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# The Drive for School Libraries in South Africa: Intersections and Connections

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## ABSTRACT

This paper traces the important developments in school librarianship in South Africa since 2007, during which time the drive to address huge backlogs in school library provision has gained momentum—largely, it argues, from the intersections of two phenomena: the *Library and Information Services (LIS) Transformation Charter*, and Equal Education, a civic-action NGO campaigning on behalf of school libraries. South African youth face daunting challenges, and their schooling is perhaps where the heritage of apartheid is most visible. The lack of libraries, it is argued, has undermined the attempts at curricular reform since the late 1990s. The daunting backlogs in school library provision mean that innovative models of service will be needed that cut across existing divisions. Given the impact of the lack of school libraries on all sectors of LIS, the paper examines the recommendations in the *LIS Transformation Charter* that South African LIS should turn to the concept of *ecosystem* to provide the framework for concerted action.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper examines some significant developments in school librarianship in South Africa since 2007, when the authors described the “conundrum” of South African school librarianship in the book published to mark the IFLA Congress in Durban (Hart & Zinn, 2007). It traces the intersecting paths of two movements: the *Library and Information Services (LIS) Transformation Charter*, the blueprint for South African librarianship, drafted in a discontinuous process of two phases from 2008; and NGO Equal Education’s campaign for school libraries, which began in 2009.

The argument is that the energy generated by the intersections of the two will drive South African school librarianship during the next few years. The focus is on South Africa, but the developments of the last few years hold lessons for school library advocates throughout the world.

The *LIS Transformation Charter* (2014, p. 24) asserts that if indeed school libraries are important for quality learning, then the principles of redress and equity, which are enshrined in the South African Constitution and educational legislation, mean that ways must be found to provide them to all schools. However, the backlogs are daunting, and the information and reading needs of our school-going children are urgent, as will be shown in a later section. It is clear that fresh approaches are required that cut across traditional divisions within librarianship and between it and other sectors. Once the focus is on the needs of our youth rather than on the provision of libraries, then shifts in mindset occur toward an understanding of the connections across the broader ecosystem.

There is some confusion over how many libraries there are among South Africa's 24,793 schools. Most commentators rely upon the figures given in the Department of Basic Education's (DBE) NEIMS report in 2011. The National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS) is intended to document and track the state of infrastructure at every school (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2008, p. 94). Its 2011 report found that about 21 percent of schools had a library, with 7 percent of those having "stock" (South Africa Department of Basic Education [SADBE], 2011a, table 7). The numbers of stocked libraries varied across the nine provinces, from 2 percent in Limpopo to 26 percent in the Western Cape. The confusion has arisen from the much higher figures given in later reports from the government. Thus, the DBE's School Monitoring Survey, conducted in 2011 and relying upon a sample of 2,000 schools, claimed that "57 per cent of learners are in schools that met the minimum standard [of library]" (SADBE, 2013d). The latest NEIMS standard report states that the number of schools meeting "adequate standards" is 49.18 percent of 23,740 ordinary public schools (SADBE, 2014a, p. 4). In the 2014 report, there is reference to "different forms of library services," which include a wider range of models than the previous NEIMS report, such as mobile libraries that serve a number of schools and library corners in classrooms (p. 5).

### SOUTH AFRICAN YOUTH

Youth (up to age 24) constitute 38 percent of our population (Statistics South Africa, 2010). The government's 2011 National Development Plan (NDP) insists that policies for the next twenty years should be seen through a "youth lens" in recognition of their potential for the country's growth and development (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2011, p. 86).

However, South African young people face daunting and disproportionate challenges in the form of violence, sexual abuse, inadequate housing, health problems, unemployment, and poverty (Theron & Theron, 2010).

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has had an impact on family life, with, for example, 245,000 children living in child-headed households (Berry, Biersteker, Dawes, Lake, & Smith, 2013, p. 85). Stilwell (2011, p. 5) links poverty to *social exclusion*, which is defined as “the persistent and systematic multiple deprivation rather than disadvantage experienced in short periods of time.” A significant 61.3 percent of all poor people are under age 25 (Statistics South Africa, 2014, p. 29), and according to a report from the South Africa National Treasury (2011), about 42 percent of young people under age 30 are unemployed, compared with less than 17 percent of adults over age 30, and 86 percent of unemployed young people do not have formal further or tertiary education. The report warns that unemployment is associated with “social problems such as poverty, crime, violence, a loss of morale, social degradation and political disengagement” (p. 9).

There is consensus in the literature that a link exists between the lack of education and poverty (Berry et al., 2013; NPC, 2011; Spaull, 2012; Statistics South Africa, 2014; Stilwell, 2011). The NDP (2011) sees education, training, and innovation as “core elements in eliminating poverty and reducing inequality” (p. 261); it envisages a “quality school education with globally competitive literacy and numeracy standards,” and a “higher education sector . . . that can contribute . . . to the knowledge-intensive economy” (p. 17). The gap between these aspirations and present reality is huge. School-going students in South Africa regularly score poorly on standardized literacy and numeracy tests, both international and national, such as the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ 2000, 2007), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS 2003), and Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS 2006) and, locally, the Systemic Evaluations (2001, 2007), National School Effectiveness Study (NSES 2007–2009), and the Annual National Assessments (ANA) (Moloi & Chetty, 2010; Spaull, 2012).

Some writers in the South African library literature suggest that the challenges surrounding vulnerable young people are best addressed though the concept of the *social ecosystem*: the network of resources in a community (Hart & Nassimbeni, 2013; Stilwell, 2011; Theron & Theron, 2010). Schools and libraries might serve as “anchors” in a community’s social ecosystem, taking on an important role in the alleviating of young people’s social exclusion and pursuing social justice (Stilwell, 2011). Teacher-librarians from disadvantaged schools explicitly mention the school library as a sanctuary, a place where young people can meet safely and discuss their issues freely (Hart & Zinn, 2011).

## SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND SOUTH AFRICA'S EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES

Any discussion of South African school libraries has to acknowledge up-front the socioeconomic challenges confronting the country and its education system. Apartheid's Bantu education policies calculatedly under-resourced the schools designated for black learners, and their schooling is perhaps where the heritage of apartheid is most evident. Advocacy for libraries has to confront the disturbing reality that many schools still lack basic facilities. According to the government's NEIMS report in 2011, of the 24,793 public schools in the country, over 10,000 still had pit toilets, and about 3,000 were without electricity and water (SADBE, 2011a).

While not dismissing these problems, the fundamental premise in this paper is that library programs are not "extras"; rather, they provide a solution to what the NDP identifies as the major shortcoming of our education system: the poor quality of school education outcomes (NPC, 2011, p. 302). The NDP here echoes widespread concern over the under-achievement of our schools, especially given the priority to education in our annual national budgeting (South African Government News Agency, 2014). Thus, Bloch (2009, p. 17), a respected educational commentator, claims that 60–80 percent of our schools are dysfunctional, although five times more is spent on them in real terms now than in 1994. Another distinguished educationist and vice chancellor of the University of the Free State, Jonathan Jansen (2013, p. 53), talks of our "barely functional" education system stumbling along in a "state of stable crisis."

This paper makes no attempt to summarize the international research evidence of the contribution of libraries to quality education; but it has to be said that the high-achieving schools in South Africa are the schools with functional libraries. What Bloch (2009, p. 128) calls "the jewels of excellence in the [South African] school system" are the so-called section 21 schools in the historically advantaged sector of public schooling. These schools are able to raise funds from their relatively affluent parent bodies in order to supplement their government subsidies. They have continued to support their libraries without the government funding for libraries they received in the past, presumably because of the belief in the role of libraries in fostering their schools' superior academic performance.

Given this kind of commonsense observation and the solid research evidence of the contribution of libraries to education quality, the fact that school libraries are to be found, on the whole, only in the historically advantaged sector of the South African schooling system points to the central issue of this paper: namely, the imperative to provide fair access to libraries for the majority of our school children. Jansen (2013, pp. 50, 164) warns that the historical achievement gaps between white and black of apartheid-era schooling still exist, but that now they are more about socioeconomic class. He expresses anger at the failure to provide

decent education in our township schools, which he says are “running on empty” as poor parents “understandably move their children to suburban schools . . . at great cost and risk” (p. 163).

Sadly, school libraries can be included as one of the indicators of socio-economic advantage in South Africa today. The purpose of our paper is to examine the events since 2007 that, we argue, might begin to redress the imbalances. The authors acknowledge that their analysis of the situation has relied upon their recent writing, thus inevitably covering some of the same ground as two recent papers at the IFLA congress in Lyon, France (Hart, 2014; Hart & Nassimbeni, 2014).

### THE “CONUNDRUM” OF SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL LIBRARIANSHIP

In apartheid South Africa, the provision of school libraries reflected the unfair allocation of funding across our nineteen racially separated school systems, with per capita expenditure varying between R5,403 on “white” schools and R1,053 on “black” in the Transkei homeland. Repetition and pass rates correlated closely with these differences (*Poverty and Inequality*, 1998, p. 112). Despite the demise of apartheid, these patterns continue today—as shown in the figure that, in 2011, while 86 percent of white children passed matriculation, only 44 percent of black and colored children did (SADBE, 2013b). These figures have to be viewed against the backdrop of the high drop-out rates among black and colored children in grades 10 and 11.

In 2007, in the chapter referred to earlier, the authors described the situation of school libraries in postapartheid South Africa as a “conundrum” (Hart & Zinn, 2007). On the one hand, we now had the promise of redress of past inequalities and a series of new progressive curricula that claimed to prepare school-leavers for the demands of the twenty-first century. The national Minister of Education herself, Naledi Pandor, had made the connection between academic performance and libraries in her budget speech of 2006: “Anecdotal evidence suggests that the high schools with the worst results are surrounded by primary schools that do not have the resources to reach effectively. It is important to stress that resources does not refer to money; it may refer to teacher competence, to an inadequate or absence of a library” (n.p.).

But on the other hand, despite this kind of promising rhetoric from government, as the chapter was being written in 2007, there was ongoing deterioration in school library provision across *all* sectors of schooling. Five attempts at building national school library policy had failed since 1997; the school library planning unit in the central Department of Education had been closed in 2002. In the absence of official public school librarian posts, enrollment for school library training at our universities had virtually ground to a halt, and most school librarians in schools serving

less affluent communities had lost their posts. Moreover, handicapped by the lack of staff and funding, the existing provincial school library support services were struggling to make any inroads into the huge backlogs.

Unfortunately, the gap between rhetoric and reality continued after 2007. In response to widespread public disquiet over the poor performance of our schools, in 2009 the Minister of Education, Angela Motshekga, appointed a panel of experts to investigate the problems. The subsequent report found that teachers were overloaded; they were stressed and confused about what to teach and how to assess performance. The report criticized the ubiquitous research projects and assignments as “superficial in nature and . . . lacking in educational rigour.” It echoed what librarians had been saying since the failure of C2005 (see, for example, Library and Information Association of South Africa [LIASA], 2001) in its finding that learners in rural and poorer communities were disadvantaged because they lacked access to resources, such as those in libraries and on the internet (South Africa Department of Education [SADE], 2009, pp. 32–33). A year earlier, a study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) had also drawn attention to the paucity of school libraries (2008, pp. 59, 186), warning that library and internet resources, including materials in South Africa’s African languages, were essential if the goals of the curriculum were to be achieved. In their final recommendation, the panel of experts acknowledged that student research projects were needed to develop the crucial skills of retrieving information, solving problems, and thinking critically and creatively (SADE, 2009, p. 34). However, they advised that there should be no more than one project per annum per subject. The Department of Education should provide examples of projects, as well as indicate how these projects should be scaffolded (p. 65). Of course, this kind of recommendation would sit well with librarians as information literacy educators.

In 2011 yet another revision was introduced, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS). Perhaps in common with the Common Core State Standards Initiative in the United States from 2009 (Loveless, 2012–2013), the purpose is to improve the quality of teaching across the country by imposing more rigorous control over classrooms. What must be taught is stipulated term by term, week by week, thus, it is believed, enabling more careful monitoring and testing. The aims of this new CAPS curriculum (SADBE, 2011b, p. 9) are resonant of the previous critical cross-field outcomes, which librarians might call “information literacy.” However, there is a definite shift back to examinations in the more senior grades, with these counting as much as 75 percent of annual assessment. Only in the more junior grades (grades 1–6) is continuous assessment still predominant.

A return to an emphasis on examinations and the “3Rs back-to-basics” movement is usually viewed as contrary to inquiry-based learning, which

depends on access to a wide range of information resources (Spren & Vally, 2010, p. 48). Teaching becomes focused on students' passing examinations, also referred to as "teaching to the test" (Frempong, Reddy, & Mackay, 2013, p. 2). But despite the reverse trend toward more formal examinations, the DBE insists on likening its curriculum to the original outcomes-based curriculum of the 1990s in which independent learning and inquiry were given prominence. Moreover, in its most recent annual report (SADBE, 2014b, p. 82), the DBE claims that "the South African school curriculum is, in essence, a resource-based curriculum," and in referring to the LIS guidelines, continues: "These guidelines were developed to attain the objective of integrating resources in order to develop information literate learners and a culture of reading" (SADBE, 2012). With no visible concerted strategy as yet from the government to implement the guidelines, the library sector has received them with skepticism. These will be returned to later.

In responding to the North American reforms, Todd (2013) dismisses fears that they sideline libraries. He argues that, in fact, the reforms fit well with inquiry-based learning and so offer an opportunity for school librarians to be brought into the core pedagogical work of the classroom, developing "deep knowledge and understanding" (p. 9). Such writing assumes that teachers view school librarians as teaching colleagues. The sixth penultimate draft of the LIS Transformation Charter (2009), which will be discussed in more detail below, suggests that such assumptions might not apply in South African schools. Its section on school libraries provides a fundamental explanation for the failure of libraries in post-apartheid schooling: namely, the lack of insight into the educational role of LIS among policymakers, principals, and other educationists (p. 40). In support, the authors provide some extracts from their interviews and submissions from key informants on the ground; for example:

It is distressing that there is still no school library policy and no real guidance from the people in province. It makes no sense that libraries appear to be dispensable when the education system is theoretically aiming at research based self-study.

No one teaches or factors in information literacy skills. Too many teachers believe that because youth can push buttons they are information literate. Meanwhile, it's just the opposite.

The principal just makes empty promises. There is money but he does not prioritise the library.

The main stumbling blocks to school library development in my province have been the lack of a national school library policy, the ignorance and prejudice of some officials and principals, and the indifference of senior management in the department. (pp. 40–41)

The plea running through these comments is for recognition of the links between curriculum and libraries, and of how the lack of libraries has

contributed to the problems in implementing our new curricula. As Bloch (2009, p. 114) remarks, the new learner-centered approaches were challenging even in well-resourced schools but were impossible in schools where “pedagogies were already poor and resources limited.”

### *Pedagogies and Libraries*

The “poor” pedagogies that prevail in our ordinary schools have to be considered in any planning for school library systems. The rather small body of research in South African school librarianship, consisting mostly of theses out of university library schools, is dominated by audits of library infrastructure, all inevitably concluding with pleas for a national school library policy and minimum standards. It seems that South African school library researchers just assume that educators agree that a library is “a good thing,” and they pay little attention to the climate of teaching and learning surrounding it. With their lens on infrastructure and materials budgets, they tend to neglect the evidence in the international school library literature that an effective library needs far more; it relies upon a complex mixture of factors that might be summed up in the phrase “the school’s prevailing culture of learning.”

The authors’ own research has delved into teachers’ and officials’ perspectives on the role of libraries in education and thus might provide some insight into the failure of school libraries in postapartheid schooling. For example, soon after the new curriculum was introduced in 1997, Zinn’s (1997) action-research study at a middle-class former “colored” high school in Cape Town, which in apartheid education had fallen under the education department of the House of Representatives, found that its teachers were paying lip service to resource-based learning and did not interrogate the underlying pedagogy of independent learning. The common understanding was that information literacy skills would develop naturally or organically. Teachers made no attempt to scaffold the learning but simply let learners find information on their own in (poorly stocked) school and public libraries. Similarly, Hart’s (1999) ethnographic study of classroom project work in one typically disadvantaged school in Cape Town uncovered how teachers’ deeply held beliefs about children’s capacity and the nature of learning impacted their use of resources. In common with many formerly “colored” schools, its library had disintegrated and its librarian had lost her post. The study also set out to investigate how teachers in such schools were coping with the resource demands and pedagogies of the new curriculum, the so-called Curriculum 2005 (C2005). As the study progressed, it became clear that, in reality, the teachers were maintaining the old-style teaching, yet, at the same time, sincerely believing that they were implementing the progressive pedagogies of the supposedly transformed curriculum.

Zinn’s (2013a) doctoral research focused on the information literacy of



teachers from the Western Cape's predominantly poor schools (quintiles 1 and 2 in the national socioeconomic classification of schools) in which school libraries are generally rare. The findings indicate that teachers generally lack the capacity to mediate and assess the research assignments of their students. Interviews with district chief education advisors revealed that teachers tend to turn a blind eye to plagiarized research assignments, have little knowledge of research conventions, and assess research projects superficially. Zinn (2013b) concludes that teachers' own information literacy self-efficacy is low, as evidenced in the inability of the teachers in her study to evaluate information, present synthesized findings, and reference their sources. They were also daunted by the use of a library catalog—exposing, she suggests, their own infrequent use of libraries.

The significance is that sixteen years after the introduction of the new curriculum that purports to embrace resource-based learning and inculcate information literacy, teachers are still underprepared. Moreover, four years after the major curriculum review process (SADE, 2009), the study suggests that the turnaround strategy has not reached all schools. According to the teachers, in-service training had not provided them with enough insight into the pedagogy of research projects. Some chief advisors concurred with the teachers, while others defensively assumed that it was being addressed in in-service training by their curriculum advisors (Zinn, 2013a, p. 279).

It is perhaps easy for librarians to, in Bloch's (2009, p. 83) phrase, "beat-down on" teachers. But while criticizing their "poor pedagogies," he reminds his readers of the inadequate preparation and training that teachers have received for our major educational shifts. As Zinn (2013a, p. 247) also points out, it is not surprising that teachers who have experienced little else than so-called transmission education in their own schooling, in their training, and in their school milieus struggle with our "transformed" curricula. As Fullan (1993, p. 9), the doyen of research in how to bring about change in schools, attests, change imposed from the top is seldom personally owned; in the end, such change is superficial restructuring and not what Fullan calls "reculturing" (p. 9).

With regard to libraries, it has to be kept in mind that most South African teachers have had little experience of libraries in their own education (Maepa & Mhinga, 2003; Olën, 1993). Both Hart's and Zinn's research studies provide insight into teachers' conceptions of libraries, and perhaps also into why South African educators as a whole have not made more forceful demands for school libraries. Hart's (2006) case study of schools, all without libraries, in a small town in a rural province investigated their relationships with the town's two public libraries. She found that teachers tended to view their local library as a place where their pupils went to "fetch" things for their assignments. Zinn (2013a, p. 263) relates a similar finding in her study of teachers in the Western Cape, commenting that

they regard libraries as storehouses of “stuff” like books, and anyhow believe that the assigned textbooks are adequate for their research projects. She also found that the teachers’ knowledge of the internet was rudimentary. The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) claims to have provided substantial training in computer literacy, and almost all schools there have computer laboratories, but Zinn’s findings suggest that, as yet, many teachers do not integrate information and communication technologies (ICTs) into their teaching and learning.

In the Western Cape province, nearly all schools have computer laboratories. Access to the internet, however, is not uniform, this being affected by the ability to pay for internet services, erratic connectivity in rural schools, and the widespread theft of copper cables. While having ICTs at a school does not mean that it has changed its teaching and learning culture (Cuban, Kirkpatrick, & Peck, 2001; Henri, Haywood, & Oberg, 2002), it can predispose people to information literacy (Moore, 2002). Therefore, it is unfortunate that a separation exists between ICTs in education and school libraries in South Africa. The *White Paper on e-Education* (SADE, 2004) and the *WCED Vision for e-Education* (WCED, 2012) either ignore the role of school libraries in offering information services or belittle the role that school libraries could play in twenty-first-century education. Ultimately, our learners bear the brunt of educational policies being developed in silos.

Overall, the authors’ research indicates that many South African teachers have little understanding of the complex processes involved in information-seeking and no conception of the librarian as a teaching colleague. Perhaps Karlsson’s (1996, p. 101) point that librarians tend to talk “solely to themselves” might well still apply today. As far as the authors know, there has been no concerted attempt by the LIS profession—for example, at educators’ conferences—to persuade the teaching profession of the need for libraries and to connect libraries to curricular changes.

### INTERSECTING PATHS IN THE CAMPAIGN FOR SCHOOL LIBRARIES, 2008–2014

The widespread concern at the plight of South African youth, described above, and specifically at the neglect of their reading and information needs, as well as the poor performance of our township and rural schools, might explain the growing momentum since 2008 to address the school library backlogs. Thanks to the campaigning of civic-action NGO Equal Education since 2009, culminating in a widely publicized court case, school libraries and their role in quality education have gained unprecedented public attention, which arguably has put pressure on education authorities to move beyond the empty rhetoric of the past.

However, another phenomenon, the *LIS Transformation Charter*, might provide the vehicle to drive school library development during the next

few years. The two phenomena, the *LIS Transformation Charter*, commissioned by the National Council for Library and Information Services (NCLIS), and Equal Education's school library campaign, belong in quite different sectors of society, but their intersections and connections have to be considered in order to understand the developments of the last few years. The charter's extensive investigations into the position of school libraries, in what turned out to be its first phase, were completed in 2009 and circulated widely in what became known as its sixth draft; they caught the attention of the newly formed Equal Education and certainly informed its campaign "1 School, 1 Library, 1 Librarian," which began in 2009. In turn, this campaign impacted on the *LIS Transformation Charter* that, having disappeared behind government doors, reemerged in late 2012, to be revised and finalized in early 2014.

*The LIS Transformation Charter: 2008–2009 and 2013–2014*

In the transition to democracy, various groupings within South African LIS drew up position papers looking toward the future of LIS, and one of the proposals was for a council that would cut across barriers in the LIS sector and represent its interests. After years of lobbying from the LIS profession, this proposal bore fruit: the NCLIS Act was passed in 2001. The mission of the NCLIS (2005) is described as follows:

to advise the Minister of Arts and Culture and the Minister of Education on matters relating to library and information services in order to support and stimulate the socioeconomic, educational, cultural, recreational, scientific research, technological and information development of all communities in the country. The functions of the Council are to develop and coordinate library and information services in the country. (n.p.)

It convened for the first time in 2004. Other writers have covered in detail the history of the council (Ralebipi-Simela, 2007; Walker, 2004); the focus here is on its commissioning of the *LIS Transformation Charter* in 2008, and specifically the work of the charter on school libraries.

A year after its first meeting in 2004, the NCLIS (2005, n.p.) reported to Parliament on the challenges confronting "under-funded" and "over-stretched" LIS, and, significantly for this paper, highlighted the lack of school libraries and the impact of this on other sectors: "The lack of well-stocked professionally staffed school libraries results in learners inundating public libraries with requests for information. This exacerbates the problem of under-funded and over-stretched public libraries. The various Education Departments should urgently address the matter."

In its presentation to Parliament, the NCLIS put forward a new vision for the LIS sector, suggesting that it be reoriented in accordance with a developmental agenda, and that political decision-makers and administrators be mobilized to prioritize funding. And, indeed, in 2005, the government

announced the Community Libraries Conditional Grant of R1 billion to be administered by the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) (under which South African public libraries fall). A further grant of R1.8 billion followed in 2012. The grants set certain targets, such as “improved coordination and collaboration between national, provincial and local government on library services,” “transformed and equitable LIS delivered to all rural and urban communities,” and “improved library infrastructure and services that reflect the specific needs of the communities they serve” (*Directory of Public Libraries in South Africa*, 2012, p. v). It also provided funds for the NCLIS to commission the *LIS Transformation Charter*, which, in keeping with the goals of the grant, provides a vision of a coordinated system of libraries that contributes to socioeconomic development and the well-being of all South Africans.

The imperative to “transform” has dominated South African public discourse ever since 1994, when, in a speech to Parliament to mark his first hundred days in office as president, Nelson Mandela described his government’s Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) as an “all-encompassing process of transforming society in its totality to ensure a better life for all.” He quoted the promise in the RDP white paper to “transform, reconstruct and develop South Africa” by transforming “every level of government, every department and every public institution” (South Africa Ministry in the Office of the President, 1994, p. 6). Such words have generated a number of transformation or “empowerment” charters in postapartheid South Africa across different sectors—all inspired by the 1955 Freedom Charter, the foundation of our democracy.

The *LIS Transformation Charter* was written in a discontinuous process of two phases: the first from 2008 to 2009, and the second from 2013 to 2014. In 2009, what was ostensibly the final draft was presented to the government by the NCLIS. It was, in fact, its sixth draft, having gone through a series of consultations with various stakeholders throughout the country in line with participatory policy-analysis approaches. The various drafts were always made accessible to the public via the websites of the DAC and the National Library of South Africa (NLSA). The charter’s processes and content are described in more detail in a recent paper by Hart and Nasimbeni (2014), thus allowing the authors of this present paper to focus on its coverage of school libraries.

*LIS Transformation Charter, Phase 1.* Phase 1’s sixth draft highlighted the weak position of school libraries and the prevailing disregard of the library needs of South African youth in its preface and final recommendations, echoing the points made by the NCLIS in its mission documents, as reported above. Furthermore, its special concern for school libraries was made clear by the inclusion of a separate long chapter that documented the deteriorating position of school libraries and its impact on schooling.

Overall, it blamed the lack of leadership from education authorities and made a number of recommendations, including the reestablishment of the school library unit within the DBE that might coordinate nationwide efforts to redress the situation. Recognizing the impracticality of demanding a centralized school library for every school in the short term, it outlined a number of interim models that might meet the urgent information and reading needs of school learners. The list of models included dual-use school/community libraries, although attaching several provisos to this model (*LIS Transformation Charter*, 2009, pp. 48–49).

Having received the approval of the NCLIS, the document was *apparently* accepted by the two government departments concerned with libraries: DBE and DAC. However, once the charter was handed over to the latter, the NCLIS relied upon political mediation to secure it as an item on the government agenda—a difficult task in the election year of 2009. The postelection cabinet reshuffling brought in new ministers of both departments, who probably knew little of the charter. And, indeed, there was a hiatus of three years, during which the charter processes froze, although (significantly for school librarianship, as will be shown below), the websites of the DAC and the NLSA continued to provide open access to the latest draft.

Then, early in 2013, members of its technical team were summoned to a meeting with the two ministers. The new minister of the DBE was at pains to convey the sobering financial challenges of the huge backlogs in school library provision, and both ministers argued that, in light of the unaffordability of the ideal of a library in every school, a new vision of shared responsibility for the provision of services to young people should be sought. They pointed to the potential of joint-use community/school libraries, and suggested that the new public libraries being funded from the treasury's grants (see above) should be built close to schools. It was clear that the chapter on school libraries had caused some discomfiture, and the meeting's participants were told that in the past three years there had been some positive developments, which should be reflected in the charter. It is true that in 2012 the department had finalized its *National Guidelines for School LIS*, which owe much to the various abandoned drafts of school library policies from 1997 to 2005, all of which were mentioned in an earlier section.

The outcome of the meeting was that the charter team reconvened in 2013 to revise what was now known as the “sixth draft.” Arguably, the catalyst for the meeting and the return to the charter came not from pressure by the NCLIS or library profession but instead from the phenomenon that had arisen during the intervening three years: the highly visible school library campaign of civic-action NGO Equal Education. Certainly, some of the comments at the meeting in 2013 revealed the discomfiture of the gov-

ernment on being confronted with thousands of young people marching for libraries and court actions and their accompanying front-page news coverage.

*Equal Education's Campaign "1 School, 1 Library, 1 Librarian."* The mission of Equal Education is "quality and equal education . . . through analysis and activism" (2012a, p. 4). And it is perhaps the combination of the two that explains its standing in civil society. Its street demonstrations were, from the start, well-planned and disciplined, hence attracting a wide spectrum of participants. Ironically, even officials from within the targeted government departments might be spotted in the crowd, presumably marching in their private capacity. It takes pride in backing up its activism and idealism with "good science" (2009, p. 4), as evidenced in the rigorous research underlying its booklet *We Can't Afford Not To* (2011b).

Equal Education began in 2008 as a group of young activists working to improve schools' infrastructure, such as broken windows, in the Cape Town township of Khayelitsha. It quickly gained wide support among the students of Khayelitsha and beyond, offering "a safe social space, role-models, and a political home" (2008, p. 4). Equal Education's lens soon widened; its 2008 annual report revealed the following intentions: to become the leading voice of education policy in South Africa; and to transfer its gaze beyond specific localized problems toward broader systemic issues.

It seems that Equal Education's growing interest in libraries was nurtured by the finding that only five of the fifty-four schools in Khayelitsha had any kind of library; by students' problems in accessing resources for their schoolwork; and by the prevailing low literacy levels. By 2009, school libraries had emerged as one of its key systemic issues, and in September of that year, Equal Education launched its "1 School, 1 Library, 1 Librarian" campaign with a march of 3,000 people. The choice of route was significant: it followed the same course as a protest against apartheid's inferior Bantu education in 1976. A few months later, on Human Rights Day 2010, 10,000 people marched to Parliament demanding school libraries. Over the next few years, the campaign was to include petitions, fasts, press releases, letters of support from prominent citizens to the president, pamphlet-dropping, seminars, and reading groups. By 2012 it had a national stage and could claim that "the impact of EE is reflected in the fact that education is today the most talked about problem in South Africa" (Equal Education, 2012b, p. 21). Its evidence-based activism and shrewd use of media had put school libraries on the map as never before. Searching questions were asked of the minister of the DBE in Parliament on the meaning of a "functional" school library (Motshekga, 2010), and heated discussions arose in the media over the merits of school libraries versus other facilities like proper sanitation toilets (see, for example, Spaull, 2013). Relevant here, perhaps, is Equal Education's (2009) statement that

the money spent on stadiums for the FIFA World Cup in 2010 would have paid for 20,000 school libraries.

Throughout this period, Equal Education engaged frequently with players in the field of school librarianship both inside and outside South Africa—as, for example, in its two public debates in June 2011, chaired by Sandy Zinn and including the immediate past president of the International Association of School Librarianship, James Henri (Equal Education, 2011a). And importantly for the focus of this paper, although the *LIS Transformation Charter* was lying dormant during these years, Equal Education was, in fact, reading it and quoting it in its publications and even in its exchanges with government officials. On a few occasions between 2009 and 2011, Genevieve Hart, who had been largely responsible for the research that informed the charter's chapter on school libraries, was invited to seminars to speak about the role of school libraries in quality education and the issues confronting South African school librarianship. This kind of connecting was informal and at a personal level, emanating from mutual respect and shared beliefs in the imperative to redress imbalances.

On the other hand, Equal Education's relationship with the DBE was increasingly acrimonious, culminating in court action in 2012. In 2007, the SA Schools Act had been amended to empower the minister of the DBE to draw up regulations on norms and standards for school infrastructure. Her ministry's failure to do so provoked a bitter legal struggle, with Equal Education launching its court case seeking "an order compelling Minister Motshekga to prescribe minimum norms and standards for school infrastructure" (Equal Education, 2012b). Its press release claimed that it was the most "far-reaching court case about the right to basic education to have been launched in democratic South Africa." In its follow-up court papers after the inadequate response from the department, Equal Education listed twenty promises that had been broken by the minister. The ministry retaliated with what Equal Education (2013) called a "racist insult," saying that "to suddenly see a group of white adults organizing black African children with half-truths can only be opportunistic, patronizing and simply dishonest to say the least" (SADBE, 2013a). Arguably, the ill-considered attack consolidated the NGO's moral high ground; and the exchange added to the public support for Equal Education, as evidenced in the flurry of online comment from other civic-action groups.

Given the purpose of this paper to trace the connections among the various players in the drive for school libraries, the strong letter in support of Equal Education's stance from the LIASA is noteworthy. The ministry eventually settled the case out of court, and we now have regulations that every school must have a library or media center. Of course, this is a victory for the cause of school libraries; but the reality is that thousands of schools have library rooms that are not functioning as libraries because

they lack the other essential elements of a library: reading and information materials and dedicated staff.

These two elements are the business of the Bookery project, set up by Equal Education in 2010, perhaps to show the government that it could do more than talk. It started as a book-donation project but evolved into a sophisticated nonprofit organization, still connected to the NGO through its board members though largely independent. It sets up and supports functional school libraries, working in township schools that have a library space but nothing more (Bookery, 2014). Each library is given a minimum of three books per students, and, understanding that the library needs to be kept open all day, the project trains and supports a group of library assistants. It is significant that the WCED has recently enrolled a group of young interns in the Bookery program.

*LIS Transformation Charter, Phase 2.* Without any official confirmation, as suggested earlier, perhaps a plausible interpretation of the government's recall of the charter team in early 2013 is that it viewed the charter as a means of responding to the pressures on it without ceding ground to its adversary, Equal Education.

Influenced by the advice to broaden its perspectives, in this second phase, the team turned to the construct of *ecosystem* as its overriding principle, arguing that the weaknesses in our schools affect all other LIS and that the entire sector will have to share the responsibility to overcome them. The ecological concept of *ecosystem* serves as an image for the "bigger picture" strategic thinking that recognizes that the good of the whole comes from the health of its parts and the relationships among them. In biology, an *ecosystem* is characterized by the relationships and dependencies among the species inhabiting an area. Each subsystem might serve a specific range of species; but if one subsystem fails to meet the needs of its dependents, then it impacts on all the other systems and species falling under the larger system (Nardi & O'Day, 1999). Early on in its explanation of the application of the concept to South African LIS, the *LIS Transformation Charter* (2014) refers to school libraries:

The ecological approach encourages us to think of South African LIS in such a way that where the flows of resources diminish, for example to school libraries, we will recognise that because of our interdependence, the weakness of one component has the potential to weaken other components. It discourages thinking about borders and so is more hospitable to the aims of eliminating barriers and achieving integration in a sector where the uneven and unequal provision of the past is reflected in disparities and fragmentation, two attributes often cited as hampering the sector reaching its potential. (p. 37)

Thinking of South African LIS as an ecosystem rather than a sector comprising organizations and institutions results in a shift of focus to the people whom they serve. Earlier in this paper, for example, it was suggested



that libraries might be regarded as “anchors” in the “social” ecosystem of our beleaguered young people.

Despite the wider perspectives, the final version of the *LIS Transformation Charter* retains its special interest in the school library subsystem, arguing that its weaknesses are impacting on higher education, the South African economy, and the country’s aspirations to join the ranks of global knowledge societies. The major change in the final document is that the long chapter on school libraries is now a subsection of nine pages—part of the chapter that deals with all the other LIS sectors. To allay the expected political sensitivities, the original long chapter in phase 1 had documented its methodologies and findings carefully; the new section makes its research base less visible. It acknowledges the positive actions taken by the DBE, but its recommendations hardly differ from the earlier draft. It thus insists that the school library unit within the department be revived, and that the department takes the lead in building policy that will lead to useful norms and standards. While arguing that the DPE’s 2012 *National Guidelines for School Library and Information Services*, which was mentioned above, falls far short of good policy, the charter sees it as the “first step towards a healthy school library system” (2014, p. 34). The *LIS Transformation Charter* is cautious as well in its comment on the DBE acting director general’s briefing to Parliament on August 20, 2013, regarding its plan of action for school LIS (SADBE, 2013c). The charter (2014, p. 51) acknowledges the admission by the department that it had neglected school libraries for years and welcomes the promise of action to address the backlogs, but it questions the lengthy time frames involved and their vagueness.

The *LIS Transformation Charter* comments on Equal Education are noteworthy, given the themes of this paper and the ongoing confrontational relationship between the NGO and the government departments sponsoring the charter. The comments praise the campaigning of Equal Education and suggest that relationships with it might be extended to other civil society groups with congruent missions, such as the freedom of access to information, social justice, and the empowerment of youth (p. 35).

## RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

In this concluding section, the authors survey the present landscape, looking for signs that the intersections and connections since 2007 might unravel the conundrum of school librarianship. In her recent presentation to the School Libraries section of IFLA, Hart listed the possible hindrances to progress ahead. The term of office of the present NCLIS comes to an end in 2014; the new members of the council will need time to settle in and might well not champion the cause of school libraries. Moreover, its limited resources may hamper its pursuance of the charter’s recommendations. The recent elections brought in a new minister of the DAC, who

might not be as well-disposed to sharing his budgets with the DBE. Having won its protracted battle with the government over infrastructure, Equal Education might move on to more tractable issues than school libraries, thus easing the pressure on education authorities. The DBE's claims for its national LIS guidelines might lull the public into believing that it has addressed the situation.

Perhaps the biggest hurdle lying ahead will be the staffing of school libraries. The 2012 *National Guidelines for School Library and Information Services* recommends "dual-qualified" teacher-librarians, part-time in small schools and full-time in medium and large ones, as well as library assistants (SADBE, 2012, p. 15). Given the fact that teacher-pupil ratios are set by the national government and the concern over the large chunk of the education budget that goes to teachers' salaries, the credibility of such words is dubious. There are some privately funded projects that might offer partial solutions. The Bookery program, for example, employs a qualified librarian to support its library assistants across a number of schools. The fact that the WCED has joined the project is evidence of the blurring of the barriers between NGOs and the government.

There are many examples on the ground of universities working with schools, of public libraries with schools, of NGOs finding a home in libraries, and so on. It is interesting that already in 1999, LIASA recognized the need to work across traditional divisions in setting up its School Library and Youth Services Interest Group. (But whether the name of the group has translated into genuine partnership in LIASA workings is questionable.) There are, moreover, signs of growing awareness of the high level of interdependencies of the different subsystems. Thus, in announcing the additional R1.1 billion for libraries in his budget speech of May 16, 2013, the minister of the DAC highlighted the need to strengthen his department's partnerships with the DBE and the Department of Higher Education. Subsequently, his department and the DBE have identified collaborative strategies in their *Strategic Guidelines for Collaboration between Community Libraries and Schools* (SADBE/DAC, 2013). It acknowledges the critical contribution of public libraries to formal school education and describes a number of possible avenues for joint activity. These include networking and resource sharing, collaborative collection building, and shared literacy and information literacy programs.

Surprisingly, the document makes no mention of dual-use school/community libraries, but reportedly the DAC (2013) has set aside funds for the piloting of this model. Hart's 2011 case study of a group of six dual-use libraries in schools in a remote area of South Africa points to its potential. Her extract from an interview with an overburdened school library advisor working in the provincial education department is telling:

It is a tricky business because I see this as a Department of Arts and Culture library in one of my schools. So everything that we've managed

to do together is based on the good working relationship that Mr M and I have. Because we both have the same end in mind . . . and that's to deliver a quality library service to the students in the school and the community. And that's why we are not territorial about what is Arts and Culture and what is Education, because I think that's where we agree we both want the same thing. (p. 211)

The advisor is honest about her initial unease in sharing “her” library with the public library system. But, in keeping with the *LIS Transformation Charter* arguments in its discussion of the LIS ecosystem, acceptance of the imperative to place the interests of the school children first had overcome her territorial concerns.

Two fairly recent events may place a positive perspective on looking toward the future. A symposium took place in November 2014 at the National Library in Pretoria to discuss the way forward with the *LIS Transformation Charter*, where stakeholders identified the top ten priorities for LIS. They identified establishing a national school library policy as priority number 2. The second event was Zinn's consultative meeting in November 2014 with the DBE's director of LTSM Policy Development and Innovation. The department, according to the director, has prioritized school libraries and is securing training providers in all the provinces to offer a two-year certificate program for school library assistants, who will be placed in every school. This is a short-term measure to address the huge backlog in school library personnel. The longer-term plan, as stated by the director, is the education and training of professional teacher librarians and the restoration of the post of school librarian as recommended in the DBE's 2012 *National Guidelines*. It appears that, at long last, the political will exists; however, the library community should continue to monitor the government's progress to ensure that the recommendations of the *LIS Transformation Charter* are met.

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