempts to remove them”¹¹:

[dakota-library-jail-lgbtq-queer-books/?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mypinknews&pnespid=tbs9VyJfbagFivzZqzLtAZKHog6sCZ4udLOI3ORmvEJm1qcfCip24nKTHEohoYkK0ZX._NMWbg.](https://www.ala.org/advocacy/voters-oppose-book-bans-libraries)

¹⁰ “Voters Oppose Book Bans in Libraries”, ALA, no date [2022?], <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/voters-oppose-book-bans-libraries>.

¹¹ Nicole Lee “Dublin libraries to keep books by trans author despite attempts to remove them”, *Gay Community News*, 2 Feb 2023, <https://gcn.ie/dublin-libraries-keep-books-trans-author-attempts-remove/>.

“Despite some complaints, Dublin libraries announced that the books will remain on the shelves as they are part of the government-approved Rainbow Reads list [12].”¹³

There was also recently a depressing article¹⁴, ¹⁵ about the removal of books from libraries in Florida:

“Keri Clark used to spend her days helping students discover books in the school library where she works in Jacksonville, Florida. As she saw it, her job as a librarian was to get as many books in kids’ hands as possible.

That changed last month. The library is now closed off, the shelves are empty, and her job now mostly consists of ‘vetting’ piles of books to comply with new censorship laws implemented by the state of Florida [...]

Ms Clark is one of many educators who have found themselves on the frontline of a sweeping effort by the state of Florida to exert greater control over every level of education. That effort, spearheaded by governor Ron DeSantis, has resulted in thousands of books being pulled from shelves so they can go through a vetting process. Some of them will never return.”

Protests continue – but there is also increasing solidarity amongst community groups and local people opposing the protests.

In Colchester:

“Hundreds of LGBTQ+ activists stood in an amazing counter-protest following attempts by anti-drag pundits to disrupt a library’s Drag Queen Story Hour event [...]

The occasion came as part of Essex County Council’s Kaleidoscope¹⁶ LGBTQ+ awareness event, which aims to celebrate queer identities with a festival, talks from local LGBTQ+ figureheads, and workshops.”¹⁷, ¹⁸

¹² See: <https://magazine.gcn.ie/articles/230694?article=104-1>.

¹³ Source: *Public Libraries News*, 12 Feb 2023.

¹⁴ Richard Hall ““A librarian’s frontline view of Florida’s ‘vetting’ process for school books, and the titles being banned”, *Independent*, 14 Feb 2023, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/florida-book-ban-desantis-schools-b2281345.html>.

¹⁵ Source: *Public Libraries News*, 12 Feb 2023.

¹⁶ See: <https://libraries.essex.gov.uk/news/kaleidoscope-lgbtqplus-event/>.

¹⁷ Amelia Hansford “Trolls tried to disrupt library’s Drag Queen Story Hour event – then something incredible happened”, *PinkNews*, 5 Feb 2023, https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/02/05/drag-queen-story-hour-counter-protest-blocks-bigots-from-library/?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mypinknews&pnespid=7eFIEiBWNKUWwf2R_j2vEYuVrkKoSsctcu7skftlqkJmEV.UuWvTxWM06YzR.bdRF4egt.iHdQ.

¹⁸ Source: *PinkNews*, 6 Feb 2023.

And in museums:

“Controversial UK politician slams Tate for hosting children's drag queen storytime session”

According to an article¹⁹ in *The Art Newspaper*, Baroness Nicholson has:

“[...] written to the chair of Tate's board of trustees decrying the institution's decision to invite a drag queen to perform to a group of children at Tate Britain in London next month.”

She goes on to write:

“‘Having adults read to children is a wonderful thing, of course, but why does it have to be a man pretending to be a woman?’ the open letter reads. Nicholson goes on to equate drag queens with ‘murderers, paedophiles, terrorists, furies and other fetishists’.”

However, the article also quotes Frances Williams, the learning and participation manager at Queercircle²⁰, as saying:

“[...] a 'culture war' is being waged through our public institutions.

It's important that our public institutions, which are publicly funded, reflect society as a whole and not a minority of zealots. Through our public exhibitions at Queercircle we have shown how drag queens have long joined forces with feminists to protest sexist gender tropes in popular culture, as when they jointly invade the Miss World Competition in 1971. Through our family programme we promote the work of LGBTQ+ writers, including those who write for children. Families tell us they find safety and connection in a cultural space where they do not have to worry about being socially stigmatised. These stories simply affirm our right to exist and thrive and as such, are important for children's healthy development and parental well-being alike' [...]"²¹

At the event itself:

“Brawls erupted during a far-right protest outside Tate Britain on Saturday over the gallery's Drag Queen Story Hour event for children.

Around 30 protesters led by the white nationalist group, Patriotic Alternative, staged a demonstration outside the London gallery in protest at the story-telling event. Signs carried by members of the group read ‘groom dogs not children’ and ‘no drag for kids’.

¹⁹ Khabir Jhala “Controversial UK politician slams Tate for hosting children's drag queen storytime session”, *The Art Newspaper*, 27 Jan 2023, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2023/01/27/controversial-uk-politician-slams-tate-for-hosting-childrens-drag-queen-storytime-session>.

²⁰ See: <https://queercircle.org/>.

²¹ Source: *Public Libraries News*, 29 Jan 2023.

They came head-to-head with counter protesters led by the antifascist group Stand Up To Racism. Police created a corridor outside the entrance to allow attendees, including small children, to access the event.”

What was particularly heartening was the robust stance taken by Tate Britain in the face of opposition:

“Tate had defended its programming after Emma Nicholson, a baroness in the House of Lords, wrote to the gallery in January criticising its decision to host the readings, describing drag as ‘adult sexualised entertainment’ and saying the event was propaganda for ‘queer ideology’.

In response, Tate said: ‘Events are not programmed either to promote, endorse or reconcile differing points of view on wider political issues. Rather they aim to be inclusive and celebrate the diversity of Tate’s visitors and the community.’

A petition calling on Tate to cancel the event attracted almost 4,000 signatures. The group that organised the petition, Art Not Propaganda, said it did not participate in Saturday’s protest, which it condemned as a ‘racist, sexist, divisive shouting match’. The group criticised the gallery for its handling of the incident, saying the clashes could have been prevented if Tate had listened to concerns.

The gallery has said that ‘visitors are free to choose with which aspect of our programmes they engage’, and that it ‘firmly believes others should be given the chance’ to decide whether or not to attend events for themselves.”²²

Abbreviations and acronyms

CILIP = Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
SLA = School Library Association
SLG = School Libraries Group

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²² If you are interested, there is more on this in: Khabir Jhala “Controversial UK politician slams Tate for hosting children’s drag queen storytime session”, *The Art Newspaper*, 27 Jan 2023, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2023/01/27/controversial-uk-politician-slams-tate-for-hosting-childrens-drag-queen-storytime-session>.