

THE CONUNDRUM OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Genevieve Hart & Sandy Zinn

Department of Library and Information Science

University of the Western Cape, Bellville

ghart@uwc.ac.za; szinn@uwc.ac.za

1. INTRODUCTION

The first democratic elections in 1994, leading to the end of apartheid education, new educational legislation and a new curriculum, brought fresh optimism to South African school library circles. This was prompted by two lines of thought. First, it was hoped that the merging of the 19 racially based departments and fairer provisioning might redress the unequal distribution of school libraries across previously advantaged and disadvantaged sectors. Second, South African educational reform echoed international trends in its emphasis on developing lifelong learners who are able to compete in the information society.

In 1994, the new Ministry of Education published a draft policy discussion document setting the tone for the educational legislation of the next few years. It stated that the curriculum should encourage “independent and critical thought, the capacity to question, enquire and reason, to weigh evidence and form judgements, to achieve understanding, and to recognise the provisional and incomplete nature of most human knowledge” (South Africa, 1994b). This kind of language indicated recognition of the need for information literacy education – widely accepted to be the specific mission of school librarianship. The interim curriculum of 1994 included an Information Skills Learning Programme (South Africa, 1994a) and, in a series of workshops, school librarians across the country designed an information skills programme to be incorporated into the envisaged new curriculum.

The shifts in education on both fronts seemed to promise a favourable climate for school libraries. However, in 2007, it has to be said that the promise remains unfulfilled. This chapter’s account will describe the present situation and, hopefully, by delving a little into the educational and historical context, explore possible reasons for the disappointments of the past 13 years.

The chapter is a synthesis of the authors’ research, teaching and professional activities in South African school librarianship. It occasionally draws on information garnered from key informants working in school library support services across the country, whose opinions on their successes and stumbling blocks were polled in 2001 (Zinn, 2001) and by email in late 2006. They were assured anonymity but the text makes it clear when reference is made to their opinions and comments.

2. THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

The brief discussion in this section of the challenges confronting South African education offers insight into the challenges of school librarianship surveyed in this chapter. Education spending is the largest single item in the national budget, representing about 17.8 per cent of the total in 2006 (Brand South Africa, 2006). Yet, 13 years after the end of apartheid education, there is consensus that its legacy lingers and that the money spent has not yet provided satisfactory outcomes (Butler, 2004:82). South African school learners perform badly in international tests of numeracy and literacy – achieving below countries with similar education budgets and below some African countries with lower budgets (Hofmeyr, 2006).

In the consideration of school libraries in this chapter, the following points might be relevant:

- *The size of the school going population:* Some 21 per cent of the total population of 43 000 000 is younger than 19 years (StatsSA, 2006). South Africa has 26 292 public schools serving 12 302 236 learners (South Africa, 2006a). Of these, only 22 per cent are high schools.
- *Rural poverty:* Some 70 per cent of South Africa's poor live in sprawling, densely populated ex-homelands that were established during the apartheid era. As Butler (2004:135) points out, they are only "rural" in their lack of infrastructure and distance from economic opportunities. For instance, in KwaZulu-Natal, the province with the largest number of schools, 52 per cent of schools are situated 10–49 km from a town (EduAction, 2004).
- *The apartheid heritage of school funding:* In 1994, per capita expenditure varied between R5403 on "white" schools and R1053 on schools in the Transkei homeland. Repetition and pass rates correlated closely with these differences (NEDLAC, 1998).
- *Continuing high rates of failures and dropout:* For example, two-thirds of the 1994 generation dropped out before the matriculation exams; only 5 per cent were eligible to enrol at university (Cembi, 2006).
- *Backlogs in basic facilities:* In 1996, more than half of all schools did not have electricity and 24 per cent had no access to water. It was estimated that 57 499 additional classrooms were needed (South Africa, 1997b). By means of the National Schools Building Programme, the Department of Education can now claim that "classrooms under the trees have been eradicated" (South Africa, 2007).
- *The redress of historical disparities in teacher/pupil ratios:* This has impacted directly on school libraries. The authors' experience in running courses for teacher-librarians at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) indicates that most library staff are funded by fees levied by school governing bodies to supplement their government allocations. The implication is that libraries continue to be an indicator of class advantage, as schools serving poorer communities cannot afford these "extra" expenditures.
- *Teachers' poor qualifications and poor subject knowledge:* This has hindered the introduction of South Africa's sophisticated new curriculum, Curriculum 2005 (Butler, 2004:82). In apartheid era education, so called Bantu education for black people was

seen to be designed to train labourers and servants (Kallaway, 1990; Stadler, 1991). Rote learning from textbooks was the norm before 1994.

3. TRANSITION OF THE EARLY 1990s

As with its schools, South Africa's school libraries in 2007 must be seen against the backdrop of their apartheid past. Before the advent of democracy in 1994, school libraries mirrored the South African political economy in that schools designated for white people (and thus serving a mere 10 per cent of the total population) had good library systems and those designated for black people did not. Stadler (1991) attributes the unequal development to the apartheid ethos that black people were destined to be "un-thinking cogs" in the labour machine, in no need of libraries.

Perhaps as a result of the tri-cameral government in 1984 that ostensibly extended political power beyond the white minority to include coloureds and Indians (*South Africa: system of government*, 1996), the schools designated for these groups were allocated large sums of money in the mid-1980s for the provision of libraries. However, the expansionary period in these schools was not to last for long, as the school library budgets dried up in the early 1990s when the end of the apartheid regime drew near. Some research has documented the resulting loss of teacher-librarian posts, the scattering of library collections and the closing of libraries in these schools (Fredericks, 1993; Job, 1993; Hart, 2000).

The new curriculum introduced in 1996, Curriculum 2005, and its revision, the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) (South Africa, 2002), nevertheless seemed to offer new opportunities (Zinn, 2002). They might be described as "library friendly" for two reasons: they recognise the ability to "collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information" as one of eight generic cross-curricular outcomes, and their documentation promises an ethos that values critical thinking and active discovery learning.

Librarians assumed that the new emphasis on assessing learning by means of projects and portfolios of work opened the way for resource-based and enquiry learning. The Department of Education itself seemed to share this assumption, as De Vries (2002:10) points out in his quotation from a 1997 Department of Education publication explaining Curriculum 2005 to teachers stating that "adequate resources [for the new outcomes-based approaches] are essential" and that "adequate provisioning of libraries" was being accelerated.

Although it is hard to see signs of this promised acceleration, evidence that Curriculum 2005 indeed *is* resource-hungry lies in its impact on South African public libraries. The use of public libraries by school learners has increased dramatically since its introduction. Research has documented the pressures on public library staff as they struggle to meet the needs of learners for project materials and for education in the effective use of library resources (e.g. Nkosi, 2000; Maepa & Mhinga, 2003; Hart, 2004). A common refrain in Hart's (2004; 2006) interviews with public library staff in her studies on information literacy education in public libraries in Cape Town and the rural province of Mpumalanga is: "We are doing the work of *school* librarians!"



Young users inside the Goudini Public Library in Rawsonville in the Western Cape.
(Courtesy of the Directorate of Library Services, Western Cape)

4. SCHOOL LIBRARY SURVEYS

The passing of the South African Schools Act (South Africa, 1996) marked the beginning of South Africa's new education system. As Le Roux (2003) points out, disappointingly, the Schools Act makes no mention of libraries. Moreover, its devolution of power to schools' governing bodies, however much in keeping with the ideals of democracy, did not help library development. The Act describes the role of the governing body as ensuring "quality education" in the school. Although librarians used this phrase to argue for school libraries, it became clear in the next few years that it was naïve to assume that school management bodies or even teachers would agree that education quality implies the provision of libraries.

In 1997, the School Register of Needs, an audit of school facilities conducted by the newly unified Department of Education, estimated that 8 million out of 12 million South African learners did not have access to libraries in their schools (South Africa, 1997b). The South African School Library Survey of the Human Sciences Research Council in 1999 confirmed the precarious position of school libraries in its finding that 32 per cent of schools nationwide had an "on-site library" and another 12 per cent had some sort of "library collection/box service" (South Africa, 1999:iv).

The report comments on the unavailability of many existing libraries, which are often used as classrooms or are shut for much of the day because the "librarian" is also a full-time teacher (South Africa, 1999:25). The audit does not record the amount of time so-called teacher-librarians spend in the library. It hints at the problem when it questions the high number (30 per cent) of teacher-librarians who describe themselves as

principals, deputy principals and teaching heads of departments. There is little information in the report on the sources of school library funds. It seems that only a minority of schools allocate funds to library resources in their annual budgeting.

Support for this comment lies in the more positive position of school libraries in South Africa's independent or private schools, 50 per cent of which have libraries. Indeed, many of the libraries in schools within the fold of the Independent Schools Association of South Africa (ISASA) rival the best in the world. They are well equipped, have adequate annual budgets and are staffed by full-time professional librarians. Their excellence is on view at the dynamic ISASA biennial school librarian conferences.

Some five years after the national audit, a provincial survey in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), the province with the largest number of schools (6129), provides up-to-date evidence of the enormous challenges facing school libraries in public schools (KZN, 2004). Perhaps impatient with delays in policy-building at national level, KZN's Directorate of Education Library Information and Technology Services (ELITS) drew up its own school library policy in 2002 (KZN, 2003).

The survey in 2004 gathered baseline information to guide the implementation of the new policy document. The findings make for sobering reading: 19 per cent of the responding 5156 schools have a central library; 31 per cent have a storeroom or box library; 20 per cent have no library at all; and 7 per cent did not reply to the question. It is noteworthy that half the schools without any kind of library have no spare room that might be converted into a library. Confronted by these figures and by on-going evidence of the demands of the new curriculum, the KwaZulu-Natal Education Department in 2005 undertook to start up 1000 school libraries in that year and to provide every school in the province with a library by 2010 (Bolowana, 2005). The authors have no information on the progress made towards this goal.

5. PROVINCIAL SCHOOL LIBRARY SUPPORT SERVICES

The 1996 Constitution spells out the responsibilities of South Africa's three tiers of government. The national Department of Education is responsible for laying down policy, whereas the nine provincial education departments must implement policy and administer schooling in their respective provinces. Five of the nine provincial departments of education have active school library support services. However, the status and influence of these services within their education departments are questioned by our informants, most of whom work in them. Only one province has a school library service at the executive management level; the other eight are either sub-directorates or divisions of a sub-directorate.

According to informants within the support services, staffing has impeded the progress of their services for a number of reasons:

- School library advisors, placed in decentralised district offices, report on a day-to-day basis to the district office's manager, who might have little understanding of the educational role of school libraries. Tensions arise as a result.
- The large-scale rationalisation of the colleges of education led to college personnel being absorbed into school library support services. They lack the required qualifications and understanding.

- A few school library support services have had to relocate from a different department altogether, for example from the Department of Arts and Culture to the Department of Education. Some are hamstrung by being aligned with inappropriate departments within education, for example sport.

As suggested earlier, a major stumbling block is the reluctance of school governing bodies to recognise the need for school libraries. One or two provinces have been able to circumvent the obstacle by purchasing materials for schools from a centralised budget. Experience has shown that the mere purchase and delivery of materials to schools is not enough. KZN, therefore, has set up processing centres where books are catalogued and processed and model collections are housed. Teachers visit the centres and are encouraged to select materials for their schools. Comments from informants in other provinces on the inability of schools to buy library materials suggest that they would like to follow suit.



Learners relaxing in the children's corner at Johannesburg Public Library.

(Courtesy of the Directorate of Library and Information Services, Gauteng)

Arguably, KZN – with its huge number of schools, predominantly rural in nature and with huge backlogs – is the province with the greatest challenges. The relative success of its school library support services, ELITS, therefore demands closer analysis. It has hosted a number of conferences, including that of the International Association of School

Librarianship (IASL) in 2003. Its director, Sibongile Nzimande, is the IASL director for sub-Saharan Africa. The success of the IASL conference has had positive spin-offs for KZN, among which was the funding of 120 school librarians to receive training in the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE): School Library Development and Management at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). ELITS's website provides links to all their policies, which include the Provincial School Library Policy, the Provincial Reading Policy and an information and communication technology (ICT) manual for provincial ICT rollout.⁽¹⁾

Perhaps it is the fact that ELITS is a directorate rather than a mere department within a directorate that gives it more clout in the KZN Education Department and has enabled it to break through barriers – with the ICT departments, for example. KZN is the only province with a school library policy, the drafting of which was funded by the ELITS directorate and is under review at present. The review is perhaps motivated by the new opportunities offered by the Education Centres Supporting Rural Development programme. With financial support from the Royal Netherlands Embassy, this programme aims to set up district education centres in all 12 regions, each of which will have nine satellite education centres. The centres will be the nodes for mobile library networks (KZN, 2005).

Through partnerships with business and foreign governments like the Japanese organisation Together with Africa and Asia Association (TAAA), other provinces have set up mobile bus school libraries that serve remote rural schools.

6. EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2002–2007

During the early 1990s, school librarianship was a popular choice of profession in the more privileged sectors of schooling. At the University of South Africa (Unisa), for example, at least 200 teachers were enrolled for the then Diploma in Specialised Education: Media Centre Science. With the new education dispensation, specialist posts of teacher-librarian were abolished at schools. In the absence of a national policy on school library staffing and the resultant lack of new entrants to the field, a concern is the “greying” of the present generation of South African school librarians.

Only three universities (Unisa, UWC and UKZN) now offer specialist training, mostly aimed at qualified educators. All three have instituted new programmes:

- Unisa introduced a Diploma in Information Services for Children and Youth in 2002. The courses in this diploma attract both public librarians and school librarians.
- UWC started its new programme, the Advanced Certificate in Education: School Librarianship, in 2003. It is run as a series of ten intensive courses during school holidays. A challenge is that, in the absence of designated teacher-librarian posts in schools, less than half of the participants are qualified teachers. Most are community members brought in by the schools to run their libraries, often for a few hours a day and at low rates of pay.
- UKZN was offered a lifeline with its new course, Advanced Certificate of Education: School Library Development and Management. In 2004, the KZN ELITS Di-

1 www.kzneducation.gov.za/elits/

rectorate sponsored the first 120 school librarians to be trained over two years. As already mentioned, KZN is the only province with a formal policy on school libraries, which might explain this support.

The mode of course delivery varies from distance education only (Unisa) to mixed mode. UWC has experimented with e-learning (blended and online only) for one course and hopes to offer more courses in this way as the demand for online distance learning grows and more people have access to the Internet. The trend is for part-time learning, as most course participants are in full-time employ. Since 2005, the UKZN programme has focused on delivery in rural areas (Hoskins, 2006:59).

7. SCHOOL LIBRARY ORGANISATIONS

The School Library and Youth Services Interest Group (SLYSIG) of the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) was established in 1999. SLYSIG has been represented on the Standing Committee for School Libraries and Resource Centres of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) since 2001. Its name signals the recognition of the common ground between public and school libraries, and of public librarians' crucial role in the education of South African school learners.

In 2005, SLYSIG drew up information literacy guidelines for Grades R to 12 (LIASA, 2005). The guidelines are rooted in the RNCS and the intention was for LIASA to influence educational policy. In July 2005, the president of LIASA, together with the then chairperson of SLYSIG, Busi Dlamini, approached the national Department of Education's new minister, Naledi Pandor, to enquire about the status of school libraries and school library policy. The Minister subsequently called for the policy's resuscitation (Dlamini, 2006).

In a few of the provinces the independent schools have informal forums, for example Adlib in Gauteng and Media Teachers Association in KwaZulu-Natal. The continuing distance between SLYSIG and these groupings is regrettable, but perhaps understandable. Whereas SLYSIG's meetings are preoccupied with basic library development, ISASA members are exploring cutting-edge technologies and advances. However, there are in fact a number of informal twinning projects between independent school libraries and township schools.

8. CONTRIBUTIONS BY NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

The above discussion has pointed to the problems facing the public sector. There are a number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have stepped into the gap and are providing valuable interventions, four of which are described here.

- For many years READ Educational Trust has been involved in training teachers in the different methodologies of promoting reading. It was instrumental in starting libraries in black schools in the apartheid era. READ works in disadvantaged schools and rural communities.
- Biblionef is an organisation based in Europe which has opened an outlet in South Africa. Its focus is the promotion of reading material in the mother tongue. In the past

there has been a neglect of all but one of the official 11 languages.⁽²⁾ Biblionef donates books to schools and organisations that do not have easy access to public libraries, mainly rural schools. In rural KZN, for example, only 1.6 per cent of people have easy access to a public library (Zinn, 2001:177).

- The Media in Education Trust (MiET) has undertaken capacity-building workshops on using resources, evaluating resources and managing print media. MiET's strength lies in training teachers in developing and using alternative resources.
- Booksmart is a more recently established NGO that receives donations from abroad, mainly the United States. It has depots in about five provinces where donated material is housed before distribution. In common with the other organisations, Booksmart has realised that it is not enough simply to provide schools with books. Teachers need to be trained in organising and using the material.⁽³⁾



Celebrations at a school during the national Library Week 2006, with the theme: "Libraries: partners in learning, nation building and development".

(Courtesy of LIASA)

9. SCHOOL LIBRARY POLICY 1997–2007

Hindrances to school libraries mentioned most frequently in the responses of our key informants are the closing of the school library office within the national Department of Education and the lack of a national school library policy. At the national Department of

² The South African Constitution guarantees equal status to each of the 11 official languages: Afrikaans; English; isiNdebele; isiXhosa; isiZulu; Sepedi; Sesotho; Setswana; siSwati; Tshivenda; and Xitsonga.

³ www.read.org.za; www.biblionefsa.org.za; www.miet.co.za; www.sabooksmart.com

Education there has not been a head of school libraries for the past five years. Responses speculate on a “lack of will” on the part of the national Department, which is puzzling given the evidence of the success of the new curriculum in well-resourced schools (Chisholm, 2005:211). Respondents have commented that, without a national coordinating office, there is little or no direction and provinces cannot insist that schools “ring-fence” their library budgets.

Since 1997, five draft policy documents have been produced by the unit in the national Department of Education responsible for school libraries, after consultation with the various provincial school library support services and other role-players. None, as yet, has received the approval of the national Ministry of Education, despite several promising ministerial statements supporting the need for school libraries.

Policy-building began in 1995 when, recognising the opportunities of educational change, Jenni Karlsson of the Education Policy Unit in Natal convened a meeting of a wide range of role-players at the School Learners and Libraries Conference in Durban (Karlsson, 1996b). The conference was to influence the process of school library policy-building for the next few years. Its agenda, to explore *alternative* models of the school library, rested on two assumptions:

- Curriculum reform would demand improved access to learning resources for all South African learners and educators.
- Providing every South African school with its own library was unfeasible, given the enormous backlogs (Karlsson et al., 1996).

Following the conference, in 1996, the unit responsible for school library policy in the national Department of Education initiated a process of building policy for school libraries. The result was two discussion documents in 1997 and 1998, which laid out a national policy framework for school library standards. The two documents were followed in 2000 by a draft implementation plan that suggested strategies, goals and costs over a four-year timeframe (South Africa, 1997a; 1998; 2000b).

Given Karlsson’s role in the writing of these documents, it is not surprising that they reflect the thinking that was evident at the School Learners and Libraries Conference in 1995. The approach in the draft policies is to avoid prescriptive quantitative standards and to offer rather generic guidelines. They suggest a range of seven models of school library service, including classroom boxes, a library shared by a cluster of schools, a joint-use community/school library, the centralised school library and the virtual library offering access to global information networks. It is suggested that school communities first adopt a model that suits their present circumstances and then gradually move up the scale in response to the evolving demands of their learning programmes.

The pragmatism in these two draft policy documents is understandable, given the huge backlog in facilities and the evidence of the past under-use of school libraries. It is true, after all, that *all* the education departments of the past era had detailed quantitative standards and specifications for a “standard” library (Overduin & De Wit, 1987). Yet, on the ground, very few schools designated for black people had any library at all. However, perhaps the subtlety of thinking in the documents and the vagueness over how schools would progress from one model to another presumed too much, as they were not approved by the Ministry of Education.

After a change in personnel in the school library unit at the Department of Education, a third draft school library policy document was issued in 2001 (South Africa, 2001). It rejects shared-use models, contending that every school has the right to its own library. The document insists that only by applying uniform minimum standards in every school will past inequalities be redressed. Le Roux (2003) labels this document as “unexpected”, as it had not undergone the nationwide consultative processes of the earlier two, and criticises it as being “vague, unrealistic and poorly researched”. Le Roux’s comments should be seen in the light of her allegiance to joint-use models, as evidenced by her editorship of the UNESCO-funded report of an investigation into the potential of joint-use libraries in South Africa (UNESCO, 2000) and her Master’s degree thesis that surveys the international experience of joint-use libraries and recommends them for South Africa (Le Roux, 2001). Whatever its merits, the third policy draft apparently met the same fate as the earlier two documents, thus stalling again the school library policy process.

In 2002, the ELITS directorate of the provincial Department of Education and Culture in KwaZulu-Natal hosted a conference with the telling title “Ghost libraries and Curriculum 2005”, in which the contradiction between the resource-based learning of the new curriculum and the government’s failure to address the shortages of libraries was frequently alluded to (e.g. Lombo, 2002; Zinn, 2002). At the conference, ELITS announced its plan to write its own school library policy on the understanding that, in the absence of a national policy, it could only be provisional (KZN, 2003). The resulting document endorses a range of cost-effective models, arguing that a mobile library, for example, can serve 20 schools. The energising effect of the policy document might be seen in the audit undertaken by ELITS to gather baseline information to guide its interventions (KZN, 2004).

After another change of staffing in the school library unit at the Department of Education, as well as much cooperative effort by the heads of the provincial school library support services, yet another draft national school library policy was produced in May 2005 (South Africa, 2005). It claims to be informed by the 1997 draft policy framework but simplifies it in providing only two models of school library, the one-school-one-library and the one-cluster-one-school library. Confusingly though, at the same time, it “recognises” the existence of the other five models in the 1997 document (South Africa, 2005:5). At the time of writing, the fate of this document is unknown.

The lack of urgency in the framing of a school library policy – a process begun in 1996 and still not complete in 2007 – surely points to a gap between librarians’ thinking and that of educationalists. Even before the new curriculum was implemented in 1996, Karlsson (1996a:101–102) speculated on the reasons for the already evident gap in understanding between librarians and educationalists with regard to the educational role of libraries. The question was raised whether it was due to the conservative image of librarians, or to librarians stressing the library as a collection rather than a learning tool. Clearly, explanations have to be looked for in further research.

10. LOOKING FOR ANSWERS TO THE CONUNDRUM

The lack of progress of school libraries in South Africa is puzzling. After all, before 1994, the weak position of school libraries was attributed to the teacher-centred cur-

riculum in which rote learning was valued. We now have a learner-centred curriculum that relies on access to resources and on information skills.

In 2000, the government commissioned a review of Curriculum 2005, which was receiving widespread criticism. The Review Committee's report acknowledged that Curriculum 2005 was faring well in the formerly white schools "because of being better resourced" (South Africa, 2000a:35). It alludes to a case study comparing two schools within 5 km of each other, one using resource-based learning and one using the "lecture method", and comments that "teachers within well-resourced classrooms were clearly reflecting [Curriculum 2005] principles" (South Africa, 2000a:77).

Throughout the Review Committee's report there are allusions to problems with "learning support materials", attributing difficulties in the implementation of the new outcomes-based curriculum to the lack of learning support materials and of training in the use of these materials. This resonates with the comment by the New Zealander, Moore (1999:105), that teachers' information literacy and their capacity to teach it cannot be taken for granted.

The publication of the Review Committee's report in 2000 gave librarians another opportunity to put their case for a more explicit recognition of the educational role of libraries in curricular documentation. In November of that year, SLYSIG submitted an advocacy document to the chairperson of the Review Committee (LIASA, 2000), followed by a meeting in April 2001.



The library of Windermere Primary School in Cape Town.
(Courtesy of Sandy Zinn)

However, the RNCS, which replaced Curriculum 2005 in 2002, holds the same contradiction as Curriculum 2005 in that it demands information literacy outcomes without providing for school libraries and information literacy education. It shares the limited vision of the Review Committee's report of 2000 in its view of the "provision of good learning support materials" solely in terms of textbooks, workbooks and worksheets. Moreover, its new Languages Learning Area omits the specific information skills outcome that was previously included in the Languages, Literacy and Communication (LLC) Learning Area and that provided the hook on which the Information Skills Learning Programme was hung.

The Department of Education's lack of response to librarians' submissions on the RNCS and its failure to finalise its own five drafts of school library policy have led to much conjecture in school library circles over the evident "blind spot". Our key informants raised issues that might point to the reasons underlying what is, as one put it, the "lack of will" to recognise the role of school libraries in the curriculum.

Several of their comments allude to a fundamental lack of understanding among educators and policy-makers of the role of a school library. It seems that educators across all levels, from the ordinary teacher in the classroom to the curriculum advisors and educational managers at head offices, are not convinced that libraries are beneficial and spend entire "learning support materials" budgets on textbooks and photocopy paper. Library-based material budgets are often subsumed under the general budget for learning and teaching support materials (textbooks, paper and stationery). Further comment is that, given the reservations about the efficacy of school libraries on all levels, it is no wonder that the RNCS overlooks any connection with school library development. Critical Outcome Five, a cross-curricular outcome of the curriculum that addresses information literacy directly, is often dealt with superficially in the training of teachers in the implementation of the new curriculum.

Even when the problems of low levels of reading ability are addressed, libraries are ignored. An example is the recent draft national literacy strategy (South Africa, 2006b), which links the dearth of both school and community libraries to low literacy levels. Its response, though, is not to call for the implementation of school libraries but for a specialist reading teacher for each school. This function is central to the task of the school librarian, who is well placed to make reading the business of every teacher, as literacy experts recommend (e.g. Heughes, 2006).

It might be expected that trends towards electronic learning might favour school library development. After all, the concept of the learning resource centre or media centre has been in existence since the 1960s, and access to the vast array of resources on the Internet might well serve to leapfrog disparities and contribute to social inclusion. However, in common with the RNCS and draft National Literacy Strategy, the White Paper on e-Education offers no support for school libraries. It states simply: "The current status of school libraries is inadequate to support resource-based learning in outcomes-based education" (South Africa, 2004:21) and appears to see virtual libraries as an *alternative* to libraries. It seems that the authors see school libraries as collections of books incapable of providing "high quality, relevant and diverse resources" (South Africa, 2004:29).

There is seemingly no awareness of hybrid library services where access to all kinds of resources is provided in library rooms and in other learning spaces throughout the school. The draft school library policy documents, which sketch the evolution of book collections to such models, are ignored. Some questions arise. Could the separation of “multimedia” departments from library departments that began in the 1970s in South African national and provincial education departments be to blame? Are school librarians seen as technophobes able to handle books only?

Both Maepa and Mhinga (2003) and Karlsson (2003) make the point that only a small proportion of South African teachers and curriculum planners would have experienced libraries in their own education at school and college or university. The proponents of “evidence-based” advocacy warn that only empirical research evidence will convince educationalists of the educational role of libraries (Todd, 2001). Indeed, there is very little South African research that moves beyond rhetoric.

11. CONCLUSION: THE WAY FORWARD

The preceding discussion makes the concluding recommendations perhaps self-evident:

- There is an urgent need for the reopening of the school library unit within the national Department of Education and for it to be led by expert school librarians who might bridge the divides in the school library sector. A national coordinating school library office would spearhead the demands for dedicated funding for school libraries, a national school library policy, the introduction of specialist posts for school librarians, and an information literacy curriculum.
- It is hard to see any future without a national policy framework. National commitment to such a policy is a necessary forerunner to progress. Perhaps the National Council for Library and Information Services, whose function is to advise the ministries responsible for South African libraries on policy, might take up this cause with more vigour.
- The policy should address the artificial barriers between the school library sector and the e-learning sector, and also those between the school library sector and the literacy education sector.
- A variety of models is called for. KZN’s programme of regional and satellite education centres and mobile libraries offers an opportunity to test innovative models of service. The investigative work in joint-use models that was undertaken a few years ago under the auspices of UNESCO should be returned to (UNESCO, 2000).
- The capacity of provincial support services must be built so that they are able to offer schools real support. Regional processing centres will expedite the distribution of library material to schools and allow part-time teacher-librarians in the schools to concentrate on their educational role.
- LIASA might make a more concerted effort to bridge the divides in the school library sector. South Africa has some of the best school librarians in the world, whose expertise must be called on before they retire.

Of course, underlying these recommendations is the question of deeply held beliefs about libraries – not only among policy-makers and teachers, but also among librarians

themselves. In 1993, in examining the possible role of school libraries in the “new” South Africa, Fredericks (1993:318) found school librarians to be only “half-convinced” of their importance. Perhaps the South African library profession has to identify more precisely what it contributes to education in South Africa and undertake focused, even if small-scale, research to provide evidence.



Young users of information technology.
(Courtesy of the University of Pretoria)

REFERENCES

- AllRefer.com. 1996. *South Africa: System of government*. reference.allrefer.com/country-guide-study/south-africa/south-africa101.html.
- Bolowana, A. 2005. R40m set aside for school libraries at KZN schools. *Mercury*, 16 May.
- Brand South Africa. 2006. *Education in South Africa*. www.southafrica.info/ess_info/sa_glance/education/education.htm.
- Butler, A. 2004. *Contemporary South Africa*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cembi, N. 2006. Concern about drop in university passes. *Independent Online*. www.iol.co.za.
- Chisholm, L. 2005. The state of South Africa's schools. In Daniel, J., Southall, R. & Lutchman, J. (Eds), *State of the nation: South Africa 2004–2005*. Cape Town: HSRC Press, pp. 210–226. www.hsrcpress.ac.za.
- De Vries, L. 2002. *Die beskikbaarheid, voorsiening en benutting van skoolbiblioteekfasiliteite binne 'n uitkomsgebaseerde onderwysbedeling in die Noord-Kaap provinsie*. M.Ed. thesis. Bloemfontein: University of the Free State.

- Dlamini, B. 2006. Editorial. *LIASA School Library and Youth Services Interest Group Newsletter*, March/April.
- EduAction. 2004. *Education statistics in KwaZulu-Natal: 2003*. A profile of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture, based on the Snap Survey 2003, with supplementary data and analysis from the 2001 Census. Durban: EduAction.
- Fredericks, G.H. 1993. *Educational developments and the role of the school library and teacher-librarian in the education of blacks in South Africa with special reference to a sample of schools in the Cape Peninsula*. D.Bibl. thesis. Bellville: University of the Western Cape.
- Hart, G. 2000. Project work as a vehicle for information literacy education in a circuit of South African schools. *IFLANET*. www.ifla.org.
- Hart, G. 2004. Public libraries in South Africa: Agents or victims of educational change? *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science*, 70(2): 110–121.
- Hart, G. 2006. Public librarians and information literacy education: Views from Mpumalanga province. *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science*, 72(3): 172–184.
- Heughes, K. 2006. Without language everything is nothing in education. *HSRC Review*, 4(3). www.hsrc.ac.za/about/HSRCReview/Vol4No3/6language.html.
- Hofmeyr, J. 2006. South African public education in perspective. “The schooling solution: Primary school performance is the key.” *South Africa Reconciliation Barometer Newsletter*. www.ijr.org.za/politicalanalysis/reconbar/newsletter 3iss3.
- Hoskins, R. 2006. Libraries and teacher-librarians in KwaZulu-Natal. *Innovation*, 33: 59–75.
- Job, C. 1993. *The influence of change on the role and profession of the media teacher in modern education in South Africa*. D.LIS thesis. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Kallaway, P. 1990. From Bantu education to people’s education in South Africa. In Entwistle, N. (Ed.), *Handbook of educational ideas and practices*. London: Routledge, pp. 230–241.
- Karlsson, J. 1996a. Conclusion. In Karlsson, J. (Ed.), *School learners and libraries*. Education Policy Unit. Dalbridge: University of Natal, pp. 101–103.
- Karlsson, J. (Ed.). 1996b. *School learners and libraries*. Education Policy Unit. Dalbridge: University of Natal.
- Karlsson, J. 2003. The politics of making a new space for school libraries in South Africa. In Zinn, S., Hart, G. & Howe, E. (Eds), *IASL reports 2003: School libraries breaking down barriers*. Selected papers from the 32nd Annual Conference of the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) and the 7th International Forum on Research in School Librarianship, Durban, South Africa, 7–11 July. Seattle: IASL, pp. 1–9.
- Karlsson, J., Nassimbeni, M. & Karelse, C-M. 1996. Identifying the inherited problems in the provision of resources for school learners. In Karlsson, J. (Ed.), *School learners and libraries*. Education Policy Unit. Dalbridge: University of Natal, pp. 5–24.
- KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). 2003. *School library policy*. Directorate: Education Library Information and Technology Services. Durban: KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture.
- KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). 2004. *Analysis of the 2004 ELITS School Library Audit*. Unpublished report. Directorate: Education Library Information and Technology Services (ELITS), Department of Education. Durban: ELITS.
- KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). 2005. *Business plan: Education centres supporting rural development*. A programme of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education supported by the Royal Netherlands Embassy, March 2005. Unpublished report.
- Le Roux, S. 2001. *School community libraries: Some guidelines for a possible model for South Africa*. M.LIS thesis. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.

- Le Roux, S. 2003. School library policy in South Africa: Where do we stand? *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science*, 68(2): 112–120.
- Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA). 2000. *The need for school libraries in the South African curriculum: A response from LIASA to a South African curriculum for the twenty-first century*. Report of the Review Committee on Curriculum 2005. School Libraries and Youth Services Interest Group (SLYSIG). Unpublished report.
- Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA). 2005. *Information literacy guidelines Grades R-12*. School Libraries and Youth Services Interest Group (SLYSIG). Unpublished report.
- Lombo, S. 2002. The relationship between OBE, learner support materials and a school library. In: *Ghost libraries and Curriculum 2005: Proceedings of the 1st Annual Provincial Conference, 11–13 July*. Education Library Information and Technology Services, Department of Education and Culture, KwaZulu-Natal. Durban: ELITS, pp. 3–6.
- Maepa, E. & Mhinga, R. 2003. Integrating a community library into the teaching and learning programme of local schools: Experiences from Seshego Community Library, South Africa. In Zinn, S., Hart, G. & Howe, E. (Eds), *IASL reports 2003: School libraries breaking down barriers*. Selected papers from the 32nd Annual Conference of the International Association of School Librarianship and the 7th International Forum on Research in School Librarianship, Durban, South Africa, 7–11 July. Seattle: IASL, pp. 270–279.
- Moore, P. 1999. Information literate school communities: Beyond teacher librarians. In Henri, J. & Bonnaró, K. (Eds), *The information literate school community: Best practice*. Centre for Information Studies. Wagga Wagga, NSW: Charles Sturt University, pp. 99–120.
- National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC). 1998. *Poverty and inequality in South Africa*. www.nedlac.org.za/top.asp?inc=docs/reports/socialreps/1998/social98.html.
- Nkosi, L.P.N. 2000. *Information provision to black youth in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa*. D.Phil. thesis. Aberystwyth: University of Wales.
- Overduin, P.G.J. & De Wit, N. 1987. School librarianship in South Africa today. *South African Journal of Library and Information Science*, 55(3): 172–178.
- South Africa. 1994a. *Core teaching programme for information skills: Grade 1 to Standard 10*. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- South Africa. 1994b. *Education and training in a democratic South Africa: First steps to develop a new system*. Draft policy document for consultation. Ministry of Education. *Government Gazette No. 15974*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- South Africa. 1996. *South African Schools Act, Act No. 84 of 1996*. www.polity.org.za/govdocs/legislation/1996/act96-084.html.
- South Africa. 1997a. *A national policy framework for school library standards: A discussion document*. Unpublished report. Directorate: Centre for Educational Technology and Distance Education. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- South Africa. 1997b. *The school register of needs survey*. Department of Education, Pretoria; Human Sciences Research Council; Research Institute for Education Planning, University of the Free State.
- South Africa. 1998. *A national policy framework for school library standards: A discussion document*. Unpublished report. Directorate: Centre for Educational Technology and Distance Education. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- South Africa. 1999. *South African school library survey 1999: National report*. Pretoria: Department of Education & Human Sciences Research Council.
- South Africa. 2000a. *A South African curriculum for the twenty-first century*. Report of the Review Committee on Curriculum 2005. Pretoria: Department of Education. (Executive summary available at education.pwv.gov.za.)

- South Africa. 2000b. *A four-year implementation plan of the policy framework for school library standards*. Unpublished report. Directorate: Centre for Educational Technology and Distance Education. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- South Africa. 2001. *Draft policy on South African school library services*. Unpublished report. Directorate: Centre for Educational Technology and Distance Education. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- South Africa. 2002. *Revised National Curriculum Statement, June 2002*. Department of Education. education.pwv.gov.za.
- South Africa. 2004. *White Paper on e-education: Transforming learning and teaching through information and communication technologies*. Pretoria: Department of Education. www.info.gov.za/whitepapers/2003/e-education.pdf.
- South Africa. 2005. *National school library policy: Final draft*. Unpublished report. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- South Africa. 2006a. *2006 school realities*. Department of Education. www.education.gov.za.
- South Africa. 2006b. *Draft national literacy strategy*. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- South Africa. 2007. *Annual Report 2005–2006*. Department of Education. www.doe.gov.za.
- Stadler, C. 1991. Competing visions for school libraries in South Africa. *Innovation*, 3: 15–23.
- Statistics South Africa (StatsSA). 2006. *Census 2001: Census in brief*. www.statssa.gov.za/census01/htm.
- Todd, R. 2001. *Transitions for preferred futures of school libraries: Knowledge space, not information space, connections not collections, evidence, not advocacy*. Keynote paper for the 30th Annual Conference of the International Association of School Librarianship, Auckland, New Zealand, 9–12 July. www.iasl-slo.org/virtualpaper2001.
- United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). 2000. *National guidelines for cooperation between community and school libraries*. National Committee for Library Cooperation. Pretoria: UNESCO.
- Zinn, S. 2001. School libraries in South Africa: A progress report 2001. In *Proceedings of the Pan-African/Pan-Arab Conference on Public and School Libraries*. Ecole des Sciences de l'Information (ESI), Rabat, Morocco, 19–22 September 2001. The Hague: International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, pp. 173–180.
- Zinn, S. 2002. Information literacy skills: A national perspective. In *Education Library Information and Technology Services (ELITS), Ghost libraries and Curriculum 2005: Proceedings of the 1st Annual Provincial Conference, 11–13 July*. Durban: Department of Education and Culture KwaZulu-Natal, pp. 6–13.