

## Working Paper 8

### Public Libraries, Children and Young People and Social Exclusion

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#### *Abstract*

*The paper begins by considering the dimensions of the social exclusion of children and young people, including poverty and its relationship with exclusion from school. It then reviews central initiatives in the area of children's literacy. The paper then considers children's use of public libraries, including access to library services and the effect of local and national initiatives on library provision. Challenges facing library services to children and young people (including school libraries) are considered. Stock selection is specifically discussed as a key means of making an impact on social exclusion. The paper then traces the transition from the outreach approach pioneered in the 1970s to a focus on building based services, followed, in turn, by an increased emphasis on education from the change of Government in 1997. Various initiatives are detailed, but it is questioned whether there is sufficient emphasis on social exclusion. It is concluded that services to children are often marginalised, for reasons such as non-mainstream funding, and that libraries are still institutions serving primarily the privileged. Public libraries therefore need to tackle social exclusion as their main purpose, and recommendations towards this end are made (May 1999)*

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“Children need to be viewed in this society as a priority and support should be given to individuals and institutions that support children. The public library is one of those institutions ... [the library] can allow our children to rise above the slavery induced self-hatred that slowly eats away at their hearts, minds and spirits.” [Abif, 1996]

“[We must] ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources ...” [United Nations, 1989]

“It is simply not acceptable that so many children go to school hungry, or not at all, that so many teenagers grow up with no real prospect of a job ... It shames us as a nation, it wastes lives and we all have to pay the costs of dependency and social division.” [Tony Blair, in Social Exclusion Unit, 1998]

#### **Introduction**

There is currently much concern within the European Union about the social exclusion of young people, and:

“In particular, there is concern about the large numbers of young people who have fallen out of the education, training and employment systems - the social institutions which have conventionally structured young people’s lives and integrated them into the formal social fabric.” [Watts and McCarthy, 1998, p3]<sup>1</sup>

Within the UK, not only is this a serious concern, but there is also considerable childhood poverty which, together with the effects of racism and class discrimination, mean that many children and young people are socially excluded. Recent work by the Government’s Social Exclusion Unit has concentrated on the effects of this - and on the means to tackle social exclusion - and, whilst locating the issue rather too firmly in “poor neighbourhoods” (rather than looking at the wider, underlying causes), nevertheless the report [Social Exclusion Unit, 1998] does recognise that:

“Poor education and poor opportunities for young people are common problems in poor neighbourhoods” (p28).

As Tony Blair says in the foreword to the report:

“It is simply not acceptable that so many children go to school hungry, or not at all, that so many teenagers grow up with no real prospect of a job ... It shames us as a nation, it wastes lives and we all have to pay the costs of dependency and social division.” (p7)

Some statistics and background information about social exclusion follow.

### **Background: children and young people in the UK today - some facts, figures and issues**

On 15 October 1998, the Department of Social Security published the 9th edition of *Households below average income 1979 to 1996/7*. As their press release states:

“almost three in ten children were in the bottom fifth of the overall income distribution. Around four in ten children were in families in the top half of the income distribution” [Department of Social Security, 1998]

and a newspaper article gave this stark description:

“Children bear the brunt of poverty in Britain, with more than three million living in households that exist on less than half the average income ... [and] more than 2.5 million living in workless households” [Cooper, 1998]

Recent research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation [Gregg, Harkness and Machin, 1999] found that:

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<sup>1</sup> interestingly, one of the key conclusions of this report is that social exclusion should be defined more broadly than at present, to involve more young people in “a broader concept of citizenship” [Watts and McCarthy, 1998, p39]

“ While child poverty (based on a fixed poverty line of half average income in 1995/96) fell sharply in the 1970s, it barely fell at all between 1979 and 1995/96, despite a substantial rise in general living standards. For the poorest fifth of the population, spending on toys, children’s clothing, shoes and fresh fruit was no higher in real terms in 1995/96 than in 1968.” [Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1999]

The NSPCC [1999] estimate that, in any week in the UK:

“ At least one child will die following cruelty.

35,000 children are on the Child Protection Register because they are feared to be at risk from cruelty.

Over 6,000 children are on registers for sexual abuse.

Over 9,000 children are on registers for physical abuse.”

The study [Hagel and Shaw, 1996] of over 3000 inner-city 16 year olds<sup>2</sup>, “Changing lives”, found that:

“in this inner city sample of young people in their first year after compulsory education, money problems and debt headed the list of pressures encountered, and many had had some sort of contact with the police” (p103).

Amongst the report’s conclusions was:

“It is likely that many of these young people would have liked to be in the employment market but it was no longer an option for them. Whatever they do instead needs to be a relevant and useful alternative. Simply using education and training as ‘holding’ devices is likely just to postpone the point at which the problems begin, and increase the weight on both the local and broader community” (p108)

Specific groups of children and young people are particularly affected: for example, the majority of looked-after children leave school without a single GCSE, and only 3% gain 5 GCSEs A-C. They are also 10 times more likely to be excluded from school than other children [*Times Educational Supplement*, 1999].

George Smith, Teresa Smith and Gemma Wright [1997] have reviewed schooling and education within the market economy and highlight the effects of poverty:

“... the number of children actually receiving a free school meal (much less than those eligible, let alone those who have not claimed, and since 1988 only available to families on income support) was 821,400 children in England in 1991 (about 11 per cent of school pupils). By 1995, this had risen to 1,235,746 children, just under 17 per cent ... a rise of about 50 per cent.” (p124)

and its relationship to exclusion from school:

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<sup>2</sup> from 34 schools within 6 urban areas of England

“Exclusion is associated with poor levels of basic skills, poverty and unemployment, limited aspirations, family difficulties, poor relationships and racism. These pressures should not be seen as causes; many young people face one or more of these problems without resorting to aggressive or disruptive behaviour. But in combination they may form part of a pattern. And the pattern may be stronger in schools, already under pressure and lacking resources, serving neighbourhoods which are themselves facing heavy pressures of poverty, unemployment, family stress and racism.” (p132)

The role that class plays in education is pithily put by Andrew Adonis and Stephen Pollard [1998]:

“So what are we to make of England’s educational evolution in recent decades? Class segregation is the dominating fact.” (p60)

A forthcoming report from the Mental Health Foundation, *The big picture*<sup>3</sup>, exposes the reality of mental illness in children and young people. As one reviewer [Bunting, 1999] states:

“Alongside the guilt has developed a belief, over the last couple of hundred years, in the developed world that we are better parents than our own parents ... To bolster this self-congratulatory belief in our own participation in the march of progress, we build up a picture of past parenting of Dickensian awfulness where incest and violence were rife. But the Mental Health Foundation’s report ... blew all that apart. Mental illness in children and young people has increased since the 1940s, and now afflict [sic] one in five. And its [sic] going to get worse ... Children are failing to thrive emotionally.”

Finally, children are often also short of hard facts - for example:

“...as parents, we are failing to teach our sons about sex and relationships. Only four per cent of the teenage boys surveyed by the project got most of their sex education from dad; another 11 per cent relied on mum. That’s 15 percent of sons who talk effectively to their parents about sex. The rest have to get information where they can: 22 per cent rely on friends, 40 per cent on teachers, while the rest pick up what they can from TV, girlfriends, magazines and videos.” [Katz, 1998]

## **Children’s literacy**

“12% of young adults said they had problems with reading, writing, spelling or basic maths.” [National Literacy Trust, 1998a]

To begin to tackle all these issues, the Government launched the National Literacy Strategy in 1997:

“The Strategy recognises that standards of literacy in this country have not changed significantly between the end of the war and the early 1990s ... In 1996 only 57% of 11 year olds reached the standard expected for their age in English. This rose to 63% in 1997. The

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<sup>3</sup> a summary of the report was published in February 1999 - the full report is due in April or May 1999, according to the Mental Health Foundation.

national target for England is that by the year 2002: 80% of 11 year olds will reach the expected standard for their age in English (ie level 4 in the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum test for English).” [National Literacy Trust, 1999]

The Strategy includes greater involvement of parents [see eg Save the Children, 1999]; primary schools drawing up school literacy plans and implementing the structured reading hour; local education authorities giving greater priority to literacy; and a requirement for OFSTED to look for evidence of whole-school strategies for raising literacy standards. In addition, from September 1998, English state primary schools are required to “teach reading in a highly structured manner as laid down by the strategy which insists that phonics comes first.” [National Literacy Trust, 1999]

To back up this ambitious programme, the 1998/9 school year was designated the “National Year of Reading”, and many public libraries have been keen to take the initiative to develop links with other organisations and to find innovative ways of promoting reading and tackling literacy problems.

The Government has also established Education Action Zones, uniting schools, business, local education authorities and parents. These Zones are all giving priority to literacy and numeracy, with, for example, Birmingham opening family literacy centres, and Grimsby and Newham employing “Advanced Skills Teachers” to raise standards in literacy, numeracy and IT. [DfEE, 1999]

## **Public library services to children and young people: an introduction**

Two sets of factors have had a major impact on public library services for children and young people. These are:

### **Children’s use of public libraries**

As public library services have been cut (with reductions in opening hours and closure of buildings), so, in many authorities, fewer libraries are open and available to children and young people, and this presents real difficulties in terms of access, particularly in areas where there is also little or no public transport; this particularly affects children in rural areas, where there is often little access to library resources, little or no public transport, and mobile libraries often visit when children are at school.

In addition, many fewer children now visit public libraries on their own, particularly because of the perceived dangers of allowing children out alone and the increasing hazards of road traffic.

Inevitably, therefore, many children do not develop the necessary skills in using libraries, finding information, browsing and reading.

This may be partly reflected in the results of a recent study [Livingstone, 1999] which, although mainly funded by broadcasting standards bodies, the BBC and other broadcasters, and the European Commission and Parliament [*Library Association Record*, 1999c],

nevertheless found that most children watch up to two and a half hours television a day, compared to spending about 15 minutes reading books (which the children surveyed found “boring, old-fashioned, frustrating and requiring too much effort”).

Recent research [Hall and Coles, 1998] has also shown that ““Libraries are a class issue”” [The Bookseller, 1999] and that children from wealthy homes use libraries and borrow library books more frequently than children from low-income families; the biggest users of public libraries are people in social classes ABC1, according to Book Marketing Ltd [1998].

Despite that, in London at least, there appears to have been an increase in library usage by children<sup>4</sup>.

### **Public library provision**

Just as changes in education provision have brought positive and negative results (see Appendix 2), so public library services to children and young people have been similarly affected by government, local authority and other initiatives.

Over the last 10 years or so, public library provision for children and young people has been eroded. Writing in 1993, Michael Rosen [1993] put the case very powerfully:

“The current government has declared war on the reading of books ... their weapons: the closing of public libraries; the elimination of library support services; the forced amateuring of school librarians - professionals can’t be afforded; budget restrictions on school book buying; the domination of fixed courses of study, set texts and testing that limits casual and pupil-led reading and browsing.” (p5)

and Rosemary Stones [1994] commented on developments of the time in similar vein:

“... while the last decade has seen the publication of a wealth of multicultural books, it has at the same time seen a massive attack on the educational and public library structures which underpin their availability ... the deprofessionalization of the school library service, LMS, the opting out of schools, the exigent demands on the time and morale of teachers of the National Curriculum and, in the public library arena, substantial cuts in resources ...” (pp4-5).

As just one example, children in rural areas may well face additional problems in terms of gaining access to books:

“Children attending rural schools may be additionally disadvantaged where there is an increasing requirement for books and other materials but more limited funding available. It is not clear how such children will be able to gain equal access to materials, research and study

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<sup>4</sup> children’s book loans in London increased by 21% from 1989-1994, according to Burton, Greenhalgh and Worpole [1996]

facilities as their urban counterparts as many services become totally fee-based and there is a strong possibility that additional demands will be placed on mainstream public library services.” [DNH, 1993, p39]

Recognising the urgent need to identify and promote the importance of library services for children and young people, the Library and Information Services Council (England) established a Working Party, and its report, *Investing in children* [1995], was published in 1995. This Working Party took an inclusive stance, by deciding that:

“... children and young people have been taken to include those of minority ethnic origins, those with disabilities, and others whose needs may be regarded as being in some way special.” (p2)

The executive summary of the report (summarised by Elkin and Lonsdale [1996a]) saw the key problems to be:

“ Problems in public and education library services for children and young people are evident in inequality of access to facilities and services; wide disparities in standards of provision across the country; lack of integration of services; failure to accord proper priority to children and their needs; inadequate or no research into reading and information needs;

The role, function and mission of library services for children and young people have to be seen in the round, with integration of the major channels of delivery - the public library service for children and young people, the schools library service, and libraries in individual schools - at strategic level;

The potential of the public library service as a force in support of reading and information literacy cannot be too strongly emphasised.” (p58)

The role of the public library service is vital to children and young people, as recent research has shown [Linley and Usherwood, 1998]:

“Library services support ... children’s educational needs ... The library supports the development of children’s reading skills.” (p95).

### **Current challenges facing public library services to children and young people**

Despite considerable support from the current government, public libraries (and school libraries) are still very much under threat, and, to my mind, the concerns raised by Michael Rosen and Rosemary Stones (above) are still present today. Public library services to children and young people face enormous challenges [eg Elkin, 1996b].

These include:

- falling levels of expenditure on services to children and school libraries:  
“The overall picture is one of falling materials expenditure. Spending in real terms has decreased by almost £3 million since 1992-93, a reduction of around 18%.” [Creaser and Murphy, 1998, p104]

- cuts in public library services generally very often fall on services which are perceived as 'marginal', but which are vital to children's reading/language/social development, such as storytelling;
- one of the effects of the cuts in recent years, coupled with changes in professional philosophy, has been the reduction in outreach and other community-based work, such as mobile library services for children. This in turn has reduced the volume of feedback received from local communities;
- the reduction of posts with special responsibility for work with children, both at branch library level (which may mean that the important relationship [eg Butler, 1995] between library staff and the child is not developed); and authority-wide (which may well mean that there is not a 'champion' for children within the Service);
- with the introduction of LMS<sup>5</sup> and the pressures of the National Curriculum, school library services are also facing severe problems in some authorities. However, progress is being made in some authorities (eg Caerphilly, Devon, Norfolk) to have public library input into the Education Development Plans [ASCEL, 1998a];
- the most recent threat to schools library services is "Fair Funding" (the government's insistence that the funding for most remaining local education authority services is passed to schools which then have the option of buying back in: many seem to be deciding not to. Verna Taylor, the 1999 Library Association President, has said:
 

"With regard to school libraries, I am still of the opinion that the fair funding debate has not enhanced school libraries. It has, and the Library Association played a key role in this, saved school libraries from the extreme, but that only preserves what is on the ground now. If the Government is serious about raising standards then the support mechanisms have to be there. School libraries and school library services are essential." [Taylor, 1999]
- there are also suspicions that OFSTED is marginalising the role of the school library even further [ASCEL, 1998b];
- the reduction in specialist posts such as under-fives librarians, Section 11 librarians;
- the education and training of librarians now includes very little on community-based work, and the specialist options on library work with children have almost totally disappeared: this has two potential effects - we may not be recruiting the right sort of people to 'library schools' for public library work, and interest in working with children and young people may be low. (Another effect of recent cuts has been a

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<sup>5</sup> "The development of Local Management of Schools (LMS) has hastened the decline of school library services ... Many school library services have broken down because schools do not wish to buy into the central service in sufficient numbers" [UNISON/LGIU, 1997, p7]

lessening of resources for training: does any authority now run the kind of comprehensive 4-6 months in-service training course which many public library services used to?)

- the lack of research into the relationship between public libraries and children's reading, coupled with a lack of documentation of practice, and the lack of Performance Indicators for services to children and young people. This is being addressed by the BLRIC research project, "A place for children", which is due to report later in 1999. The Interim Report [*A place for children*, 1997] states that

"the research team identified a need for a major empirical study that would investigate the role of the public libraries in supporting children's reading development. The project was, therefore, designed to embrace children's acquisition of initial and higher level skills, their access to literature and information sources in fiction and non-fiction, the implications of the new literacies now required by young people in a multimedia environment, and the multicultural environment of many local authorities." (p3).

In addition, a number of authorities has been working with the IPF to produce standards for surveying services to children and young people in public libraries, "Children's PLUS", via which children's own views on services can be taken into account; and benchmarking projects are also developing (eg Cambridgeshire Schools Library Service, in S E London via SELPIG) [see ASCEL, 1998b].

- as with all public library services, the lack of evidence of their value and impact (hence this research project!). Whilst some work has been done on outlining the school library's contribution<sup>6 7</sup>, public libraries' work is still under-valued.

- the level of information provision for teenagers is often poor, and there is a dire need for better access to material on, for example, sex education and sexuality. The public library's role in providing such information is often overlooked, and the information provided elsewhere;

- censorship, or attempted censorship, of children's books, especially in the US [see eg Saltman, 1998].

## **Stock selection**

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<sup>6</sup> according to Sally Gibbs [1997], the school library can contribute to the academic; economic (by assisting young people to gain the skills for work, for example); political (literacy gives young people access to the political debate); social/socialising; and technological development of children and young people.

<sup>7</sup> The "Colorado Study" [Lance, 1993], summarised recently by Graham Small [Small, 1998], "provides firm evidence that the school library does have a direct and significant effect on academic achievement, especially on reading and literacy levels, and that this is the case for all schools, regardless of geography, phase or socio-economic influence." (p185)

Stock selection is one of the key methods by which libraries can begin to make an impact on social exclusion (although it still seems possible to produce a report on this topic without mentioning social issues! [Chambers and Stoll, 1996])

In the 1970s, spurred on by the pioneering work of a group of London children's librarians in producing a booklist [Hill, 1971], librarians working with children developed an awareness of and an active role in combatting racism and sexism in children's books, aided by the parallel awareness and action of writers, illustrators, publishers and reviewers, and the work of a number of other pioneering groups, such as the Children's Rights Workshop<sup>8</sup>. However, for a number of reasons, (including an assumption that this was a 'battle fought and won'; changes in the political climate in the 1980s and early 1990s, particularly linked to the 'political correctness' debate; the pressures to satisfy the requirements of the international market in children's books; and the conservatism of some elements of the 'children's book world') such approaches seem no longer to be at the core of public library work with children and young people in the UK, although work in the US still focuses on such approaches [eg *Library Trends*, 1993].

The Library Association *Guidelines* ... [Blanshard, 1997] are very positive about the role that stock selection should play:

“[Selection criteria] should include statements on  
- the issues of censorship and positive selection  
- content, including such aspects as plot, style, characterisation, currency, accuracy, bias (including racial and gender issues), vocabulary and age suitability.”

However, as noted above, there are also concerns, largely fuelled by the media, that such issues could be labelled “politically correct” (PC)<sup>9</sup>. Whilst attention is not currently on libraries<sup>10</sup>, it has been in the past, and this ‘backlash’ may have had a serious effect on some libraries’ decisions about stock purchases: as Rosemary Stones [1994] puts it:

“... a new social climate of ridicule and alienation around equalities issues which it has become socially acceptable to dismiss as ‘political correctness’.” (p5)

In addition, cuts in funding [Elkin, 1996a], perceptions about what constitutes “value for money” and the UK's increasing insularity [Flugge, 1994] have reduced public libraries' spending on materials from abroad and from small, non-mainstream suppliers. This position has been exacerbated by the limitations placed on children's reading and school libraries by the requirements of the National Curriculum and other recent education developments:

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<sup>8</sup> whose work led to the establishing of the “Other Award” in 1975.

<sup>9</sup> space does not allow for a full discussion of the political dimensions of “political correctness” - please see Vincent [forthcoming] and also, for example, Feldstein [1997].

<sup>10</sup> a current target is children's television - for example, in an articles, “Shiny happy people”, about the sacking of a BBC TV presenter, Jack O'Sullivan [1998] says: “Whatever the reason, *Blue Peter* is excruciatingly PC. The language is scrupulously non-violent, non-sexist. The presenters, like good children, all share the limelight, none enjoying prominence over the others ...” he then goes on to equate being “PC” with “squeaky cleanness”.

“The very focused subject nature of the National Curriculum does not support the cross-curricular, underpinning nature of multicultural awareness; LMS does not encourage a liberal, multicultural approach ...” [Elkin, 1996a, p115].

In addition, the National Literacy Strategy demands that, in term 3 of year 4, classes study a “significant” author, and, to be practical, that author needs to have written at least ten books, preferably at different levels of difficulty - this requirement rules out many black writers for children, and places reliance on white writers who may feature black characters in their books [Harris, 1999].

For many children whose first language is not English, dual-language books are a way in. Teachers can read the English version and the children (and their parents) can read in their own first language. Having dual-language books in public libraries and schools is also a way of showing that languages are valued and represented. However, most dual-language books are picture books, and there is very little for the older child: monolingual books in many other languages are difficult to obtain, and librarians may shy away from stocking these as they cannot be completely sure about their content.

The globalisation of the market for children’s books has also led to what could be argued is a blandness in much UK publishing: as Elkin [1996a] says:

“Allied to a certain nervousness in children’s book publishing which means that few risks are being taken with new authors or new ideas, inevitably the range and quality of titles diminishes.” (p115)

and issues, such as class, are still virtually ignored.

At the time of writing, experiments are being carried out by Hertfordshire Libraries and Westminster into stock selection by suppliers to a specification, and it will be interesting to see what effect this has on selecting materials for children and young people, which reflect social exclusion [Hall, Valentine and Fletcher, 1998].

In the US, supplier selection is coming in for some criticism:

“The outsourcing crisis in Hawaii is a continuing saga of disillusionment and finger-pointing” [Knuth and Bait-Mundy, 1998]

Let’s hope that this is not the eventual conclusion here!

## **What have public libraries done to tackle the social exclusion of children and young people?**

There has been long regard paid to the needs of children and young people in the library literature, and this is an area of librarianship where concerns about social exclusion and

special needs [eg Heeks and Kinnell, 1997] have been recognised, and innovative services developed.

The report *Investing in children* [1995] makes a strong case for the development of library services for children and young people, and focuses on some areas of social exclusion and libraries' potential role, for example:

“The increase in unemployment among young people in many areas can lead to an increase in leisure time ... [this] can produce a greater demand for library facilities; it certainly offers the public library a role as provider of information on benefits, training opportunities, and other areas of likely interest to unemployed teenagers. Unemployed teenagers taking advantage of training opportunities are also likely to be thrown into a reliance on the public library as an informal means of studying” (p9)

It also stresses that:

“Access is not a problem solely of distant static service points, reduced opening hours, and inconvenient mobile library stops. In some library authorities, the make-up of the population requires that ... a different approach from [the] traditional ones is necessary to reach people, including children, in the community, and hence the development of outreach programmes which take the library into the community, making it available in non-library settings, and providing a useful point of contact with many children, parents and carers who would not, for a variety of reasons, visit a public library building.” (p56)

The report cites a number of examples of then good practice, including Somerset County Library's service to playgroups and portage groups; a Holiday Mobile Library; a Village Shops Project; and Lambeth's outreach service.

Amongst the recommendations is that a “Charter for Children” be produced, a:

“promotion that emphasises the benefits of the library and takes its service to **every** child in its area, irrespective of age, background and culture.” (p47) [emphasis theirs]

This emphasis was continued in the recent Library Association *Guidelines* ... [Blanshard, 1997], which recommend that:

“children from all backgrounds, cultures and abilities have an equal right of access to library services.”

and stress the importance of the public library in relation to children's literacy:

“The library service has a key role in fostering literacy. It can exercise this in three ways:  
- by providing and promoting material which assists reading development in young children  
- by organising activities (sometimes with other agencies) which promote literacy  
- by providing and promoting services which assist those with literacy difficulties”  
(p21)

A landmark publication (hailed as a successor to Janet Hill's inspiring publication of nearly 25 years previously [Hill, 1973]) was *Focus on the child* ... [Elkin and Lonsdale, 1996b]. This important book gives an overview of the world of children's libraries, publishing and

bookselling, from the 1970s to date, and contains some excellent pointers to the key developments and issues.

However, there is not much of an emphasis on social exclusion, despite quoting a powerful indictment from *The Bookseller*:

“Publishers have drawn back from non-sexist and non-racist books, because of the recession ... Publishers are going for safe commercial ventures ... There are fewer titles by new authors and fewer with black children taking the main roles” [*The Bookseller*, 1995],

and some of its suggestions seem tentative:

“It could be argued that particular care should be taken to ensure that those who have the least advantages in [having parents or carers who will introduce them to literature, libraries and information sources] are targeted” [Eyre, 1996, pp178-9]

and

“[Libraries] are cultural centres in the true sense of the word, highlighting local culture and able to highlight the cultures of children representing the various groups within the community. This may be by offering activities such as Eid parties, celebrations for Chinese New Year, etc.” [Eyre, 1996, p188]

although, to be fair, this may well be because the authors recognise the climate in which we have been operating:

“Where promotion of library services is concerned, emphasis has shifted to the adoption of marketing strategies and strategies borrowed from the world of business and commerce, rather than the outreach approach pioneered by Janet Hill in her seminal work of two decades ago [Hill, 1973]. Because of the thinking of the current age this approach cannot be ignored, but there is still a place for considering the needs of children as individuals and their right to the provision that library services can make for them.” [Eyre, 1996, pp175-6].

## **And what are public libraries doing now to tackle social exclusion?**

The cuts and restructurings over recent years have led library managers to concentrate on retrenchment, to focus on in-library matters, and to set and attempt to attain what are often reductive service standards.

However, with the change of Government, the increased emphasis on “education, education, education”, and the beginnings of some reinvestment in public services, there has been a number of positive initiatives over the last couple of years, some of which in relation to social exclusion are outlined in Appendix 1.

Despite these developments, it may well be that work on tackling social exclusion is not yet high enough on the agenda:

“Under the heading ‘Services for Children’ we found a wide range of initiatives and specialised facilities within libraries. Policies were more clearly developed, as was the

emphasis on links with schools and education generally, especially in relation to national initiatives such as the National Year of Reading, and the National Grid for Learning ... Surprisingly, social inclusion was not specifically addressed. Was this perhaps regarded as implicit?" [DCMS, 1999, p21]

## **The National Year of Reading**

The National Year of Reading (1998/9) has also proved to be a major incentive and focus for the development of projects aimed at socially excluded children and young people - some examples are also listed in Appendix 1.

## **Conclusions**

This paper highlights some areas of the social exclusion of children and young people, and examines the role of and provision by public libraries.

Whilst the picture is not entirely gloomy, nevertheless there are issues of serious concern.

Are public libraries really tackling social exclusion in their services to children and young people? The DCMS clearly has some doubts.

What has happened to all those equalities initiatives of 15-20 years ago? They cannot all be "old hat".

Despite all the glitzy schemes and projects, are our core, everyday services to children and young people really providing for their needs? Or are we just serving the children of traditional middle-class library users?

More and more funding is becoming available from the government in support of its various initiatives (eg "Sure Start") and from the private sector in terms of provision for specific projects (eg Sainsbury's involvement in Bookstart schemes).

Without doubt, a large number of initiatives is being developed by public libraries as a result (Appendix 1 gives a taster of these), and we are encouraging public libraries to apply for such funding as it becomes available.

However, we have learned from previous government initiatives (such as Urban Aid and City Challenge - it is still too early to come to a conclusion about SRB) that projects developed with time-limited funding from external sources will not be sustainable unless there is mainstream funding available when the external funding stream dries up.

The private sector funders may be happy to provide resources for projects today, but what happens when their profits drop? Will they then wish to continue to fund our children's reading schemes? (And, as an additional concern, there may well come a time when the funders will want more than just to put money into projects, and will ask for other

involvement/control.) In any case, do we really want public libraries being seen as an extension of the advertising arm of big business?

There is, therefore, a very real danger that the current flurry of activity will be short-lived, and that, once the external funding ceases, there will be no further resources available so that projects will either have to be funded from existing mainstream resources (presumably at the expense of some other service) or will stop (once again giving the message that public libraries cannot deliver).

Partnerships are the “in” thing, and, of course, they can provide real support and scope for development. However, public libraries are often the poor relation (and how often are other funding bodies going to want to be charitable?), and, with the current pressures on staff time and resources, it is frequently difficult to get the time to make the necessary contacts and to nurture these.

Therefore, it is imperative that, as well as seeking external funding sources, public libraries continue to press locally and centrally for more mainstream funding. It might well be fruitful to look at other models of development such as some of those in education or the museums service (see Appendices 2 and 3).

ICT is seen as the cure-all, yet there are real problems in terms of access, usage, support and the resources for libraries to make ICT really accessible.

Links with education and after-school homework support are being developed very strongly, and, whilst this will undoubtedly assist many children, might it also not be a great turn-off for those children who are already distanced from school? Are those young people who, because for example of racism or the lack of future prospects, are disillusioned with school and the education system really going to flock to libraries to do their homework? I very much doubt it!

At the same time as developing the links with schools and other education facilities, services to a wide range of other community organisations must be developed to try to reach young people where they are - not where we want them.

Library services to children and young people are already marginalised, from the way that this area of work is taught (or rather not taught) at “library schools”, to the reduction in service provision, staffing and funding in libraries themselves. If we are to stop this decline, we must grasp some nettles now, the foremost of these being that libraries are, at present, institutions serving primarily the privileged, and that, to place public libraries centre-stage (and to rediscover our key role), we must tackle social exclusion as our main purpose - not to do so would be to fail the children of today (and tomorrow) and to consign public library services to children forever to the past.

## **Recommendations**

Public libraries need to:

1. taking the recommendations from Morrison and Roach [1998]:

- consult young people
  - translate policy into action (eg by developing a detailed ethnic profile of young people using libraries to guide service delivery)
  - reduce the social distance between libraries and young people
  - staff public libraries to serve children and young people (eg by establishing staff development programmes that focus on general “ethnically sensitive” provision and on specific services for young people)
2. develop partnerships with other agencies, such as social services departments, education, health, and become involved in initiatives such as Education Action Zones, Early Years initiatives, Health Action Zones, “Sure Start”, Single Regeneration Budget
  3. via these initiatives, it may be possible for public libraries to recreate posts to work with children and young people
  4. review their services and take urgent action to reach children from low-income families
  5. review and upgrade information provision for teenagers
  6. take the opportunities (New Opportunities Fund, for example) which are becoming available to get involved in more sophisticated ICT provision, bearing in mind the possibility that ICT itself may be exclusive
  7. investigate the potential value of introducing equalities standards into libraries (parallel to those produced by OFSTED)
  8. ensure that, if supplier selection is introduced, specifications are written to include the supply of non-mainstream titles as required
  9. ensure that the widest possible range of materials is made available, related to the needs of local communities, including for example promoting the writings of black authors, investigating the supply of stock which may not be easily available (eg monolingual materials in languages other than English; realistic portrayals of working class children)
  10. reassess public library provision in the light of that made by education (Appendix 2) and Museums (Appendix 3)

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## Appendix 1

### Public Libraries and social exclusion: some examples of good practice

For an outline of the social impact of public libraries, see Francois Matarasso [1998].

#### The early years

For many years, public libraries have focused on serving under-fives, recognising the importance of introducing children to books as early as possible. Recently, Bookstart schemes [Cooling, 1998], such as that in Wandsworth [Bray and Ash, 1997], have proliferated, and have just gone national [see ASCEL, 1998b], with the aim of giving every baby in the UK two books - the stimulus that this provides has now been shown to assist in improving children's enthusiasm for books and reading, as well as learning more generally [Raven, 1999].

At the time of writing, the Department of Health's "Sure Start" programme to establish one-stop centres for health advice for young children and their families may also be offering money to libraries to buy materials for the under-threes [*Library Association Record*, 1999a], and the "Boots Books for Babies" project (a three-year project which aims to encourage parents to use books with their children from an early age) has just been launched as a partnership between Nottingham City Council, Nottinghamshire County Council, and the Boots Company [*Impact*, 1999].

#### The school years

Many UK public libraries organise summer holiday activities for children to assist with their literacy development, and LaunchPad will be running the National Summer Reading Challenge later this year<sup>11</sup>. For example, in 1997, the Library Association surveyed the activities that summer, and, of the 155 local authorities mailed, 79 replied. Of these 47 offered a reading activity scheme over the summer holidays, and 71 provided special events in libraries [Library Association, 1997].

Homework help clubs are also being established all over the country, often with the involvement of public libraries. Southwark was one of the pioneering library authorities [London Borough of Southwark, 1998], and a recent article [*Library Association Record*, 1998] identified a number of projects which was to receive Lottery funding, including Derby's out-of-school learning centre in Peartree Library, a partnership between Derby City

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<sup>11</sup>LaunchPad is a new organisation to promote the value of libraries for children, involving the Library Association, The Society of Chief Librarians and ASCEL (the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians. Further information from: Trish Botten, Professional Adviser: Youth and School Libraries, The Library Association, 7 Ridgmount Street, London WC1E 7AE (tel: 0171-636 7543).

As well as the Reading Challenge, it has just started a campaign, "Reaching Parents", and will be working with Asda to promote reading and storytelling [*Library Association Record*, 1999b] and with Ford to set up a workplace library [Nurden, 1999].

Libraries, Derby City Education Youth Service; a partnership between Brighton and Hove's schools and libraries and the University of Brighton to create an on-line after-school learning community; and Gloucestershire libraries and schools, the TEC, the Afro-Caribbean Association, the local education authority, and the Youth and Community Service joining forces to provide a study support service.

In addition, homework clubs/study centres have been established in two libraries in Bedfordshire; in 27 libraries across Birmingham (and Birmingham is a partner authority in the BLRIC-funded research to evaluate the educational and social value of library-based homework clubs); at Norbury Library in Croydon; at three Hartlepool libraries; and a number of other authorities is piloting schemes [ASCEL, 1998b].

Many young people find access to the Internet and using ICT for homework exciting, and this is a major way in which public libraries can become involved in Lifelong Learning. It is also important that public libraries (or other agencies) provide access to ICT, because of possible costs implications for home-users:

“More extensive use of on-line services could lead to much higher household telephone bills, exacerbating debt and disconnection problems. It could also cause difficulties where children, or others not responsible for paying, run up large bills.” [National Consumer Council, 1996, p64]

Research for the report, *New library ...* [Library and Information Commission, 1997], found that homework clubs with IT facilities

“were thought to be a brilliant idea. The reasons given were:

- a) IT would motivate children and give them practise [sic] in essential computer skills and other new technology;
- b) the library network would also ensure access to a wide choice of relevant and interesting references for children's project work;
- c) the children would be less distracted in a library environment and be able to concentrate more;
- d) help and guidance would be on hand, if needed.” (p26)

Sandwell successfully bid for Wolfson funding to provide greater access to IT, which will build on the success of their “Time Out” homework club provision which operates in all 19 libraries in the borough [ASCEL, 1998b], and Leeds operates the “Online@Leeds” project. More work is needed to improve and develop Internet access and ICT facilities for children and young people, and research is being undertaken into aspects of this [Denham *et al*, 1997]. Preparations also need to be made for our involvement in the National Grid for Learning, and to ensure that poorer children do not lose out by not gaining access via public libraries [Scales, 1999].

May 1999 has seen the publication of a Code of Practice on Study Support [*Study Support*, 1999] which:

- “• identifies common principles in Study Support drawing on examples of good practice in Public Library based Centres around the country
  - provides a framework of standards with identifiable success criteria which libraries can use to evaluate and improve practice
  
  - suggests strategies and sources of support which can help libraries meet higher standards.”
- (p1)

### **Library services to Black and other communities**

Whilst not referring specifically to children in their conclusions and recommendations, Patrick Roach and Marlene Morrison [1998] powerfully argue that some public library services have not made any provision for Black people:

“... it may be argued that the principle of ‘universality’ as expressed in the Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1964, rather than enabling, actually defeats equality by imposing a standard based on the needs of the most powerful or influential groups within society whilst failing to recognise the needs of less powerful or influential groups. In this way it has been possible for individual public library services to promote access for all whilst continuing to deliver, at best, colour blind (or, at worst, ethnically biased) service provisions.” (p165)

In their “Good Practice” notes [Morrison and Roach, 1998], Marlene Morrison and Patrick Roach go on to spell out some ways in which public libraries should forge better links with young people from ethnic minorities:

“Public library services have a critical role in developing opportunities and resources for young people that are *educative, social, participative, and empowering*. Young people from ethnic minorities are likely to be among the key groups to access information in new and exciting multimedia forms, with its potential to enhance educational opportunities and provide new frameworks for active citizenship. Yet approaches to library provision have often been modelled on a traditional paternalistic form of local government rather than an effective dialogue and engagement with young people. Such models have, on occasion, assumed that young people’s needs are homogeneous, or have prioritised the problems that young people pose in library space. Yet it is clear that libraries will need to develop good practice for a group that is widely recognised as amongst its heaviest users.”

They then indicate four areas which their research has shown to be important: consulting young people; translating policy into action (eg by developing a detailed ethnic profile of young people using libraries to guide service delivery); reducing the social distance between libraries and young people; and staffing for youth (eg developing staff development programmes that focus on general “ethnically sensitive” provision and on specific services to young people).

A recent article in the excellent reviewing journal, *Multicultural Review*, stresses the importance of contacting communities, in this case Puerto Rican children:

“libraries must reach out to these communities with information about the wealth of materials and services available for their educational, cultural, and informational needs.” [Mestre and Nieto, 1996]

and Ayub Khan [1998] proposes targeted programmes of outreach to draw “minority parents” into libraries’ services.

### **Library services to refugee communities**

Enfield Libraries have recently developed a special reading programme (involving storytelling, crafts, learning about the library, and introductions to books) targeting 3-8 year-olds from the borough’s Turkish, Bangladeshi, African-Caribbean, and refugee communities<sup>12</sup>.

### **Literacy and reading problems of boys and young men**

Although it has been a problem well documented in the past, attention is now being paid to the under-achievement of boys and young men at school:

“In Kensington and Chelsea, Redcar and Cleveland, Lewisham, East Riding of Yorkshire, Southwark, Islington and Cornwall, girls are at least 20 percentage points ahead of boys.” [Cassidy, 1999]

“Many schools and local education authorities increasingly recognise that boys’ achievement is an area for concern and a wide variety of strategies to raise performance in the area of boys and English is being employed.” [National Literacy Trust, 1998b]

The Trust also notes that there is a move towards providing, for example, more nonfiction texts and texts in different forms, the use of role models, and changing the way boys interact in the classroom by introducing more oral and collaborative work, teaching reading strategies and so on to raise levels of achievement.

A recent article [Dunne and Khan, 1998] highlighted some of the evidence [OFSTED, 1993; Schools Curriculum Assessment Authority, 1998; Frater, 1998] for this problem and reported briefly on two research initiatives: Birmingham Libraries are starting to collate information on activity/usage by gender, and Hampshire Libraries are researching the difference in reading patterns between boys and girls in one 11-16 mixed comprehensive school. Amongst suggestions for improving services were: using publicity materials which would attract boys; using “Boox”, the teenage book magazine produced cooperatively under the “Well Worth Reading” umbrella by Hampshire, Dorset and West Sussex; and putting on events which would attract boys [see also *Basic Skills*, 1998; *Guardian Education*, 1999].

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<sup>12</sup> noted in the shortlist for the 1998 Community Initiative Award [*Community Librarian*, 1998]

## **Involvement of adults/Family Reading Groups**

As noted above, the Government's National Literacy Strategy includes greater involvement of parents. One way of doing this is to establish Family Reading Groups - recent initiatives [Library Association, 1998] include: a Family Reading Initiative in Redcar and Cleveland, and family reading events in Croydon.

A pilot project in Stockport involved visits to and work around the public library [Jordan, 1998], and a recent NFER study [Brooks, 1997] showed that Family Literacy programmes appear to make lasting improvements:

“This follow-up study shows that the Family Literacy children have successfully maintained the gains they made during the courses, and that parents have continued to widen their participation in education and society.” (p10)

Salford Libraries have received Wolfson funding to establish family learning centres in four main libraries [ASCEL, 1998b].

## **Children with disabilities and learning difficulties**

Access to libraries and materials is extremely important [see eg Spiers, 1996; Spiers, 1998]. A number of initiatives is being developed currently [see ASCEL, 1998b], including:

- Birmingham are consulting with parents of children with disabilities via “Words on Wheels”, their under-fives’ mobile library service;
- in September 1998, Merton launched a new collection of books for young people with dyslexia, in partnership with the S W London Dyslexia Association;
- Newport have launched a collection of subtitled videos for hearing-impaired children and adults;
- via a Wolfson bid, Sandwell are providing Kurzweil reading machines at eleven sites for people with visual impairment and reading difficulties;
- amongst other initiatives, Somerset have introduced free loans of talking books for visually impaired and dyslexic children, have developed close links with Special Schools and Opportunity Playgroups, and held a children’s training day on disability and learning difficulties, involving children talking about their disability and library/reading experiences.

## **The National Year of Reading**

*Read me*, the National Year of Reading newsletter, lists new projects<sup>13</sup>, and these have included:

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<sup>13</sup> further information about the range of activities which are taking place can be found in the National Year of Reading’s halfway report (tel: 0171-828 2435).

- training library staff in reading promotion for teenagers (Enfield)
- “Babies love Books” packs, including a free book and information about the library service) available for parents when they attend children’s 8 month health check (Gloucestershire)
- “Voyage into Books”: funded via the Arts Council’s A4E scheme, this project runs workshops in children’s homes, libraries, secure units, youth groups and preschool groups to encourage deprived young people to take part in reading and writing, exploring literature from different perspectives, such as poetry performances, writing on the Internet, and journalism (West Sussex/East Sussex/Brighton and Hove)
- “Fiction Café”, a virtual bookshop and meeting place on the National Library for the Blind’s Website
- “Story Start”, providing multicultural preschool materials, storytelling and other forms of promotion in all health centres, doctors surgeries, and dental and orthodontic practices (Bury)

as well as six developed via the Well Worth Reading “Boox for us” programmes for socially excluded young people:

- Young Carers Project, Lewes, East Sussex
- Teenage reading group on inner-city estates, Beaumont Leys, Leicester
- Scotswood Support Centre, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, working to expand the reading of those not attending or excluded from school
- Barnardos Castle Project, Leeds, working with young people in children’s homes and youth projects)
- Litherland Library, Liverpool, encouraging a greater sense of ownership of the public library by young people
- “Read on - Write away!”, working in three Derbyshire youth clubs, focusing on young people in care or with disabilities or learning difficulties.

Projects supported via the third round of funding are described in the *Library Association Record* April 1999 [Attenborough, 1999].

## Appendix 2

### Education, education, education!

In the last 10 years or so, education, particularly in terms of provision for children and young people in schools, has arguably undergone the most major redefinition and reorganisation in its history. There is not space in this paper to go into this in any depth, but coverage in the national press has been wide, particularly in the education supplements of the broadsheets.

However, there are great parallels and strong links between what happens in education and what happens in public libraries; although education (and teachers in particular) have been under attack from OFSTED and the Government, there are still all sorts of initiatives being developed - can we learn something from this?

Just some of the current issues facing education are:

- racism: schools are ignoring racism, according to a recent survey of 15 secondary schools in Bedfordshire, Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk [Ghouri, 1999a]; “Britain’s schools dubbed racist” [Smithers and Carvel, 1999]. However, the Macpherson report [1999] recommends amending the National Curriculum to value cultural diversity and to prevent racism - according to Nadene Ghouri’s summary [1999b], councils and school governors should be given a duty to implement antiracist strategies, including:

- recording all racist incidents and reporting them to pupils’ parents, governors, the LEA
- schools publishing annually the number of incidents
- schools publishing annually the number of ethnic minority children who have been excluded

and inspectors’ roles should be extended to examine the implementation of these strategies;

- the National Curriculum: the debate about what should or should not be included in the National Curriculum continues [see eg Judd, 1999a]. The National Curriculum is also under review [QCA, 1998], and is being influenced by topics introduced by the Government, including citizenship, the environment, personal/social education, health education;

- parental choice

in a report for the Scottish Consumer Council, Sheila Riddell [Riddell, 1994] delivers a powerful critique of the current emphasis on parental choice:

“If we continue on a path which stresses the rights of those who are able to fulfil the role of critical consumer, then those who are unable to do so and who may have no one to act as their advocate are likely to be cast adrift. Children in families such as these will experience education of an increasingly impoverished quality. Even for working class children whose parents do succeed in gaining a place for them in a more privileged school, there is a strong possibility that they will be gradually lost from the system.” (p102)

- the problem of league tables:

“[League tables’] most damaging consequence has been the demoralisation of schools working in disadvantaged areas, which appear time after time at the bottom of the grade rankings. This bad publicity and the public ‘naming and shaming’ has had a negative impact on teacher morale and recruitment. Schools in disadvantaged areas commonly find it more difficult to attract and retain experienced staff which makes the task of school improvement all the more difficult ... There is worrying evidence the league-table mentality can encourage schools to target attention on those most able to boost their position ... There is a real danger that those not seen as capable of five A\* to C grades may be labelled as failures early in their school careers and that particular pupils (working-class boys and some ethnic groups) are adversely affected.” [Sammons, 1998]

- privatising state schools [*The Guardian*, 1999].

Given all the criticisms of liberal education methods and the ritual bashing of “poor teachers” and “failing schools”, we might think that little is being done to tackle equalities issues and social exclusion. Yet, despite all this, many exciting, positive initiatives are taking place, for example;

- organisations such as NATE (the National Association for the Teaching of English) continue to have a strong equalities commitment [see eg Bennett, 1997];
- global citizenship, relating local issues of social justice to the broader picture, has been put on the school agenda by organisations such as Oxfam, Actionaid, WWF;
- the Humanities Association is promoting a secondary school curriculum with a strong equalities thrust [Humanities Association, 1999];
- work is being undertaken to investigate sexuality, race and masculinity [Mac an Ghaill, 1994a; 1994b] and to explore “how black boys survive” [Sewell, 1997];
- standards for children entering school are being pursued (although “Lessons too early ‘scare off infants’” [Judd, 1999b]:

“Desirable outcomes on entry to compulsory schooling: Children enjoy books and handle them carefully, understanding how they are organised. They know that words and pictures carry meaning and that, in English, print is read from left to right and from top to bottom. They begin to associate sounds with patterns in rhymes, with syllables, and with words and letters. They recognise their own names and some familiar words. They recognise letters of the alphabet by shape and sound.” (p10) [SCAA, 1996]

- early years action research: recognising the demoralisation of early years workers:

“... early years practitioners, by which we mean adults working with children under eight in group settings in the education and care sectors ... are arguably more deprofessionalised and disenfranchised than colleagues working with older children.

Early years workers feel powerless and marginalised by government policies.”  
[Burgess-Macey and Rose, 1997]

action research projects to involve workers and to raise their status have been developed. Linked to this has been the development by the Early Childhood Education Forum of a “framework for early childhood practitioners” on *Quality in diversity in early learning* [ECEF, 1998]<sup>14</sup> <sup>15</sup>. (Early Years Partnerships are statutory requirements for local authorities - are public libraries usually involved?)

- inspecting equal opportunities  
in its series, “Inspecting subjects and aspects 11-18”, OFSTED [1999] has produced useful guidelines for inspecting equalities.

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<sup>14</sup> this publication has a very useful bibliography and list of organisations in membership of the Forum.

<sup>15</sup> The ECEF document was published by the National Children’s Bureau, themselves an important membership organisation dealing with the well-being and interests of children and young people, one of whose areas of work is combatting “inequalities of opportunity and social exclusion” [NCB, 1999]

## **Appendix 3**

### **The development of Museums' services for children and young people**

The Museums Association (MA) has put considerable effort into looking at the needs of children and young people; for example, their report, *Museums and young people* [Rider and Illingworth, 1997] assesses some specific initiatives, and then draws good practice from these into guidelines. The MA has also produced a series of briefing documents on key aspects of service development [Museums Association, 1994; 1995; 1997]. The Museums & Galleries Commission has also commissioned research into cultural diversity (and has pulled together some key points into a fact sheet written by Naseem Khan [1998]) and has produced guidance to museums on developing new audiences, including the greater involvement of children and young people [Dodd and Sandell, 1998].