

**HANNAH SMITH**

**TITLE:**  
**BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE:**  
**COMMUNITY BOOKSHOPS AND**  
**SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS**

**ABSTRACT**

This article analyses and discusses community bookshops as a viable commercial enterprise, by investigating the methods by which individual shops successfully balance a sustainable financial model with their prioritisation of social values. It uses secondary sources to conduct historical and contextual research, which is then synthesised with its primary research in the form of interviews and business model analysis. The article concludes that, by focusing on the needs of their local community, these bookshops are able to elevate the value of their business and products at a time when traditional retail outlets are struggling to retain customers. As beacons of social responsibility these businesses focus on collaboration and cohesion, along with developing the literacy of their local areas. Through their unique knowledge of their local community, and their community-ownership models, these bookshops display how economic function and social objectives can work hand in hand to create a sustainable and responsible business model.

**KEYWORDS: COMMUNITY BOOKSHOPS, BOOKSELLING, SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS, SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**



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## FULL ARTICLE

### 1 THE CONCEPT

Community bookshops are initiated and supported by members of the community, both financially and in their day-to-day activities. They are distinguished from independent bookshops by their cooperative-ownership models and being sustained by the (often voluntary) efforts of local people for the benefit of the neighbourhood. To fulfil their purpose, community bookshops must be economically viable and serve their communities, striving for positive social development. Currently, in a response to unmet needs in both local communities and the publishing industry, more community bookshops exist than ever before. While there are only a handful of these bookshops in the UK, gradual growth over the past two decades (including six new shops in the last ten years) suggests a desire to resist the decline of the High Street and the monopoly of a small number of multinational retailers. When asked whether people like the ‘community’ element of the bookshop and why, one bookshop manager alluded to their customers’ unwillingness to feed into corporate structures (Bookshop B).<sup>1</sup> Community bookshops exemplify people coming together to put their values into practice.

If it is true that ‘[p]ublishing exists to advance civilization’, affiliated industries such as bookselling must also lead efforts to challenge social injustice.<sup>2</sup> In the past few decades the book industry has made notable efforts to address social and environmental issues.<sup>3</sup> There are many programmes aiming to improve inclusivity, children’s literacy, and accessibility to books and publishing careers.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, there are many publishers and retailers making changes and commitments to address social inequalities.<sup>5</sup> The existence of these schemes proves a need for change in the industry. Slowly, and with the encouragement of a few leaders, the publishing industry is starting to exhibit ‘social extrapreneurship’: ‘[r]eframed in the context of social innovation, social extrapreneurship captures the process of inter-organizational action that facilitates alternative combinations of ideas, people, places and resources to address social challenges and make social change’.<sup>6</sup> By collaborating with each other, businesses in the publishing industry can discover innovative ways to address social challenges and make a greater difference than acting alone. Community bookshops are a micro-example of people and organisations working together in extrapreneurship, collaborating on projects to increase their potential social impact.

1 Bookshop and interviewee quotes and references in the text are from anonymised interviews conducted by the author.

2 Trentongalozo, ‘Publishing Defined: How an Industry about Words Needs to Change the Words About it’, 2 October 2017 <<https://tkbr.publishing.sfu.ca/pub800/2017/10/publishing-defined-how-an-industry-about-words-needs-to-change-the-words-about-it>> [accessed 10 July 2018].

3 Sarah Shaffi, ‘Publishing seeks to address industry’s lack of diversity’, *The Bookseller*, 4 November 2016 <<https://www.thebookseller.com/news/publishing-seeks-address-industry-s-lack-diversity-426031>> [accessed 27 June 2018].

4 The Publishers Association, ‘Creating a representative publishing industry’, 2016 <[https://booksellers.org.uk/getattachment/industryinfo/industryinfo/Creating-Inclusive-Bookshops/2016-RepresentativePublishingIndustry-\(1\).pdf.aspx](https://booksellers.org.uk/getattachment/industryinfo/industryinfo/Creating-Inclusive-Bookshops/2016-RepresentativePublishingIndustry-(1).pdf.aspx)> [accessed 10 July 2018]; National Literacy Trust, website, <<https://literacytrust.org.uk>> [accessed 10 May 2018]; BookTrust, website, <<https://www.booktrust.org.uk>> [accessed 10 May 2018].

5 Charlotte Eyre, ‘Publishers sign NLT literacy pledge’, *The Bookseller*, 25 January 2018 <<https://www.thebookseller.com/news/publishers-sign-nlt-literacy-pledge-712341>> [accessed 27 June 2018]; Natasha Onwuemezi, ‘Amazon and PRH among businesses backing literacy pledge’, *The Bookseller*, 15 November 2017 <<https://www.thebookseller.com/news/prh-and-walker-back-literacy-pledge-675301>> [accessed 27 June 2018].

6 Paul Tracey and Neil Stott, ‘Social innovation: a window on alternative ways of organizing and innovating’, *Innovation*, 19.1 (2016), 51-60 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14479338.2016.1268924>> (p. 55).



## 2 THE THEORY

Some community bookshops in the UK have been founded on mission-based objectives, such as ‘to provide access to books and information on the reality of the world and how to change it and ourselves for the better’.<sup>7</sup> The term ‘provide’ characterises bookselling as a means of distributing information rather than a financial transaction, a clear prioritisation of social responsibilities over the economic. To sustain a business and fund any social activities, however, they must be profitable. When analysing the balance between economic and social activities of community bookshops, it is helpful to consider the ‘concentric circles of social responsibility’ proposed by the Community for Economic Development, which places a business’s most important functions at the centre:

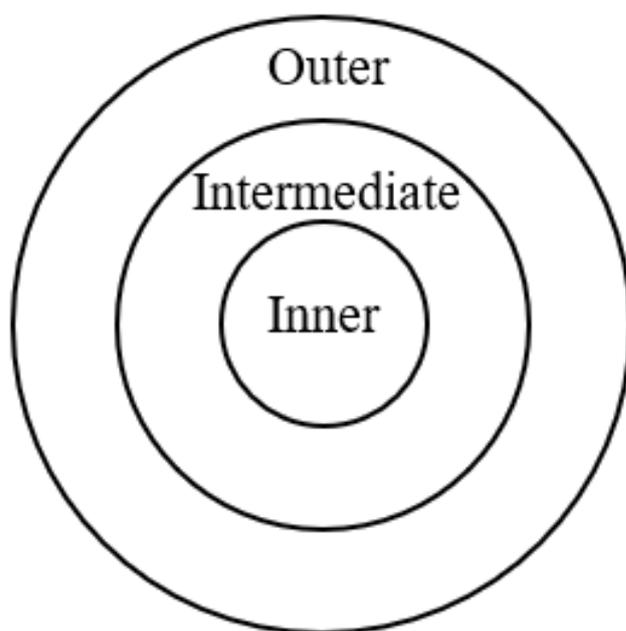


Figure 1: ‘Concentric circles of social responsibility’ (Community for Economic Development). Created by author.

The *inner circle* includes the clear-cut basic responsibilities for the efficient execution of the economic function – products, jobs and economic growth.

The *intermediate circle* encompasses responsibility to exercise this economic function with a sensitive awareness of changing social values and priorities: for example, with respect to environmental conservation; hiring and relations with employees; and more rigorous expectations of customers for information, fair treatment, and protection from injury.

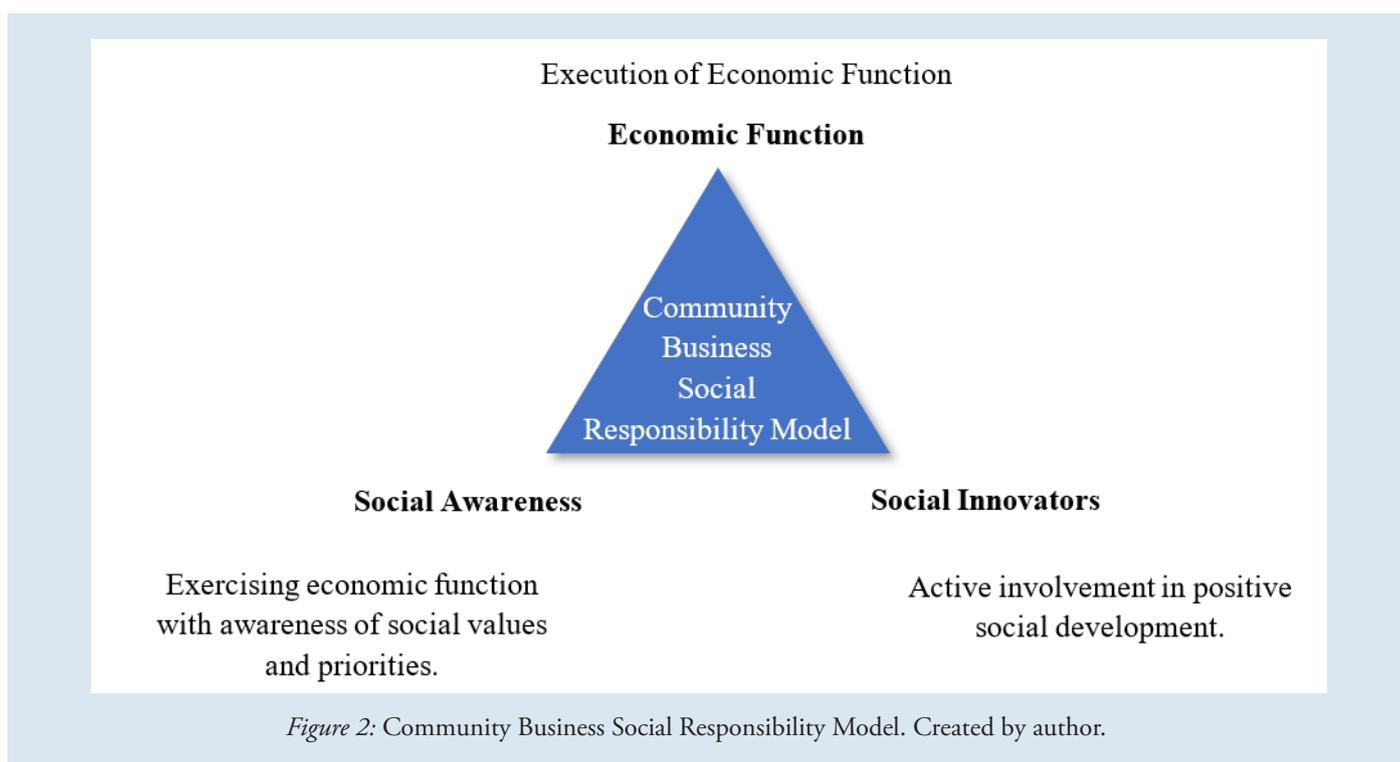
The *outer circle* outlines newly emerging and still amorphous responsibilities that a business should assume to become more broadly involved in actively improving the social environment. (For example, poverty and urban blight).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> News from Nowhere, ‘Our history’, <<http://www.newsfromnowhere.org.uk/info/aboutus/OurHistory.php>> [accessed 18 February 2019].

<sup>8</sup> Community for Economic Development, ‘Social Responsibilities of Business Corporations’, 1 June 1971 <[https://www.ced.org/pdf/Social\\_Responsibilities\\_of\\_Business\\_Corporations.pdf](https://www.ced.org/pdf/Social_Responsibilities_of_Business_Corporations.pdf)> [accessed 8 August 2018] (p. 15); Archie B. Carroll, ‘A History of Corporate Social Responsibility: Concepts and Practices’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Corporate Social Responsibility*, ed. by Andrew Crane, Abigail McWilliams, Dirk Matten, Jeremy Moon and Donald S. Siegel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 19-46 (p. 29).



This model puts the economic function at the core of a business, indicating that its greatest concern should be maximising profitability. Community bookshops sit at odds with this concept – they are often initiated by communities wanting to ‘actively [improve] the social environment’, therefore prioritising the outer circle. Although the origins of these bookshops vary - some were founded as a strictly commercial enterprise, others created for the specific purpose of providing social outreach – they all owe their current existence to the efforts of local people who believed their absence would be socially detrimental to the area. In the case of the intermediate circle, community bookshops must be aware of neighbourhood values and have positive relationships with their members, volunteers and employees. In the bookselling industry, due to increased discounting of books and the growing threat of online retailers, bookshops must increasingly prioritise the intermediate circle by providing outstanding customer service in order to encourage customer retention. The social responsibility model of community bookshops, and community businesses more generally, is perhaps better represented as a triangle:



Unlike the previous model, here all facets of a bookshop’s activities unite to demonstrate their values and give social purpose to their economic function. One community bookshop manager views the community business status, including the bookshop’s accomplishment of all three points, as their bookshop’s unique selling point (Bookshop A). Social awareness and social innovation attract book-buying customers, thus serving the economic function. The three factors work together simultaneously, rather than having different priority levels. Similarly, a profitable bookshop in turn funds activities of social impact. The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGF) argues that contemporary attempts to create economically-viable community businesses differ from historical examples for this very reason, since past enterprises ‘set themselves social, cultural or educational, as distinct from economic, objectives’.<sup>9</sup> They also argue that the term ‘not-for-profit’ is ‘insufficient, or even misleading, if it suggests that any type of community enterprise can afford to ignore profit either as a source of motivation and incentive or as a resource for further

<sup>9</sup> Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, *Community business works: a report by a working party set up to consider community self-help groups and local productive activity* (London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1982), p. 2.



development'.<sup>10</sup> Community businesses, and other 'not-for-profit' businesses, must aim to be profitable in order to fund their social activities: 'the profit that we make from the business, we plough back into the community'.<sup>11</sup> The trading activities and social contribution of a bookshop must work hand in hand to create a sustainable and impactful business.

Whilst the bookshops in this study raised initial capital through loans and shares, they aim to be self-sustaining through bookselling and therefore satisfy their economic function. Some bookshops utilise funding to make changes, but commercial bookselling is the main activity of each enterprise and this provides an income that keeps the organisation viable. With only two exceptions, UK community bookshops sell first-hand books; this necessitates a working relationship with publishers and, like all bookshops, the effective management of a bookselling business.

### 3 THE CONTEXT

In 2018, a community interest company was created purely to address a gap in book production: 'society is changing faster than the publishing industry and there is now a large gap in children's books between what the publishing industry is producing and what children need in our society now in terms of diversity, ideology and representation' (Interviewee D). The manager believes that, until publishing staff are representative of the population, it will struggle to produce books that cater to everyone. The publishing industry needs to start listening to, and representing, individuals – and *all* individuals. Jonathan Douglas, Director of the National Literacy Trust, stated that '[i]f we are to truly transform the life chances of the nation's most disadvantaged children, we must tackle low literacy one community at a time'.<sup>12</sup> Community bookshops are representatives of the publishing industry in hundreds of schools across the UK, simultaneously encouraging young people to read and witnessing the need for more accessible and diverse literature.

Whilst community bookshops exhibit social enterprise as a promising and successful bridge between private sector and public need, they are also supported by publishers and community enterprise funding bodies. Funding organisations such as the Plunkett Foundation, Power to Change, and Impetus (some of whom supported the bookshops in this study) provide financial support and training associated with the initial set-up of a community organisation. Aside from any start-up funding, community bookshops utilise funding in different ways. They may choose to invest in a larger building, to expand their activities, or to develop an area of their business. For example, one bookshop received funding from a large publisher in 2017, with which they commissioned some artwork to develop their branding. Some grants state how the money must be used, such as for a chosen event, on a focus area (such as school outreach), or to employ someone in a specific role. By partnering with publishers and other organisations in the publishing industry, these bookshops could make a greater positive difference to our society – 'one community at a time'.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, *Community Business Works*, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Power to Change Trust, *Crediton Community Bookshop - turning book sales into opportunities for local people*, online video recording, YouTube, 13 June 2017, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TtEjjLuh5b8>> [accessed 31 January 2019].

<sup>12</sup> National Literacy Trust, 'Life expectancy shortened by 26 years for children growing up in areas with the most serious literacy problems', 15 February 2018 <<https://literacytrust.org.uk/news/life-expectancy-shortened-26-years-children-growing-ar-eas-most-serious-literacy-problems/>> [accessed 9 July 2018].

<sup>13</sup> National Literacy Trust, 'Life expectancy shortened by 26 years'.



Many school libraries are underfunded and, in some instances, do not exist at all.<sup>14</sup> As ‘[p]rimary and secondary schools are under no legal obligation to provide a library’, the work being done by bookshops across the country is vital.<sup>15</sup> ‘Schools programmes’ run by community bookshops provide one of the few opportunities many children in these areas are given to engage with literature. Books, and access to them, are vital to children’s development and to a positively progressing society. Books educate, explore and entertain. They teach people to empathise, widen people’s horizons and provide an escape from reality. The extent to which a low level of literacy can affect all aspects of a person’s life is shocking: adults with lower levels of literacy are more likely to experience poor health, to believe that they have little impact on political processes, and are less likely to participate in volunteer activities.<sup>16</sup> With so many consequences to lower reading levels, it is vital more is done to combat any disadvantages children and adults may have. Whilst socio-economic background is an undeniable factor in these studies, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development have discovered that being an ‘engaged reader’ is more important for children’s cognitive development than their parents’ level of education and their socio-economic background.<sup>17</sup> This is a strong testament to the positive effects of reading but should be considered with other factors in mind. Epstein’s research into community involvement in children’s education proposes the concept of ‘Spheres of Interaction/Influence’, which include home, school and community:<sup>18</sup>

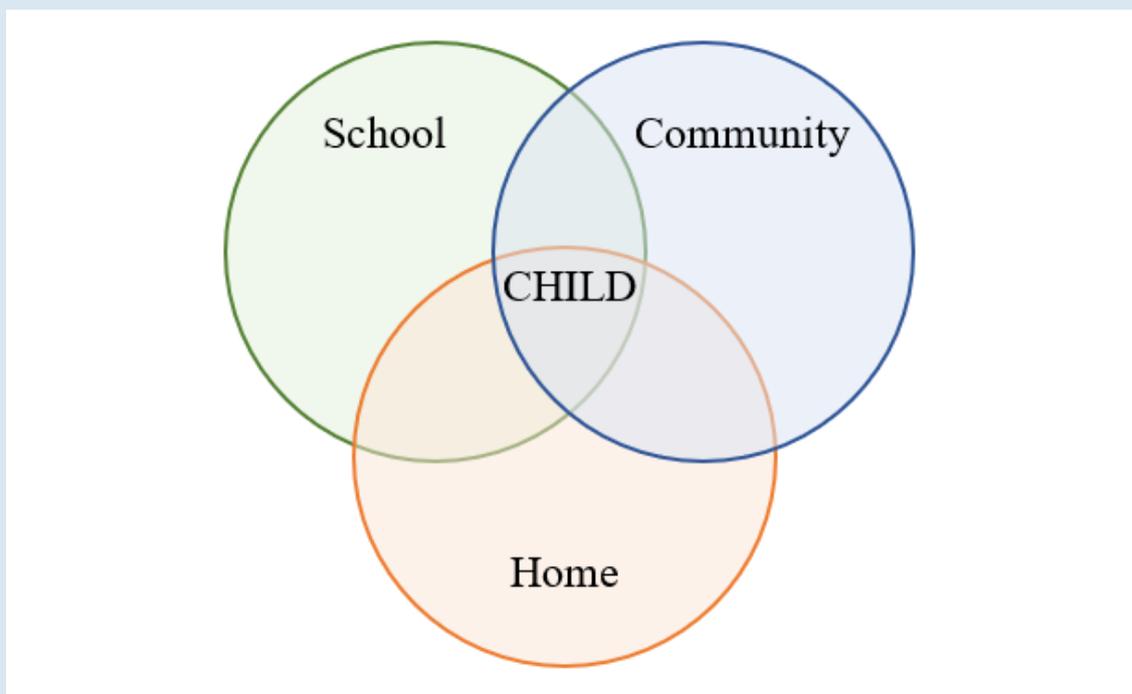


Figure 3 – Model of Epstein’s ‘Spheres of Influence’. Created by author.

14 Sufiya Ahmed, ‘We have the lowest teenage literacy rates in the OECD – and the Government wants us to shut down more school libraries’, *Independent*, 27 November 2017 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/school-cuts-education-libraries-literacy-oecd-teenagers-failing-justine-greening-a8077766.html>> [accessed 16 January 2018].

15 Booksellers Association, ‘Bookselling for Britain’, <<https://www.booksellers.org.uk/BookSellers/media/Booksellers/Bookselling-for-Britain.pdf>> [accessed 6 August 2018], p. 10.

16 The Reading Agency, ‘Reading Facts’ n.d. <<https://readingagency.org.uk/about/impact/002-reading-facts-1/>> [accessed 10 July 2018]; University of Oxford, ‘Reading at 16 linked to better job prospects’, *ScienceDaily*, 9 May 2011 <<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110504150539.htm>> [accessed 13 August 2018].

17 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, ‘Reading for Change: Performance and Engagement Across Countries’, 2000 <<http://www.oecd.org/education/school/programmeforinternationalstudentassessmentpisa/33690986.pdf>> [accessed 13 August 2018] (pp. 16-17).

18 Wendy L. French, ‘A role of the rural elementary principal: Increasing reading literacy in third graders living in poverty through advocating community partnerships’ (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing: Northwest Nazarene University, 2014), p. 5;



Wendy French's analysis of this concept discusses how 'the interaction of the spheres can positively or negatively impact the child, and those external forces, such as age, experience, philosophy, and practices, determine the strength of this interaction'.<sup>19</sup> People within these spheres should be aware of the needs of children in their reach and actively support their learning where possible. Helen Haugh believes '[c]ommunity-led social ventures have the potential to deliver benefits over and above economic and financial outcomes as they are closely engaged with people with a shared interest in their creation and management'.<sup>20</sup> As the objectives for many community bookshops are not primarily financial, and because the members and community shape each organisation, these bookshops can deliver benefits tailored to their communities and so meet a specific local need. If communities can utilise their skills and resources, and partner with schools and families, a reading culture can be encouraged and socio-economic statistics overcome.

## 4 THE REALITY

Many community bookshops already work closely with schools, funding these activities with their own profits and/or with the financial support of publishers and other funding bodies. They take authors into schools, run book fairs and children's workshops, and curate specially-selected book lists every school year.<sup>21</sup> One community bookshop manager identified the encouragement and support of schools as a 'virtuous circle' and a 'long-term investment in bookselling' (Bookshop A). Discussing corporate social responsibility, Carroll stated that 'it is sometimes difficult to differentiate what organizations are doing for business reasons...and what the organizations are doing for social reasons'.<sup>22</sup> This virtuous circle of promoting literacy in schools, and therefore creating future readers and book-buyers, satisfies both business and social responsibilities. Furthermore, interaction between bookshops and schools links to the 'Spheres of Interaction/Influence' proposed by Epstein. Community bookshops want to work together with schools 'to encourage a love of reading amongst the children and their parents' and feel that since they 'are neither home nor school, [they] have a unique opportunity to help make this happen'.<sup>23</sup> Community bookshops situate themselves in the 'community sphere' of children's literacy development, alongside libraries. Due to the decline in library funding and the reduced presence of school libraries, it is crucial that other areas of the community come together to engage children with literature early on.

One bookshop manager said they believe it is valuable to support teachers by informing them of recent children's publications and providing them with suggested lists. Strathclyde Community Business has noted that 'many urban teachers live outside the community in which they teach. Links with community businesses can enable those teachers to better understand the social and economic realities of the community in which their students live'.<sup>24</sup> One UK community bookshop runs an annual professional

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Joyce Epstein, 'School/family/community partnerships: Caring for children we share', *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76.9 (1995), 701-712 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20405436>> [accessed 9 July 2018] (p. 702).

19 French, 'A role of the rural elementary principal', p. 26.

20 Helen Haugh, 'Community-Led Social Venture Creation', *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 31.2 (2007), 161-182 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2007.00168.x>> (p. 161).

21 In 2017 one community bookshop ran 59 school class events attended by 4,069 children and 10 book fairs reaching 3,204 parents and children.

22 Carroll, 'A History of Corporate Social Responsibility: Concepts and Practices', pp. 20-21.

23 Kett's Books, 'Annual Report 2018', <<http://www.kettsbooks.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Ketts-Books-Annual-Report-2018-WEB2.pdf>> [accessed 8 August 2018] (p. 10).

24 Strathclyde Community Business, *Stepping together: schools and community businesses: contributing to education/industry links and promoting local development* (Glasgow: Strathclyde Community Business, 1991), p. 3.



development workshop for teachers in association with staff of the local university, and hosts general discussions about recent children's publications. This increases teachers' awareness of current publications and provides a generalised knowledge of titles to suggest to readers, whatever their ability and interests. In the provision of information and tools, a community bookshop can facilitate childhood literature development through those directly providing children's education. Teachers say that they greatly benefit from the top titles lists for sourcing new reading suggestions, and the bookshop's efforts to source good quality and entertaining material across the age ranges relieves the pressure on teachers who do not have the time to read widely.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, working alongside parents and teachers to promote and encourage a child's education is something many bookshops feel privileged to be part of.<sup>26</sup> The schools programme of this particular bookshop has received a great deal of positive feedback from teachers:

The children thoroughly enjoyed your talk and left the room excited and enthused. You [...] engaged them from the very beginning of the talk and held their attention with an expert mix of discussion, questioning and reading. It was wonderful to see them so engaged and to listen to the myriad of questions they posed to you. One rather reluctant writer in my class said to me later that day that he didn't realise you could actually make real places into a story and he then went on to ask if he could have a go at writing his own story.<sup>27</sup>

By making literature relevant to the children and integrating it with the local area, these bookshops allow students to engage with stories and encourage other areas of literacy development, such as writing and creativity. Moreover, by engaging children with literature early on, habits can be established and positive social attitudes introduced. Reading for pleasure benefits people by enhancing 'empathy, understanding of the self, and the ability to understand one's own and others' identities'.<sup>28</sup> One study found that 'reading Harry Potter has been shown to improve children's attitudes toward stigmatized groups such as immigrants, refugees, and members of the LGBT community'.<sup>29</sup> These benefits will go some way to making our society more tolerant and accepting of differences in opinion and identity.

Another bookshop in London decided to create and develop a social enterprise to focus on their school outreach. They realised that children who regularly attended reading festivals were already being encouraged to read by their parents. To reach those without access to books or the encouragement to read at home, the bookshop set up festivals for schools to attend. They 'very deliberately' target schools in deprived areas of London and 'try to ensure that the range of authors [they've] got coming in are reflective of the ethnicity and diversity of the communities who are attending the festival' (Interviewee D). The results of this innovative idea have been overwhelmingly positive. The manager says 'it's engaged lots of children who wouldn't necessarily have been brought into the bookshop by their parents' (Interviewee D). Moreover, the effect is rippling out to families of the children they engage with: 'a lot of the parents we're getting coming in are actually being brought in by their children rather than the other way around' because the children are familiar with the shop, 'they know where it is, they liked it, they had a good experience there' (Interviewee D). This outward spiral positively impacts the overall local community. By engaging children in an exciting and direct way, and by taking books to where they are, this social enterprise is reducing the intimidating stigma associated with books – especially in families where parents might have low literacy levels. One

25 Information gathered in the interview process (April-June 2018).

26 Information gathered in the interview process (April-June 2018).

27 Crediton Community Bookshop, 'Work in the Community 2017' (unpublished draft report, Crediton Community Bookshop, 2018), p. 1.

28 The Reading Agency, 'Reading Facts'.

29 The Reading Agency, 'Reading Facts'.



literacy charity employee stated that ‘if you get more diverse books into a bookshop catering for different kinds of people, then you’re going to get more people coming in and it’s not going to be so intimidating to somebody who, say, English isn’t their first language’ (Interviewee E). In this way, the bookshop enterprise aims to ‘break [the] cycle’ of low literacy levels and successfully do this by ‘engaging the kids’ before negative habits are made, making bookshops a comfortable and happy place for children and the people close to them (Interviewee D).

Many of the bookshops have good relationships with their local library, supporting summer reading challenges, collaborating on outreach events and sharing expertise. The Booksellers Association praised the UK library service for being ‘a locus for social cohesion and a safe and established environment in which all members of the community can study, learn and read for pleasure’.<sup>30</sup> These attributes reflect the objectives and values of many community bookshops. And yet, given the competitiveness of the modern bookselling landscape, why are community bookshops not in competition with libraries? The manager of a London bookshop discussed the historic relationship between book-buying and library-use: ‘[y]ou would borrow the books you just wanted to read or use for reference and you would buy the ones you wanted to keep or give as presents’ (Interviewee D). When all bookshops sold books at the recommended retail price, the author, illustrator and publisher each received a portion of the selling price. The library allowed people to ‘try-before-buying’ and provided access to books for those unable to purchase them. The manager went on to say how the discounting of books has damaged both libraries and bookshops. The lower the cost of a book, the less people will use libraries. Cheapening the value of books has a knock-on effect: it reduces the money paid to authors and so reduces the pool of people who can afford to become writers. This results in a less diverse industry, and therefore a lower likelihood of finding relatable stories for underrepresented communities. Bookshops and libraries both advocate for the value of the book (Interviewee D). They have similar goals and values and can, therefore, provide support without compromising the other’s integrity. Moreover, libraries and bookshops still serve different markets and different purposes. Tracey, Phillips and Haugh state that ‘[p]ower relations are transformed [when] partners are seen as sources of valuable assets, knowledge and expertise’.<sup>31</sup> The relationship between bookshops and libraries can be fruitful and beneficial to both parties due to this sharing of assets, knowledge and expertise.

While books, and therefore the publishing industry, are devalued by discounting, community bookshops are adding value to bookshops through social outreach. Two community bookshops are expanding their enterprises to create work and meeting areas, and a space to be used as a community resource. The CGF predicted that community centres would become ‘more like a collection of small working spaces, flexibly planned and constructed with basic equipment and technical resources provided communally’.<sup>32</sup> The development plans of these bookshops align with this prediction. Incorporating workspaces in a community bookshop is not detrimental to the economic function of the business; these bookshops are planning to rent out these spaces and so create another income stream. These spaces will form ‘community hubs’ – community gathering places to be used to host events, workshops and bookshop activities. One bookshop also plans to host health and well-being activities and to use the upper level as supported housing for the homeless. It is logical for community bookshops to make creative offers such as these to revive the high street, forming cultural hubs and driving wider thinking about literacy development and consumer engagement. By offering these services, the bookshops aim to be integral to their local communities, responding to and providing for the needs of local people. Whether enticing

30 Booksellers Association, ‘Bookselling for Britain’, p. 13.

31 Paul Tracey, Nelson Phillips and Helen Haugh, ‘Beyond Philanthropy: Community Enterprise as a Basis for Corporate Citizenship’, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 58.4 (2005), 327–344 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-004-6944-x>> (p. 327).

32 Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, *Community Business Works*, p. 19.



people through their bookselling space or general community space, community bookshops are actively seeking opportunities to attract a wider range of people and to make books more accessible.

Some of the bookshops have diversified to expand their retail potential, optimise volunteer skills, respond to customer needs, and emphasise their values. One bookshop repairs old rare books in their bindery, another sells organic and fairly-traded food (this diversification of products was well received by customers, provides other income streams, and complements the sustainable and environmentally-friendly values of the shop). Another bookshop has a café, which encourages people to stay in the shop longer and provides a positive social service (Bookshop C). The Federation of Radical Booksellers says that '[h]aving a café certainly makes the bookshops more accessible and attractive to people who find the idea of a bookshop daunting'.<sup>33</sup> Whilst the café does not make a lot of money, the bookshop understands the benefits it brings and recognises its value as a resource (Bookshop C).

## 5 FINDINGS / CONCLUSION

Community-driven bookselling activities, collaborative relationships, and diversification enable community bookshops to retain customers and demonstrate effective alternative business structures. The community-ownership business models encourage local people to feel invested in, and contribute to, the success of each business, providing insight into the local area and offering a variety of skills. Furthermore, community bookshops are responding to changes in society and the industry by meeting local needs and demonstrating the integrity of bookselling. The social activities of these bookshops, supported by and conjunctive to their economic function, exhibit their dedication to making a positive difference in their communities. Through school programmes, local partnerships, innovative projects, and economic viability, community bookshops are a welcome and resilient business enterprise.

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<sup>33</sup> Federation of Radical Booksellers, *Starting a bookshop: a handbook on radical and community bookselling* (Lancaster: Federation of Radical Booksellers, 1984), p. 75.



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