Service Learning in a Course in Children's & Youth Library & Information Services: A Case Study

Genevieve Hart

Summary

The case study describes a service learning project in Library and Information Science. In 2002, 14 students enrolled for the service learning elective – the 4th year second semester module, Children's and Youth Library and Information Services (LS 421). The final year second semester programme comprises four equally weighted modules: an elective, a bibliography project and two fieldwork modules. In 2002 the strategy for LS 421 was to merge it with the two fieldwork modules. Students spent two days a week in the three libraries in Delft, Delft South and Bellville South and attended a weekly seminar. The aim was to embed the learning of the LS 421 course in their experience in the libraries. The children and youth of the Delft and Bellville South face huge challenges arising from the histories and socio-economics of their communities. The lack of literacy and information literacy was identified as an area for the intervention of librarian students. The case study reports the various challenges encountered and concludes that more interrogation of the difference between library based fieldwork and service learning is required.

Preface

The case study relies heavily on a narrative report written in November 2002, just as the service learning module was coming to an end. The module was not repeated in 2003 since the numbers of final year students dropped substantially and none enrolled for the module [1]. Two sets of factors might explain this: changes in patterns of librarian employment and differences in approach to "fieldwork" within the Department of Library & Information Science at the University of the Western Cape (UWC).

In what has been described as a "crisis" in public librarian employment, our overall numbers have continued to drop and students continue to prefer modules that they perceive (quite accurately) will lead to better employment opportunities. The public library services in Cape Town and in other regions used to be the major employer of our graduates. In the last few years none of our new graduates have been employed in Cape Town's libraries – the result of a general "freezing" of posts as municipal structures are repositioned. The position is not unique to Cape Town – as evidenced

---

[1] In 2006 the module is being revived as students have enrolled for it and there are signs of improvement in the public library climate.

in Professor Dennis Ocholla's recent survey of advertised job opportunities in South African public libraries between 1997 and 2004, which confirmed that the public library sector, at present, offers very few professional positions to young graduates (Ocholla, 2005). The optimism evident in the introductory sections of the case study, where the initiation and conceptualisation of the module is described, makes for painful reading in the light of these later developments.

The second set of factors, relating to conditions inside the academic programme, will become evident in the course of the case study. I have chosen to retain much of the 2002 report as it reflects the truth as I saw it at the time. However, quite often, I add insights from the shifted perspectives of 2005. The purpose in the case study as a "learning document" is to assist other academics who might be considering service learning. These later thoughts therefore might well be useful.

Administrative details

This case study describes a service learning initiative in the second semester of 2002 within the Department of Library and Information Science at the University of the Western Cape. It involved a group of 14 students in a new 4th year elective module, Children's & Youth Library and Information Services. The course has 10 credits and is one of the eight modules in the final year programme of the BBibl degree, a professional degree within the field of Library and Information Science. Two of these eight modules are "fieldwork" modules, where students are placed in libraries and information services to gain practical experience.

Initiation

The CHESP pilot learning initiative came at an opportune moment in our Department for two reasons. We were re-considering our traditional approach to fieldwork and we were planning a new course in children's librarianship. A colleague in the Department of Library & Information Science, Sally Witbooi, took part in the initial discussions with CHESP, where she met a group of nuns working on a project with small children in Delft. She recognised the proposed new children's librarianship module as an appropriate service learning module.

Fieldwork programme

Elsewhere, Sally Witbooi has provided an analysis of the various models of fieldwork found in professional librarian education (Witbooi, 2004). Our approach at UWC until 2001 was to build in two fieldwork sessions of three weeks each - in the university vacations. The students would choose a library, often close to their homes, and the Department would negotiate access.

Fieldwork has several aims, for example: to provide practical training and experience, to give students insight into the different kinds of libraries and career opportunities, to enable students to apply their theoretical learning. In this list of aims, there is no emphasis on the students' contributing to the community. Yet in other areas, UWC's Department of Library & Information Science shows a pre-occupation with

"community librarianship". Its research and teaching themes are evidence of this interest and it has taken part in a number of community projects - for example, working with the Western Cape Education Department over a number of years to set up libraries in disadvantaged schools.

In 2000 we restructured our BBibl programme and, after a roundtable discussion with practising librarians, embedded the two fieldwork modules (to be IS 421 and IS 422) in the formal 4th year curriculum. This decision reflects the problems we had been experiencing in managing the quality of the fieldwork experience. Students were scattered throughout the country in their vacations and the learning experience was uneven. Some students were no more than an extra-pair of hands at the circulation desk of their small local library - while others were benefiting from an in-depth educational experience in complex library systems. We hoped that, in placing our students in libraries in Cape Town inside the teaching term, we would resolve these problems.

New Children's & Youth Libraries module
As we examined our fieldwork programme, we were also deciding to introduce a new 4th year elective module - Children's & Youth Library & Information Services (LS 421). This decision had its roots in two areas of activity within the Department: our concern over the reading and information needs of South African youth, as evidenced in the international symposium, *Focus on Youth: the Reading & Information Needs of South African Youth in the 21st Century,* which we had hosted in 1999; and a research project into the state of children's libraries that I had undertaken in 1999.

The research project (Hart, 1999) explored the position of children's libraries in the public libraries of Cape Town. I visited 67 libraries throughout the metropolitan region and conducted interviews with "the staff member responsible for children's services". My conclusions were that children's libraries were in a precarious position (Hart, 2000). Respondents were unanimous that they were in need of more resources, more support and more education. When I reported my findings at the annual national conference of the Library & Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) in 1999, I found they resonated with librarians from all over the country. The paper led to a conference motion being passed at the LIASA AGM of that year, which pointed to the need for specialist children's librarians' posts in all local government structures.

The climate surrounding librarian education since 1999, alluded to above, has meant that nothing in fact came of the conference motion. However, it can be seen that the CHESP offer came at the right time. Linking the two fieldwork modules with the proposed new module offered the chance to cross-pollinate the two strands of learning experience. The students who elected to do the Children's LIS course would be expected to spend two days a week in the libraries at Delft, Delft South and Bellville South. It would allow the theoretical learning of the LS 421 module to be grounded in real-life experience in children's and youth library work. Moreover, the

3

concept of *service* learning offered a new conceptualisation of our traditional approaches to community work. It seemed that the CHESP project might allow us to weave together the threads of interest and activism within the Department.

In analysing the module from the perspective of 2005, two points are significant. Firstly, it soon became clear that the students in 2002 had a particularly heavy timetable as some were doing an extra course in order to switch from our old Lower Diploma in Librarianship, then being phased out, and some were "carrying" courses. The BBibl Degree is a four year degree with three majors - two in Library and Information Science and the third in another discipline. Students' complicated timetables made clearing two full days for work in the community difficult. Some found it easier to work a few hours a day. This might explain the constant anxiety over transport that was evident in students' journals. Taxis are unreliable and dangerous. One student had two mugging incidents in her taxi rides from Delft. Another noted:

> "*It was scary - we had to get off though we had paid*" Student journal 10 September 2002.

A second related factor is the gap between the service learning module and the fieldwork of other students. The 14 students enrolled for the LS 421 course were part of a class of 40. The other 26 students, having chosen other electives, were placed in libraries and information services in Cape Town in the conventional way - with occasional contact with the staff member responsible for the fieldwork modules. The assessment of the fieldwork modules for these 26 students depended solely on two reports – one from the students and one from the hosting library. However, the assessment process for the 14 service learning students was far more complex – including components such as students' journals and their regular reporting and analysis at weekly seminars. Indeed, it is clear that their experience was far more demanding than that of the other 26 students – in terms of induction, numbers of hours on site, rigour of supervision, service provider input, and the students' reflection and writing. On reflection, some four years later, the difference in demands and students' perceptions of these differences should have been addressed. Courses have "reputations" – perhaps the perceived demands of the LS 421 module led to its failure to attract students in 2003.

Conceptualisation

The project, by means of its logic model building, conceptualised ambitious aims - to "improve the literacy and information literacy of youth" in the chosen communities. Reading levels at South African schools are low – affecting learners' academic performance across all learning areas. Pre-school children in disadvantaged communities have inadequate access to stories and to print. Public libraries in South Africa are struggling to cope with the demands of the hundreds of school learners who flock to the libraries in the afternoon in search of information for their school assignments. They are often unable to articulate what they need – in terms of the topic they are "researching" and what information might help them. The absence of

school libraries and of information literacy education in their schools leaves them ill-prepared for the high-level cognitive demands of information seeking, whether using print-resources or the World Wide Web.

The logic modelling did not clarify how and where to achieve the above aims. There were vague comments on "reaching out to the youth" with storytelling and literacy programmes but no clear idea on how this might be done outside of established schools, educares and libraries. The changing faces at planning meetings perhaps meant that a common understanding did not evolve from meeting to meeting. The three libraries found it difficult to release staff for the series of planning meetings. Moreover, some months into the planning process and after a series of rather unsatisfactory meetings, consisting of polite but vague talk, our specific project was still missing the third component of the desired triad – a community member active in the field of literacy and information literacy. The group of nuns, who had suggested the project to colleague Sally Witbooi, had left South Africa and the focus of the community activist first "allocated" to our project in 2001 was community health. Of course, in other circumstances, a community library would have made an excellent partner for her. The absence of a dynamic community partner meant that the CHESP project managers completed our logic model on behalf of the "community".

In any case, it soon became clear that the service providers saw the project as library based. The service providers regard themselves as *community* libraries - they interact directly with their communities, both formally through various community forums and informally on a day-to-day basis. The expectation was that each of them was in regular contact with schools, crèches and youth groups in their communities. This expectation perhaps blurred the need to continue the active search for a formal CHESP community partner. Invitations to schools to take part were thwarted by the fact that educators may not leave their schools for morning meetings. My hope, eventually, was that working in the libraries would be the students' springboard into the surrounding communities.

 "Development politics" also played a part. In June 2002, Bellville South Library apparently decided to withdraw from the project. It had sent no representatives to our planning meetings in the first semester of 2002 - citing staff changes and shortages. On speaking to the Librarian, I learned that the real reasons were more complex. Community representatives from Bellville South had heard comments from Delft that Bellville South was "too advantaged" to be part of the CHESP initiative. On hearing her comment, the CHESP staff intervened. It is ironic that, of the three sites, perhaps Belville South came to conform most closely to the ideals of the concept of the three-way partnership in service learning. The four students placed at the Bellville South Library soon were spending two days a week in a close-by Afrikaans medium school where they identified a group of Xhosa-speaking children in desperate need of literacy support. My aim in reporting this hiccup is that it points to the negotiating demands often placed on the academic partner by the service learning ideal of the triad.

=Preparation

The 14 students enrolled for LS 421 had met with CHESP staff in the first semester and had been introduced to the project. The transport and seed portfolio money for the students was crucial. At times I was shocked to see how poverty stricken our students are. Some students clearly used their funds up too soon and some were unable to provide documentation for what they had spent on their portfolios. These are life-skills that need developing.

We set aside the first three days of the second semester for an orientation programme - the necessary transport being provided by the CHESP office. The first day aimed at introducing the 14 students enrolled for the course to the service providers. Their journals later revealed how nervous and insecure they felt.

> "*I feel very nervous and anxious because I'm not too sure that I will cope and I'm not sure what is expected of me*" Student journal 22 July 2002.

> "*I was very concerned about my lack of work experience in the LIS field. This is one of the reasons why I registered for this module. One of the things that made me more relaxed was that their people speaking to us seemed to be less concerned than I was*" Student journal 22 July 2002.

Several revealed fear of working in the community:

> "*I've never been in a community based work and never dealt with young people and children so I'm not sure I will treat them as they expect me to*" Student journal 22 July 2002.

> "*I was afraid of dealing with the community. I was not sure exactly about their expectations*" Student journal 22 July 2002.

The second day's workshop took place at Delft South and brought together about 40 people: the core CHESP group, the students, the service providers and a number of role-players from the Delft and Bellville South communities - health workers, police, youth workers and managers of child-care centres. Though the agenda listed "Introduction to schools", no school educators were present so again an opportunity to gain a foothold in schools was missed. Each person present was invited to talk about their work and how they saw the needs of youth in the area. The discussion was lively and the students asked many questions. The students' journals contain several comments on the social challenges within Delft - high levels of unemployment, HIV/Aids, teenage pregnancies, gangsterism, abuse, crime, drug abuse. They were impressed by the dedication of the community workers. As one put it:

> "*It was wonderful to learn how all these people are united working together to develop their communities*" Student journal 23 July 2002.

Several commented that their eyes had been opened to the role of a community library. For example:

6

"It's a huge responsibility working in the library. Librarians have a huge responsibility of taking care of their users helping them solve their problems - helping them to be information literate and to love reading" Student journal 23 July 2002.

However one or two expressed reservations about being placed in largely-Afrikaans speaking communities:
"I learned that that most of the time I will serve the Afrikaans-speaking people. And I don't understand their language" Student journal 23 July 2002

"I realise that most of the children in Bellville South Library don't understand English, they are Afrikaans speaking people" Student journal 23 July 2002.

The third day - Wednesday 24th - was a tour of the sites. Students visited each library and chose where and when they were to work. Six chose Delft South; four Delft and four Bellville South. Of the 14 students, one was an Afrikaans speaking male. The rest were Xhosa-speaking women. Delft and Bellville South, largely Afrikaans-speaking communities, were clearly not ideal for the largely Xhosa-speaking group of students enrolled for the course; but the nature of the pilot project left no room to go elsewhere.

Overall, the three-day orientation was a success. One student said:
"If today were to set the tone for the rest of the project I think I will enjoy it very much and gain valuable experience as well". .... "I feel confident, excited and I can't wait to start working" Student journal 22 & 24 July 2002.

Implementation

Weekly seminars

The course description for LS 421 shows a programme of 14 seminars, each with its own theme. These cover the theory, research and professional practice of children's and youth librarianship. About R8000 was spent early in 2002 on course reading materials - professional and academic manuals and texts. These provided the reading for the seminars and served to expose students to the breadth and depth of children's librarianship. The frame also included themes outside the narrow confines of librarianship such as family literacy and the position of South African children and youth in post-apartheid South Africa - of clear relevance to students training to design and manage responsive children's services. It was envisaged that the students would undertake two projects in the course of the semester - a literacy portfolio and an information literacy portfolio. These would include examples of activities and programmes the students were to embark on in their service learning sites, the schools and libraries. Instead of the information literacy portfolio, the students at

Delft opted to build a database of children's and youth community services in Cape Town - something that had been identified as desirable in the course of the logic model building.

The seminars followed a similar structure from week to week. The first hour was spent on general group discussion on what had happened that week in the sites. Students were asked to keep a journal to reflect on their day-to-day experiences and to connect it to their seminar work and to their readings. I used this first hour to pick up pre-occupations and professional issues revealed in the journals, thus trying to find connections to that day's seminar theme.

Service learning programme in the three sites

At the end of 2002, I recorded the pang of regret I felt on comparing the early journal entries of the students with those at the end. Many of their expectations were not met. This does not come out in their final questionnaires for CHESP where they give uniformly positive responses to the questions that probe their attitudes to "courses in a community setting". Their main complaints in the questionnaires concern the amount of time the course occupied, their safety fears and their transport worries. It was in their journals that students let off steam and complained - and sometimes appealed for my intervention. The truth over the success of the service learning component probably lies somewhere in between the journal woes and the positive questionnaire responses.

On being asked in their first week's journal to say what advantages the service learning approach might have over traditional fieldwork, many expressed great idealism and hoped that they would be working outside the library building in the community. Thus one student wrote:

> *"I have to come up with a programme to develop the information literacy of children in the Bellville South community. Not much time will be spent on issuing books [or] on being in the library all day. I have to be in the community helping children realise the importance of the library - how it will give them lifelong learning experience.... I know we will be working hand in hand with the community and library users. Not all users come to the library but we are going to the community"* Student journal 24 July 2002.

The comment just above comes from a student placed at Bellville South Library. In their first week, her group took picture books to the local clinic and read stories to mothers and children. However, they found themselves at a disadvantage, because their Afrikaans was weak. They then found a niche in Goeie Hoop Primary School, a street away from the public library. Another in her group reported in mid September:

> *"Working at Goeie Hoop was a wonderful experience for me, one I will treasure until I'm in my own library."*

Another in this group claims:

"[The experience] made me feel so wanted and useful" Student journal 10
September 2002.

The students - three Xhosa-speaking women and one Afrikaans-speaking man - at
Delft Library were not feeling so wanted. One commented early in September:
"The staff don't know what to do with us" Student journal 2 September
2002.

The fact that Delft Library, like Bellville South, serves a largely Afrikaans-speaking
community created problems for the students:
*"It's the language barrier that is the problem. Some users get angry when
you answer in English"* Student journal 2 September 2002.

The students in Delft were unable to find a focus outside the library's walls and were
soon complaining of the tedium of the work in the libraries. The male student worked
through this slump in enthusiasm and, by the end of August, was using his journal
entries and the seminar discussions to explore certain issues that pre-occupied him -
such as his "authority" or status as a student, the management and supervision of
library staff, his relationship with other staff members, the role of the security guard
at the library, his enjoyment of reference work, the management of the Smart Cape
computers. After being away with flu, he reported:
*"I truly enjoy working in the library, particularly the Reference Section. I
couldn't wait to get to work in the Reference Section after being away"*
Student journal 10 September 2002.

The three women students with him at Delft meanwhile claimed that they were doing
nothing but shelve books. Delft library is under-staffed and is crowded every
afternoon with hundreds of school learners doing school projects and using the Smart
City computers. Each morning the library is littered with piles of books in need of
shelving and the students kept complaining that the library staff was expecting the
students to do all the tidying:
*"I wouldn't mind if they [library staff] were helping us but they no longer
do. They just sit and wait for us to do it"* Student journal 19 August 2002.

They also worried that, as soon as they sat down to prepare a programme or discuss a
plan, they were made to feel they were shirking and were interrupted. They also were
finding it daunting to be faced with 70 children unexpectedly arriving for a story time.
They could see no evidence of systematic programming and communication with the
schools in the area and felt insecure. Unlike the group at Bellville South, they did not
have the capacity to suggest changes, visit schools and develop a systematic
programme.

But of course there are always other versions of a story, as I discovered when I visited
the senior librarian at Delft in an attempt to intervene in response to the students'

unhappiness. This was followed up with a meeting of all the library staff and students. According to one student my intervention had a positive effect:

> *"You made a big difference. They said that they don't have the time [to allow students experience in other areas like cataloguing] but it's not true. After you came things changed"* Student journal 20 September 2002.

Perhaps the story can be said to have a happy ending. All four had positive comments on the experience at the end of the course and two weeks later Delft held a party for them which the students appreciated. And it is interesting to see how many of the staff in their final questionnaires commented on how they had enjoyed having people of a "different culture" in their midst. For example, one said that the best aspect of the experience had been:

> *"The different cultural groups teaming up to finish tasks* [and] *learning about their culture"* [Service Provider final questionnaire].

The issues at Bellville South and at Delft pre-occupied me - so that I neglected the six students at Delft South, where things seemed to be going smoothly. There was no language barrier – Delft being largely Xhosa-speaking. At the beginning, they were in the hands of a community mentor – a library volunteer. They had a community partner, an educator from Delft South Primary Number Four, who brought groups of children to the library every Monday. However, conflicts suddenly arose among the students. One student was being ostracised and began to visit my office often. The making of a video on the project brought out a strongly competitive streak in the students and her peers had said that she was not "good enough" to take part. Moreover, once the video was made, the group seemed to feel their work was complete and lost motivation. My solution to re-energise them was to use the seminar on user surveys to initiate a research project investigating the information needs of school learners using the Delft and Delft South libraries. Over one week in late October, the students conducted 800 interviews (Hart, 2003; 2004).

At various times, students across all three sites asked questions about the impact of what they were doing. Programme assessment, accountability and performance measurement became common themes in our seminar discussions. Libraries all too often rely on instinct and anecdote in talking of the value of their work. There is very little attempt to assess systematically the value of their interventions. Students became frustrated at the lack of structuring in their programmes. For example, the educator in Delft would send large amorphous groups of children to them every Monday and there was no continuity or feedback.

Revisiting what I wrote in 2002, I question my role as the academic partner. I was in constant contact with the service providers and the students' community contacts; yet, my preoccupation was, I must acknowledge, always the academic course. I relied on the Friday afternoon seminars to encourage students to learn from what they were experiencing – good or bad. Students compiled portfolios of their literacy and

information literacy programmes as the course progressed. But it was difficult for some to implement their plans since they would suddenly be faced with a different and unknown group of children.

Questions that surface, as I write this a few years later, relate to the responsibility of the academic partner. For example: *Should I have intervened more actively in the decisions made by the libraries? Should I have got more directly involved in the planning of the various interventions? Should I have spent more time looking for community partners?*

However, the reality is that the new module took an inordinate amount of time. The meetings and planning over two years, described above, make no mention of the large amount of time needed to prepare a new academic course. Then as the module was implemented, I spent hours negotiating the various problems at each site. The experiential learning approach is more demanding than lecturing – with seminars having to be carefully planned, students' cajoled into participating, their journals responded to sensitively. At the same time I was teaching two other courses. At times, I looked a little enviously at my colleague responsible for the other 26 students who were tucked away quietly in library and information services across Cape Town. Probably, the 14 service learning students were looking at the other 26 students in the same way.

Outcomes

There was no attempt to measure the outcomes with respect to the target groups - apart from the completion of the questionnaires provided by the CHESP office. We collected no data to measure the impact of the students' presence in the libraries - on the libraries themselves or on children and youth. A thorough evaluation implies the services of a research unit with more resources than we had.

It is also true that the blurred focus of the project would make it hard to measure its outcomes. *Were the students in the community to serve in the libraries - to help them in their day-to-day functioning? Or were they there to intervene in the reading and information behaviours of youth?*

If the former, then, given the nature of the project, the outcomes for the community are intertwined with those for the service providers. The students, in impacting positively on the three libraries, were serving the community - since by definition the service providers are community service organisations. If the latter, then I wonder if we realised how ambitious our project was. If we want more than extra pairs of hands in the public libraries, service learning in the library context implies a new kind of library service - one that moves out of the barriers of the library walls and that cuts across long-established barriers (between the school library sector and the public library sector for example). I suspect that there are no models to follow - despite the commonplace use of the label "community" library.

Community and service provider outcomes

Providing figures for the numbers of children involved in the project is not possible. The students in the course of their daily activities interacted on a one-to-one basis with children - helping with projects - and they also engaged with groups in the libraries and at Goeie Hoop Primary.

One of the threads of concern in the above account has been the issue of assessment of impact. It is something the students mentioned from time to time: thus, "*How do we know whether we are making any difference*?" In the absence of a structured programme for the same group of children and some kind of assessment of their skills before the programme, it is surely impossible to talk of assessing outcomes.

The underlying aim of the storytelling and reading programmes was to improve reading enjoyment and reading ability - the two being inextricably linked. But measuring impact is extremely complex. One simple measure might be counting how many books the children take out immediately after the session or in the weeks following a programme but most of the children are not registered borrowers and do not take out books.

The students undertook "library orientation", introducing children to the library and encouraging them to join. How many did join the library after their interventions is not known. I hoped that they would set up more structured information literacy interventions, perhaps working with one educator and one class on a project over a few weeks. Then we could assess the project as it went - using agreed upon criteria. Such measurement implies careful planning - by the service provider, the students and the educators. It would indeed be a valuable project, perhaps for a post-graduate degree.

One potentially useful outcome for the community and the service provider was the study we conducted in late October of the use of the two Delft libraries by school learners, which was referred to earlier (Hart 2003; 2004). Another visible outcome was the database of youth and children's services that the Delft students constructed. It has 50 entries and aims at supporting youth workers.

Outcomes for UWC

The CHESP pilot course brought clear benefits to students and to me as the academic partner. Firstly, thanks to CHESP funds, the Department now has a good collection of books on the practice and theory of children's librarianship and an attractive collection of educational games, puzzles and craft materials.

The Friday seminars achieved some of their aims. Students learned to engage in lively argument. It was easier for students to argue analytically - as they had experiential learning to base their arguments on. They were able to put a case, support it and listen to other students' cases. They would listen to or read a point and consider it in the light of their learning in the library or school. This was thus an exciting teaching

experience. The journal writing was an important tool in the nurturing of a reflective frame of mind and in the building of connections. Not all the students engaged with the journal writing at the same depth, however; one or two wrote perfunctory summaries of what they were doing.

Very few students came well prepared to the seminars. Students took turns leading the seminars, each of which involved preparatory reading. Their difficulties in reading ahead and preparing seminars that applied theoretical reading to their practical experiences convinced me that experiential learning cannot be introduced in the final year of a degree. It should infuse the whole programme from the first year. This of course implies commitment to its ideals from all staff members – which cannot be assumed, given the increased demands of this kind of teaching that were referred to above.

Importantly, final questionnaire responses and fieldwork reports showed that the 14 students emerged from the course with a positive attitude to community work and convinced of the importance of the role of libraries in the development of communities. As one said:

> *"The course helped me realise that this fieldwork could help me develop my community library at Fort Beaufort - to help people understand the importance of the library also to improve their information skills and their children's reading skills"* Student field work evaluation report 6 November 2002.

In 2005, I can report that, despite the failure of the LS 421 module the following year, the service learning pilot has had a positive impact on our BBibl programme through its impact on the general fieldwork programme. At our end-of-year retreat in 2002, it was resolved that responsibility for students' field experience be shared among all academics, that closer contact would be maintained with students and their hosts, that journal-keeping would be required to encourage reflective learning, and that regular report-back seminars would be held in the course of the fieldwork. Thus, the learning style of service learning has been adopted – if not, as yet, the community service component.

Partnership issues
This account has included several comments on the partnering issues. From the beginning there was a crucial gap – left by the departure of the original motivators. Our obvious community partners were the schools; yet the absence of teacher-librarians in the schools made it difficult to find, ahead of the module's implementation, champions of the cause of literacy and information literacy within the Delft and Bellville South Schools. There was no one staff member in the schools who might be assumed to share the interest. However, as shown in the above account, interested educators did emerge once the students were in the libraries.

One of lessons of the pilot course in 2002 is the difficulty over defining partners' responsibilities. It was difficult at times, for example, to know what my role was in terms of the students' day-to-day experience in the libraries. I was being kept well-informed by their journals and by the discussions at the seminars. Yet, I felt I could not tell the library staff what to do with the students. I also felt that I could not interfere with the day-to-day library procedures and practices. Academics are sometimes accused by practising professionals of being out of touch with the "real world". Before and during the course, there were several comments that "the students are learning about the real world now". Of course the staff in the three sites have years of experience and knowledge to impart. This came out in some of their answers in the final questionnaires. For example:

> *"I was very happy to work with the students and show them/equip them with what is expected in the world of work".*

One of the refrains of experiential learning is that it serves to expose students to the "real" world. However, when some people talk of the "real" world, they mean the "bad" world - from the perspective of disillusioned experience. One of my aims as a librarian educator is to nurture the idealism of youth and to provide a vision of possibilities.

Conclusion: the future of our fieldwork and community service?

The LS 421 experience in 2002 raises the question whether our practical fieldwork should stress "community service" or "best practice". Ideally, the two are not contradictory. But much depends on the service providers. The libraries in the three sites in this case study are unusually under-resourced. Only four of the staff across all three libraries have post-school education. There are no specialist children's staff and there has been little (if any) in-service education in the needs of young people.

We need to examine fieldwork and community service in other professional fields in order to decide our priorities. It is hard to believe that student doctors are exposed *only* to struggling under-resourced clinics in their tertiary education. Should librarian education be any different?

Given the theme of the course, services to children and youth, and given the fact that this was the students' first and only experience in the field, I suggest that the students and the other partners would have benefited from a preliminary placing, perhaps for one month, in libraries which have dedicated children's librarians. Towards the end of the module, the theme for our seminar discussion was the pros and cons of specialist children's or youth staff as opposed to generalists. None of the students argued for the need for specialists. They had spent a few weeks in environments where everybody was expected to "do the same" and they could not conceive of alternatives. If they had been placed with one of the specialist dedicated children's librarians in Cape Town, some might have argued differently. Internationally, professional practice recognises children's librarianship as a specialisation, demanding its own competencies, attributes and education.

14

In conclusion, I suggest that our pilot service learning module in 2002 might be viewed as *enhanced* fieldwork. This case study has identified its weaknesses in terms of the CHESP service learning model, with three chief flaws highlighted:

- the inadequate interrogation of the difference between the conventional library-based fieldwork approach and service learning
- the absence of community partners
- the mismatch of students and service site – referring to the language barriers.

The fact that the course was not repeated in 2003 did not allow these weaknesses to be addressed.

The restructuring of our BBibl Degree in the next two years provides the opportunity to return to these issues. As we revisit our programme in 2006, there is a need to assess more rigorously the purposes and outcomes of our fieldwork programme – perhaps in a formal research project. In future, our basic professional fieldwork experience will probably be built into courses in the second and third year programmes, thus allowing for reflective and deeper-level learning. Our students might thus be better prepared for community service in their final year.

References

Hart, G. 1999. Ready for the information society? A study of Cape Town's children's librarians. *New review of children's literature & librarianship*, 5: 169-188.

Hart, G. 2000. Cape Town's children's librarians. Cinderella's of the library world? *Cape Librarian*, 44 (4): 72-74.

Hart, G. 2003. Public libraries stepping into the gap? A study of school learners' use of libraries in a disadvantaged community in Cape Town. 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 2003.* Seattle: IASL: 71-83.

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.

Ocholla, D. 2005. Librarian job advertisements: 1997 and 2004 compared. Paper presented at Indaba of Librarian Educators, University of South Africa, 28 February 2005.

Witbooi, S. 2004. Service learning in the Library and Information Studies curriculum at the University of the Western Cape: an exploratory study. *Mousaion,* 22(1): 89-102.

15