The LPYL in Context
Changing Minds about School Libraries In South Africa

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It is an honour to write a foreword for the Bibliotek I Samehälle's book on the Library Practice for Young Learners project (LPYL) - and also a challenge. The "honour" is due to the significance of the LPYL project, which is a project rooted in our past and present realities but which reaches out to future possibilities. I believe that it thus has a real chance of "making a difference" to South African education. The vision of the original partners, the Library & information Workers Organisation (LIWO), BIS and the Education Policy Unit (Natal), deserves gratitude and respect. They realised the importance of school libraries as a force for educational transformation - an area of action often neglected by the mainstream library profession. They then recognised that the South African landscape called for innovative models of school libraries. It is important perhaps to acknowledge upfront the links between the LPYL project and the national Department of Education's school library policy-writing process. Jenni Karlsson of the EPU (Natal) was largely responsible for the drafting of the *National Policy Framework for School Library Standards* (Department of Education, 1998) and she is a leading partner in the LPYL. From the beginning the intention of the LPYL project was to pilot certain of the models described in the policy document (a document which has apparently since been shelved by Government). Whatever the underlying intention, the result was an elegantly-designed project that provides us so far with at least three useful case studies for the future (Naiker & Mbokazi, 2002).

The "challenge" I referred to earlier comes from my limited perspective on the LPYL. I had been made aware of the project since its beginnings by informal conversations with friends within the provincial education departments. But the first time that I was fully engaged in its aims and workings was at the closing conference in June 2002 in Johannesburg. It occurs to me as I write this that the visibility, or rather lack of visibility, of the project might be an issue someone else will pick up in the book.

My brief, in writing this foreword, is to try to place the project within the context of school library development in South Africa - with the understanding of the limitations of my having only the closing weekend conference as a window to the LPYL. That closing weekend - I guess typically of the project - was well designed. It was far more than a wrapping-up. It encouraged reflection by the role-players and allowed me to share this process. I had a wonderful opportunity to interact with the teachers, school library advisors and education department officials.

However, I must admit to a bittersweet feeling that touched me at times in the course of the meeting. It was indeed sweet to witness such positive energy (the weekend was vibrant with warm greetings, laughter, camaraderie). But a certain regret tinged my pleasure. It is sad that it took a partner from outside our borders to initiate the project. Within South Africa we have a "North" - a fine tradition of school librarianship. We have libraries in our advantaged sector of schooling on a par with the best in the world. But of course the vast majority of our schools can be labelled "South", where the "library" is usually a few shelves of tatty books.

Surely the major benefit of LPYL is that it might show us how to build creative partnerships inside South Africa - that bridge the divides in our country.

School libraries & teachers' beliefs
There are two comments that give two angles on the project as I look back on a very intense two days. One was Jenni Karlsson's comment that the LPYL project had set out "to mess with people's minds". This resonates as it points to the strength of the project - its realisation that developing school libraries is all about beliefs and attitudes. There is a growing recognition in the international research literature that school libraries depend on educators' subjective perceptions (Asselin, 2001).

This approach distinguishes the LPYL project from others that see school libraries in terms of "things" - books, computers, and rooms. The LPYL seems to have persuaded its participants to explore their own beliefs about teaching and learning. This surely is the key to school library development. Once educators accept that they cannot succeed in the kind of learning they want in their classrooms without access to library resources then we will make progress.

In 2000, on taking over as Chairperson of the newly formed School Libraries & Youth Services Interest Group of the Library & Information Association (LIASA), I soon realised that even people within our profession seem at times only half-convinced of the need for school libraries. Much of our challenge involves persuading colleagues that the school library is not a luxury - rather it is a learning tool that might serve to transform the kind of school leavers our education system produces.

The second comment from the closing conference - that has provided me with much food for thought in the weeks since the closing conference - came from a teacher librarian sitting with a group of other teachers as they described the success (or otherwise) of the project in their schools. Predictably perhaps, all were extremely positive as they reported back on their progress. But then came a teacher librarian's complaint that the teachers at his school were unwilling to "give" him more time in the library. He still is expected to run the library programme in his "free" time. This comment came after we had all nodded happily at his response that "Yes - my library is definitely now playing an important part in the school programme". The other teachers in the group then chorused in agreement that their teachers were just the

same! They seemed unaware of any contradiction in his responses. My cynical viewpoint concluded that his teachers were happy for him to run the library as long as it did not require them to make any changes. I silently asked myself: How could he **really** be playing an active role in the school's teaching programmes when he was spending all day in his classroom teaching subject classes?

The two comments point both to the potential of the LPYL and to its limitations. In its understanding of educational transformation it is an admirable model to follow. It began with the teachers - where they are. I could detect no sign of the alienation that a North / South intervention might have led to. A sincere consensus that both the South African participants and the Swedish had benefited was evident. The project's strategic decision to work with different levels of the education system hierarchy - teachers on the ground, principals, departmental advisors and provincial school library heads - shows awareness of the interdependence of components within the system. Principals' attitudes have for example been found to be a key factor in the success of a school library programme (Henri, Hay & Oberg, 2002). However it is in this bigger arena outside the library that the limitations of the LPYL project become clear. To nurture lasting change we need to provide a friendly environment. The LPYL cannot overcome by itself the restrictions imposed by the bigger system. How can we persuade teachers to allow their teacher librarian colleagues more room and time on the learning programme when there is no support coming from educators outside the immediate library system - curriculum developers for example - and when there is no support from policy?

To understand these dilemmas it might help to look at our past and at the bigger picture of our curriculum and its implementation in the past few years. This might highlight the same kind of contradictions inherent in the LPYL experience.

The apartheid heritage for school libraries
Of course to divide simplistically our schools into two North / South camps as I did above is misleading. There were always schools in the advantaged so-called white sector of our schooling with no libraries or with travesties of libraries. They had no **need** of effective libraries in the educational climate that prevailed. School libraries thrive in systems that encourage independent thinking and learner centred approaches. A survey of the South African literature of school librarianship in the 1980s shows a thread of concern at the under-use of the existing school libraries. School libraries, where they existed, remained on the periphery of the school's learning programme (for example Beswick & Beswick, 1981; Overduin & De Wit, 1987; Diepraam & Bester, 1993).

Another factor in our history that blurs the simplistic distinction between "haves" and "have-nots" is the growing number of school libraries in the ex-House of Representatives and ex-House of Delegates schools (the historically Coloured and Indian schools) from the mid 1980s. In our new non-racial democracy it might seem distasteful to recall our racially divided education departments but any discussion of

the present situation of school libraries has to acknowledge that we have several histories - rooted in our separate pasts. From the 1980s, so-called "black" education departments had begun to set up school library systems. Analysts like Stadler (1991), who trace the connections between education and the political economy, see this expansion of school libraries as evidence that the economy of South Africa needed more sophisticated school leavers which the historically white sector alone could no longer continue to provide. This growth came to an abrupt halt in about 1993 as budgets dried up when our racially divided education departments were dissolved (Stopart, 1993).

Not enough attention, I believe, has been paid to this rather sensitive aspect of the history of school librarianship in South Africa. It is "sensitive" as it leads to the question whether we have not wasted some eight or nine years of development opportunity by ignoring (and indeed in some cases dismantling) existing school library structures and resources. As far as I can see, government, both at national and provincial level, has made little concentrated effort to co-ordinate development across sectors or to build on what we have already. The excuse, perhaps, has been the new legislation, the *South African Schools Act* for example, that allows individual schools far more autonomy than in the authoritarian past. Provincial school library services have been able to sit back saying that it is up to individual schools to decide how to spend their budgets. I am not aware of any concerted proactive effort to persuade schools of the advantages of spending money on library materials rather than on, for example, reams of photocopying paper for the ubiquitous worksheet.

The outcome is that ironically in 2002 the division between advantaged schools and disadvantaged with regard to school libraries is maybe more clear-cut than in the late 1980s. Indeed it could be said that the school library in South Africa today is almost a symptom or indicator of advantage. Almost all our functioning school libraries exist on funding from schools' governing bodies - that is from pupil fees levied by schools. The implication of this funding mechanism is that only so-called middle class schools have effective school libraries. Schools in working class communities have not been able to maintain their libraries.

The Ministry of Education has only just released the audit of school libraries it commissioned in 1999 (Department of Education, 1999). According to the survey, overall just less than 30% of South African schools have libraries - with provinces like the Western Cape and Gauteng having a higher provision than other provinces. The audit's findings were contested as soon as they were reported on at the LIASA conference back in 2000 (Paterson, 2000). Delegates to the conference commented that principals in completing the questionnaire had claimed to have a library in the hope that this might lead to an injection of library materials. Others pointed out that the questionnaire's definition of library was just too loose.

Thus those of us who live in the Western Cape for example know that far fewer than 30% of our schools have functioning libraries. Many principals in the old House of

Representatives (HOR) and Delegates (HOD) schools (the historically Coloured and Indian schools that used to represent about 70% of Western Cape schools) might indeed claim to have a school library - because their standard school plans include a library. All the ex-HOR schools for example that were built after a certain date have a standard "library", which consists of a books storeroom leading off a classroom space. In many of these schools this storeroom has been locked up for years with the adjoining room being used as an ordinary classroom. Very few new library books have been bought in the last ten years and almost all the teacher-librarians in these schools have been retrenched or been asked to take on fulltime classroom teaching (Hart, 2000).

One casualty has been teacher-librarian education in our universities and teacher training colleges. The existing Diplomas in School Librarianship, one-year courses offered to experienced educators, as well as the modules in school librarianship in teacher education, are under threat. Without secure teacher librarian posts there is no incentive for teachers to sign up for these courses. At this year's conference of the librarians of the Independent Schools' Association of South Africa - librarians representing the advantaged sector of our schools - I witnessed concern at the "greying" of their profession. In the present climate, it is indeed difficult to see who will take over from this group as their members retire.

Curriculum change & school libraries in South Africa
The late 1990s brought Curriculum 2005 (C2005) - our new outcomes based curriculum that aimed at transforming the outdated apartheid curriculum into one appropriate for our new democracy and for the global economy (Department of Education, 1997). C2005 promised a favourable climate for school libraries. It listed information literacy skills as a critical cross-curriculum as well as a desirable outcome in each of the eight Learning Areas. Throughout the world, librarians since the 1970s had been claiming information literacy education as their domain so it seemed that at last the time of the school library might have come.

In addition, C2005's documentation reflected an ethos of emancipation in which school libraries should thrive. The ethos is one of lifelong learning, of critical thinking, of problem-solving - echoing the values of our constitution. Its continuous assessment methods recommended projects and portfolio work rather than examinations. There was consensus that the model of learning espoused in our new curriculum was "resource-based" - in which learners are encouraged to construct their own learning in engaging with learning and information resources. In this model, the teacher is a facilitator of learning rather than Paulo Freire's "banker" doling out knowledge at the front of the class. The role of the library in providing for both the "physical" and "intellectual" or cognitive access to resources in this kind of pedagogy is obvious - or so some of us thought in the optimistic late 1990s.

This optimism was unfounded since the reality was that, despite the assumptions made about the value of resource-based learning approaches, there was no mention

of libraries anywhere in C2005. The portion of the curriculum devoted to Information Skills - which librarians scattered throughout South Africa had spent many hours writing - was tucked into the Learning Area for Languages. There was no explicit link made between this Information Skills Learning Programme and access to reading, information & learning resources (otherwise known as library resources). The result was that the role of school librarians was invisible - and increasingly hard to justify in a stringent economic environment. There was no visible recognition that school librarians were the right people to teach information skills - and the publishers of our language textbooks began to introduce sections on reference tools like atlases. These sections echo the old much-criticised *book education* of the 1970s and 1980s.

The phasing-in of C2005 encountered many problems - largely owing to the underestimation of the shifts required in teaching methods and to shortages of resources (Taylor & Vinjevold, 1999). Teachers had been asked to make fundamental changes to the way they teach but there had been no accompanying support in the way of resources. The report of the Review Committee on Curriculum 2005, appointed by Government after widespread alarm over the failure of the new curriculum (Department of Education, 2000), holds many comments that resonate with school librarians. It attributes the problems to a neglect of reading and writing, to the under-preparation of teachers, to a lack of learning support materials and to the bad management of learning support materials. The Review Committee found evidence that C2005 had fared well in well-resourced schools. Although again there is no explicit mention of libraries, we can assume that these "well-resourced" schools are those with libraries. The success of C2005 in schools with libraries is of course no surprise to those who see the school library as an essential learning and teaching tool in the kind of environment C2005 encourages.

LIASA's School Libraries and Youth Services Interest Group made two representations to the Review Committee to advocate a more explicit recognition of the role of libraries in the revision of C2005. But it is frustrating to report that, despite assurances that the revision would "please" us, in fact there is still no mention of libraries in the two *Revised National Curriculum Statements* of 2001 and 2002 (Department of Education, 2002).

Changing minds about libraries and learning: a role for the LPYL project?
An explanation for the contradiction between the promises of our curriculum and the reality on the ground probably lies in educators' and policy-makers' deeply-held beliefs about libraries. I suggest that they see libraries as collections of things not as places for learning. The heritage of our past also perhaps shapes their view of the library as an unaffordable luxury.

Our mistake has been to assume that educators see libraries as we see them. We have acted as if the links between resource-based approaches, tacit within C2005, and libraries were obvious - not realising that the average teacher or policy-maker has very hazy notions of what the educational purpose of a library is. An example is the

ambiguity of the term that government constantly refers to, "learning support materials". If we are to move towards the learner-centred approaches promised by C2005, its definition must be expanded to include far more than textbooks, worksheets and workbooks. The gaps in understanding are clearer if we accept Olën's point in 1996 that only about one quarter of today's teachers had any exposure to libraries in their childhoods.

The potential contribution of the LPYL project is its power to persuade educators to re-consider their beliefs - to change their minds about libraries and to allow school librarians a louder voice. The LPYL project has provided pilots and case studies of innovative ways of providing schools with access to resources and to information literacy education. Hopefully, it will provide support for other possible positive developments in the school library arena.

One of these developments is the KwaZulu/Natal decision to formulate its own provincial policy statement on school libraries. This signals impatience with the stalling of policy at national level and perhaps will be the catalyst for nation-wide action. Last month ELITS, the Education Library Information & Technology Services, the directorate responsible for the development of school library systems in KwaZulu/Natal, hosted a conference with the provocative title of *Ghost Libraries & the Curriculum*. I sensed there a new will to make a less ambiguous claim for the need for school libraries. There was, for example, a resolution that posts for at least half day teacher-librarians are essential and that government must oblige schools to "ring-fence" a set portion of their budget allocations for library materials.

KwaZulu/Natal's ELITS is to host another conference next year - the International Association of School Librarianship's annual conference in 2003. Hopefully that occasion might provide another opportunity for analysis of the LPYL project and its potential contribution to our future.

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