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Public Libraries Stepping Into The Gap? A Study of School Learners' Use of Libraries in a Disadvantaged Community in Cape Town, South Africa

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The paper describes an investigation of school learners' use of the two public libraries in a disadvantaged community on the outskirts of Cape Town. Over 850 school learners were interviewed using a structured questionnaire in late October 2002. The study supports claims that public libraries in South Africa are having to compensate for the shortage of school libraries and are playing a crucial role in formal education. It recommends that this reality be recognised by the libraries' governance structures, by provincial and local government authorities, and, above all, by national and provincial education authorities. Questions are, however, asked about the capacity of the public libraries for an enhanced role in information literacy education.

This paper describes an investigation of school learners' use of the two public libraries in a rapidly growing township on the outskirts of Cape Town, which for the purposes of the study has been given the pseudonym Vista. The study will eventually form part of a larger case study of the nine schools of Vista. The aim of the larger case study is to examine the impact of South Africa's new school curriculum, Curriculum 2005, on historically disadvantaged schools, which cannot be assumed to have effective libraries within their walls. It will investigate how the reading and information needs of their learners and educators, including their needs for information literacy education, are being met.

Background and Rationale

According to public library staff none of the Vista schools has a functioning library or a librarian on its staff. In its lack of school libraries Vista is no different from other parts of South Africa. Less than a third of South African schools have any sort of library (Department of Education, 1999). Yet South Africa's new curriculum's shift from rote-learning and examinations towards constructivist resource-based approaches expects schools to engage in independent project and portfolio work.

Given the demands of the new curriculum and given the shortage of school libraries, in the past few years there have been suggestions that South Africa's fairly well-developed public library system might step into the gap and play a more explicitly educational role. At the same time, in public library circles throughout Africa, there have been suggestions that we need a different model of public librarianship from that in the developed world (Sturges & Neill, 1998; Issak, 2000). In the developing world, where school library services are inadequate and where the target population of libraries is largely youth, the argument is that providing for formal education might well be a primary function of public library services. And indeed there is evidence that South African libraries are moving in this educational direction. The annual reports of the large provincial public library governance structures show that they are spending a bigger slice of their budget on educational materials. And at most gatherings of public librarians in South Africa there are calls for increased funds to cope with the pressures of increased school use (Hendrikz, 1998; Leach, 1998).

Increased co-operation between the public library and school library sectors is clearly called for. It has proved difficult, however, to overcome historical barriers between the two sectors. In the Western Cape Province, as elsewhere, each has separate governance and legislative frames. In 1999 UNESCO supported a high-level committee to come up with recommendations on how to promote increased co-operation. Its report (National Committee for Library Co-Operation, 2000), however, has so far had little impact perhaps because, as the report recognises, each sector has been pre-occupied confronting the challenges of stringent budget cutbacks and re-structuring.

One of the models put forward as a possible solution to the problem of the shortage of school libraries is the multi-purpose school-community library (National Education Policy Investigation,1992; Karlsson, 1996; Le Roux, 2002). The Education Policy Unit at the University of Natal hosted a conference in Durban in 1996 specifically to examine the potential of this kind of joint-use library (Karlsson, 1996). The model apparently received the approval of the national Department of Education, as shown in the draft school library policy documents produced by the Department in the years between 1995 and 1998 (Department of Education, 1998). They assumed that the so-called "one school-one library" model was infeasible and presented a range of alternative models, one being the joint-use library and another being the public library serving a cluster of schools as a combined school-community library. It has to be pointed out, however, that national school library policy is still stalled as the policy documents have still not received ministerial approval.

Existing Research

There have been studies of the educational use of the public library in South Africa as far back as the early 1980s (Van der Walt, 1981; Brooke-Norris, 1986; Niven, 1987). Some of the earlier studies seemed to see the use of the public library by school pupils as a "problem." Their authors perhaps saw the support of formal education as outside its traditional mission. Fourie's study (1994) of the use of a library in a Johannesburg suburb by school learners found that many of her respondents, even those within relatively advantaged schools, preferred to use the public library for their assignments rather than their school libraries. My own survey of 67 children's library staff in Cape Town in 1999 provided evidence of the increased pressures brought about by the new curriculum (Hart, 1999). It concluded that public librarians were taking on an enhanced educational role but in an ad hoc way. Many reported that they were being expected to "step into the gap" and to do the work of school librarians. However there was little evidence of systematic planning or programming or training for this work. Witbooi's survey (2001) of the membership of the two libraries in Kuils River, a suburb close to Vista, found that 37.6% of their members are school learners, the highest proportion of their total membership. Yet she comments that its local authority and management lack awareness of this educational role which is not prominent in the official documents of the public library service. The Education Policy Unit (Natal) has recently published three case studies of innovative library models (Naiker & Mbokazi, 2002), which, it is claimed, might serve to pilot the models suggested in the Department of Education's draft school library policy framework mentioned above (Department of Education, 1998). One of the three cases is a community library in rural Limpopo, the Makhuva Information Centre, which serves a number of schools. The Centre began in a garage and relies heavily on volunteer student staff.

User Study of Vista Libraries

As mentioned above, the study reported in this paper forms just one part of a larger case study of Vista schools to be undertaken throughout 2003 and 2004.

The new curriculum, Curriculum 2005 (C2005), is widely acknowledged to be resource-based with an emphasis on constructivist independent learning by means of project and portfolio work. On paper, the curriculum holds great promise for school librarianship as it is recognises information literacy, the accepted mission of school librarianship, to be a critical outcome of schooling. The teaching methodologies it promotes have shifted from the teacher- and textbook-centred approaches of the past. A pre-requisite for this kind of curriculum would seem to be access to a wide range of learning and information resources. And indeed since its introduction in 1996, South African librarians have continuously warned that schools without libraries will struggle to make the changes the new curriculum demands (Library & Information Association of South Africa [LIASA], 2000). However these warnings have not so far been heeded. The lack of urgency over national school library policy and the deterioration in the position of school libraries even within the more advantaged sectors of our schooling (Stopart, 1995; Leach, 1998; Hart, 2000) indicate perhaps that educationists and policy-makers are not convinced. There is thus a crucial need for solid research evidence to show if

and why the new curriculum requires libraries. Todd (2001) warns that advocacy must depend on "evidence." If they are to receive wider recognition of their role in the new curriculum, then librarians need to provide supporting evidence. The case study will thus document how the schools within Vista, none of which apparently have libraries, are managing the project and portfolio work of C2005.

The study reported on in this paper is thus a preliminary to the other three components of the larger case study. The next phase of the study will document the two public libraries with regard to their services to schools, their capacity, and staff attitudes. The third phase will be a field study of what might be called the "information climate" within the Vista schools. This will involve fairly long term participant observation inside the schools. The final component will be the implementation of a pilot information literacy project within two schools in Vista and the public libraries. The two schools will be chosen in the course of the earlier phases of the case study. Each of the four phases has its own focus and research questions, but all four are interdependent.

The initial user study of the two Vista libraries, described in this paper, aims to document the situation on the ground with regard to the use of public libraries by school learners in a disadvantaged township.

Choice of Site

Case study sites are chosen using a variety of criteria (LeCompte, Preissle & Tesch, 1993). Vista might be said to be a "purposive" choice for a number of reasons. The Joint Education Trust and the University of Western Cape's Community and Higher Education Service Learning Project (CHESP) had already decided to use Vista for its pilot programmes. They had found Vista to be typical of the rapidly growing townships on the periphery of South African cities. Their libraries likewise might be deemed to be reasonably typical of those in Cape Town's townships. The case of Vista might thus provide useful data to inform the debates around public and school libraries in South Africa.

Vista lends itself to the research problem because it has two medium-sized public libraries, each of which serves a manageable number of schools within reach, that is about four or five in the catchment area of each. The membership statistics of the two libraries show that Vista Library has about 2500 child members (under the age of 16) of a total of 8000 members (31%). Vista East Library has about 2500 child members of a total of 6000. Both libraries belong to the same metropolitan sub-structure and to that sub-structure's network of libraries. They thus both report to the same governance structures and policies, although this situation is in a state of flux as Cape Town is in the process of rebuilding its management structures.

The facilities in both the Vista libraries are similar to other township libraries in Cape Town as documented in a study in 1999 (Hart, 1999). There are about 14 staff in the two libraries, with 13 being Afrikaans-speaking and one Xhosa-speaking. Only one or two in each library have any professional librarian or post-school qualification. In common with other Cape Town libraries, the Vista libraries have neither OPACs nor card catalogues available to the public. The switch to computerised systems meant that one or two workstations were supplied for the circulation desk and for the librarian's office. Card catalogues were discontinued. A recent development in Cape Town is the Unicity's SmartCape project which plans to provide public Internet facilities in all the city's libraries. Vista Library is one of the pilot sites and has a bank of six PCs with Internet access. Vista East Library has no computers for public use except for a PC in its small business corner.

Another consideration in the choice of site was convenience. Vista is logistically convenient as its libraries were hosting a number of University of Western Cape (UWC) librarian students throughout the second semester of 2002 and it is quite close to the University campus.

UWC's involvement in Vista came out of the CHESP initiative which had, as mentioned above, identified it as an appropriate site for its pilot service learning programme. The service learning project began with a three day programme in July 2002 that introduced the students to the Vista communities. A panel of youth workers, health workers, police, and social workers had discussed the social issues facing the youth of the area, including high rates of teenage pregnancies, HIV/Aids, gangsterism, and unemployment. They highlighted the prevailing poverty that underlies most of the social problems.

Another constant refrain in the three-day induction programme was the impact of the inherited apartheid town planning on the life of the township. The Vista community is clearly split into two by culture and by language. Vista East library was opened in 2000 in the new Xhosa-speaking section of Vista, while the older Vista library, just a kilometre away, serves the longer-established Afrikaans-speaking so-called Coloured community. The schools in the Vista Library catchment area are older and are ex-House of Representative (HOR) schools. These schools, in the apartheid era, belonged to the so-called Coloured Education Department that managed the schools that Coloured children attended. Although apartheid has gone, its heritage remains in the obvious inequities in facilities across our schools, such as sports fields, halls, and libraries as well as in more intangible school "culture."

The public libraries' hosting of UWC students as part of the CHESP project came from their stated wish to improve their services to the school learners in their communities. Preliminary discussions with library staff uncovered much criticism of the local teachers. Typical complaints were: teachers do not come to the library, they do not inform the library of school projects in good time, and school children are not taught how to use the library effectively. The Vista libraries' staff echoed the comments of the earlier 1999 (Hart) study in also claiming to be "doing the work" of school librarians.

Yet in fact very little is known about the schools' needs. If it is indeed true that the schools lack libraries and resources, the question has to be asked, *how do their educators and learners manage the project and portfolio work required by C2005?* The literature of project work assumes that easy access to such collections is a pre-requisite for such pedagogical approaches.

Research Questions

The four-day investigation of the use of the two public libraries by school learners set out to throw light on the question of how much the Vista libraries are filling the assumed gap caused by the non-existence of school libraries. It asks the following questions:

- How many learners from the surrounding schools are coming to the two libraries?
- Why do learners come to the public libraries?
- What is the educational use by school educators and learners of the two public library branches at present?
- How does this educational function compare in terms of user numbers with the other functions of the libraries?
- Which learners from which schools are using the local library? And for what?
- What other sources of information and resources do the learners use?
- Are there differences in the patterns of use between the two libraries?
- What do the learners need from the library? Does the public library have the required capacity to take on the active educational role that is being suggested?

Methodology

Over the period of four days, Monday to Thursday, in the last week of October 2002, 894 interviews with school learners coming into the two libraries were conducted by 14 senior UWC students, who were enrolled in a BBibl children's librarianship module, and by myself. Of the total, 414 were in Vista Library and 382 in Vista East Library (three questionnaires failed to identify the library). The students had been placed in the two libraries for some weeks as part of the CHESP service learning initiative. The interview used a structured questionnaire, comprising 16 questions gathering data on learners' backgrounds, their reasons for coming to the library that day, and their broader information seeking behaviour. It had been piloted in another library close to the University that was also hosting UWC students. After the first day a second shorter questionnaire was used for any learner who reported at once that he or she had already been interviewed. By the end of the four days, 89 of these "second round" questionnaires had been collected. They are not, however, included in this paper. The UWC students were instructed to try to interview every school learner coming into the library excepting those not wishing to take part. It soon became clear that it would be impossible to interview every child, and it is estimated that about 80% of the learners in the libraries that week were included. Several questionnaires were subsequently scrapped as the respondents were clearly not school learners. It was decided however to retain the few respondents attending Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) night classes in a local high school, even though they are some years older than the typical school learner.

The data were then entered on an *Excel* spreadsheet for summary and statistical analysis (where useful). The analysis is reported on in the next section.

Other data were gathered by means of interviews and observation. I conducted preliminary interviews on 12 September 2002 with the managers of the two libraries using a questionnaire evolved in an earlier study of libraries in Cape Town (Hart, 1999). These rather formal interviews were followed by frequent more informal conversations with them and with the other library staff members. The purpose was to document certain key data and to gain insight both into library procedures and staffing and into the services offered to learners. Observation of the two libraries by the UWC students, recorded in their journals as part of the requirements of their BBibl module and by myself in the course of frequent visits to the libraries also added useful insights into the services offered to school learners and into their behaviour inside the libraries. The interviews and observation were analysed and recorded as key themes evolved. Information gathered by means of these interviews and observation is given when judged relevant in the discussion that follows. The exploration of the capacity of the libraries to give an enhanced service to schools is, however, an ongoing process, and its analysis is not a major focus of this paper.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Analysis of the completed questionnaires shows how important a role the public libraries are playing in the school life of the learners. The use involves more than one-off visits. Many report that in the course of their school projects they return to the library frequently, with 76 learners claiming to have made seven visits or more for their current project. The mean number of visits is 2.15. (see Table 1)

Table 1: *Number of Visits to Library*	
No. of Visits	**Respondents**
1	561
2	61
3	52
4	20
5	16
6	13
7 or more	76
Total	**799**
Median No =	1
Mean No =	2.15
Maximum =	14

Of the 799 respondents, 623 (78%) said that they never use any other library. Twenty-seven (3%) said they also use a school library; 16 use the Bellville Library, the large district central library some kilometres away that is designed to serve the reference needs of the municipal sub-structure that Vista is part of. Others named various public libraries throughout Cape Town, probably those close to their schools.

The figures on access to school libraries are rather ambiguous, however, as in a later question 234 respondents (29%) said that in the past year they had used "books in their school library" for their school work. One respondent in Vista Library gave me a clue towards a possible explanation for the contradiction when he told me he used some "old books" from the library at school but it wasn't a "real" library. Of the 234 claiming to use books in the school library, 156 (66%) are Vista respondents whose schools can be labelled as ex-House of Representative (HOR) schools that served the so-called "Coloured" population in the era of apartheid education. Many of them have the remnants of the school libraries that were established in the 1980s but that, since the amalgamation of school systems in the mid 1990s, have fallen into disarray (Hart, 2000; Le Roux, 2001). In the past, each of the racially-based education

departments had its own library policies and standard library layouts. The HOR schools' standard primary school library was a small windowless storeroom leading off a classroom. The teacher-librarians and teachers would go into the storeroom to fetch books for the children to work with. Until the ambiguity can be cleared up by visits to the schools this remains the most likely but still speculative answer to the contradiction.

Who Are the School Learners Using the Libraries?

The first section of the questionnaire gathered data on the age, gender, home language, school and school grade of the learners.

The major finding here is the high numbers of learners using the libraries. Over the four days a total of 799 usable questionnaires were completed as well as 89 "second round" questionnaires. Library staff assured us that these numbers are not unusual in the course of the school term, and the experience of the UWC students over a number of weeks confirm this. My photographs document the problems these high numbers bring, especially for the older smaller Vista Library. Vista East Library is only two years old and was built to cope with the large study spaces required by township learners, who often do not have conditions at home conducive to study. Every chair in the afternoons at Vista Library is filled. Large queues form at the single photocopier and large crowds of children congregate around the bank of SmartCape PCs in the centre of the floor in Vista Library. Both libraries seem to adhere to a policy that ejects school learners at 4.30pm every afternoon. This means that use by schools learners is telescoped into a few short hours between the closure of schools from 2.00pm and the 4.30 library deadline. My observations record that both libraries are extremely quiet in the mornings, which are largely used to tidy up the disorder left by the hectic afternoons.

Very few adults are seen in the libraries in the busy afternoons. The dominance of school learner use is not reflected in formal membership statistics of the two libraries given above. The questionnaire did not document formal membership of the respondents but it is probable that many will not be formally registered members as membership requires parents' signatures. Witbooi (2001), in her study of the membership of a library in a nearby suburb, suggests that high levels of adult illiteracy, together with perceptions that the library is for the educated middle class, mean that many children in a disadvantaged community just do not get signed up formally.

There are significant differences in the age groups, grades, and the language groups using the two libraries.

Table 2 *Age Split by Library*

	Age																		
Library	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*	*12*	*13*	*14*	*15*	*16*	*17*	*18*	*19*	*20*	*21*		*Total*	*Mean*
Vista	3	5	11	15	30	44	49	71	57	33	38	27	10	3	3	1		400	13.2
Vista East	1	5	6	14	20	13	37	48	50	35	40	31	20	15	11	5		351	14.4
TOTAL	4	10	17	29	50	57	86	119	107	68	78	58	30	18	14	6		751	13.8

Test Statistic CHI-Squared = 43.8896
P-Value = 0.0001

Table 3 *Grade Split by Library*

		Grade											
Library	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
Vista	12	7	14	22	48	42	113	27	42	38	17	13	395
Vista East	11	6	7	14	30	25	69	43	35	44	36	17	337
TOTAL	23	13	21	36	78	67	182	70	77	82	53	30	732

Test Statistic CHI-Squared = 43.8896
  P-Value = 0.0001

Vista's users (see Table 2) are significantly younger than Vista East's users with use peaking at Grade Seven and quite sharply dropping after that grade. The bulk of Vista East users, however, are two or three grades senior. The later finding that Vista users' most common use of the library is for projects whereas Vista East's is to do homework might throw light on the age differences. Curriculum 2005, with its ubiquitous project work, was phased in from 1996 beginning with the Foundation Phase. It could be that project work is not yet entrenched in the schools of the younger Vista East. Language and culture, intertwined with South Africa's racially based teacher training of the past, could be contributing factors. In her study of teacher training in South Africa Olën (1996) concluded that only about 25% of South Africa's teachers-in-training had had access to libraries in their schooling. It can be assumed that black teachers educated in the historically disadvantaged sector would make up the majority group with no direct experience of libraries. Inadequate access to libraries might well infer reliance on "chalk and talk" methods and very little direct experience of independent project work. Indeed my own experience is that many teachers in our courses at the University of Western Cape report that they have never done an independent project. Yet they are now being expected to manage research projects in their classrooms. These are crucial questions for the follow-up study within the schools of Vista.

Table 4 *Main Languages Spoken by Library Users**

Language	Vista Library	Vista East Library	Total
Afrikaans	272	88	360
English	94	12	106
Xhosa	6	250	256
Afrikaans / English	28	8	36
TOTAL	400	358	758

Test Statistic CHI-Squared = 400.0531

P-Value = 0

* Less frequent languages omitted

A shortage of Xhosa language materials might also play a part in explaining differences in age and in use patterns. The analysis of respondents by home language (see Table 4) confirms the language and cultural divisions within Vista. Vista Library's users are predominantly Afrikaans-speaking, with 272 naming Afrikaans as their primary home language, 94 English, and six Xhosa. Vista East's users are largely Xhosa-speaking, with 250 naming that language as their primary home language, 12 English, and 88 Afrikaans. The follow-up study will need to look carefully at the stock of the two libraries in terms of language and readability level.

The list of schools from which the respondents come makes interesting reading. At the start of the study the librarians in each library had reported that they served four or five schools. Yet the reality is that their school users come from 71 different schools scattered throughout the neighbouring areas. A later question, which asked about use of other libraries, revealed that these children might well also be using the library close to their school. It is clear, however, that many of the children who travel out of their home communities to attend school choose to do their homework in the library close to home.

Despite the range of 71 schools, it is true that each library's user community is dominated by two or three schools. Interviews with library staff had revealed that neither of the libraries before the start of the CHESP project had sustained contact with their local schools. In the preliminary interviews, both sets of library staff claimed that they had tried to get teachers to communicate their assignments and projects but had failed. The Vista East staff were especially critical of the high school just across the road, saying that its educators had nothing to do with the library. Yet that school forms the largest user group for the library. This clearly is something to follow up in the school.

Table 5: *Mean Number of Visits by Library and Gender*

Library	Vista Library	Vista East Library	Total
M	2.3	2.0	2.2
F	1.6	2.6	2.1
Total	1.9	2.3	2.1

The mean age of males (13.5 and 14.9) was on average greater than females (13.0 and 14.1) in Vista and Vista East respectively.

A t-test for unequal variances was used to test for significant differences between the mean number of visits to each library by gender. At Vista Library males visited significantly more frequently than females (t = -3.03, p = 0.0026), whereas the reverse was true at Vista East (t = 1.99, p = 0.0473). A possible explanation could be the SmartCape computers at Vista Library that, as will be shown below, seem to be used predominantly by males.

Reasons for Using the Public Library

The question that probed why the learners were in the library that day is the heart of the study. Originally 11 categories were created but these were extended to 16 on analysis of the open-ended question that encouraged respondents to give "other" reasons that might not be spelled out. Table 6 below lists the responses. On average most respondents come in for more than one reason, to do a project and to photocopy for example.

Table 6: *Why Did You Come to the Library Today?*

Reason	Vista Library	Vista East Library	Total
Work on school project / portfolio	193	134	327
Sit in library to do homework	80	176	256
Use library for assignment	64	135	199
Bring back / take out book	91	106	197
Photocopying	63	94	157
Sit and read	43	84	127
Meet / be with friends	57	67	124
Read info on hobby / interest	8	42	50
Pass time	27	20	47
Use computers	31	7	38
Personal information	7	15	22
Study for Exam	0	19	19
Admin	7	6	13
Help Others	1	7	8
Games	4	2	6
Use Phones	0	2	2
	483	*782*	*1265*
Mean no. of reasons per respondent	**1.2**	**2.1**	**1.6**

Analysis of the total for both libraries together shows that the most common reason is to work on a project, the second is to sit in the library to do homework, the third is to use library materials to complete an assignment, and the fourth is to return or borrow a book. The role of the library in the social life of young people is rather striking. Rather a high proportion of the visits involve meeting friends and passing the time.

There are significant differences between the two libraries. Table 6 shows that Vista Library users are mostly in the library to do a project whereas the Vista East Library users are there to do homework without using library materials. This difference might indicate differences in teaching style between the two communities within Vista, each of which has its roots in a different education system. Or it might point to the socio-economic differences. Vista East has a large informal housing settlement. Perhaps what children who live in shanties need most from a library is a chair and table in a light secure room. Spearman rank correlation tests show no positive correlation between the libraries for the main reasons for coming to them. When the top seven reasons are looked at there is Spearman correlation of 0.6786 (p = 0.0965), and for the top four reasons the Spearman correlation coefficient is -0.6 (p = 0.2987).

The questionnaire gathered information about the project topics being undertaken and about the educators behind them; this will be useful in the next phase of the case study. Given the library staff's rather negative perceptions of educators, it is interesting that 52% of respondents said that their teacher had told them to use the library.

It is striking how little the libraries are used for personal information needs and for information on interests and hobbies. Vista youth face huge social problems and, if it is indeed true that the local schools do not have libraries, it is necessary to ask where do the young people of Vista get information on HIV/Aids, sex education, violence, crime, careers, and, so on. This is another issue that requires follow-up inside the schools.

The data about use of computers by Vista learners have to be viewed against the backdrop of the large national and provincial projects to bring computers to school learners. One of the most often stated goals of the national and provincial education departments in South Africa is to fast-track historically disadvantaged learners into the global information society. Millions of Rands are being spent on providing schools with computers and with Internet access. Two questions in the questionnaire focused on the use of computers. One asked whether the respondent was in the library to use a computer, and another later question asked whether they ever used the Internet at school, home, or in the library as an information source. Only 38 respondents (5%) over the four days said that they had come to the library that day "to use the computers. Only 52 respondents (6%) reported that they sometimes use the Internet at their schools for information. Forty-six respondents (6%) said they use the Internet at home and eighty-five (11%) said that they sometimes use the Internet in the library. It would be sobering perhaps to compare these figures with those from an equivalent group of young people in some of the adjacent middle class suburbs.

Of the 38 respondents coming into the library to "use the computers" over the four days, 27 were male. This confirms my observation and those of the UWC students that very few females use the PCs in the Vista Library. My photographs show that the workstations are constantly surrounded by young men with younger boys stretching over their shoulders to watch. From a distance it is hard to assess what the PCs are being used for. The SmartCape initiative was not the focus of the study, but reports from UWC students and my own observation, as well as comments of library staff, suggest that it is rather isolated from the main business of the library. They are maintained by a community volunteer trained by SmartCape and the library staff rarely go near them. The reference desk in Vista Library has a PC with Internet access but the UWC students reported that this facility is rarely used. If true, this might lend support to one of the findings of my study in 2000 of 67 children's librarians in Cape Town: there was consensus among them that they urgently needed computer literacy and Internet training (Hart, 1999).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The aim of the study was to provide quantitative data that the field study within the schools in 2003 will rely on. The study has uncovered many questions that hopefully the later richer case study will answer. The user study in itself, however, has provided useful data from which conclusions and recommendations can tentatively be made.

The first conclusion is that it lends support to the claim that public libraries in South Africa's disadvantaged townships are indeed "doing the work" of school libraries. The learners rely almost exclusively on the public libraries for their school projects, homework and assignments. It has to be said that in terms of numbers and volume of use, school learners dominate the lives of the libraries.

This reality, however, might not yet be fully accepted by either the libraries or their management structures. The question has to be asked whether the libraries receive adequate support for the role they are playing in the learning and teaching curriculum. The libraries struggle to cope with the numbers of learners that swamp their facilities each afternoon and do not seem to have as yet received recognition for this in terms of staffing and resource provision. Witbooi (2001) concluded in her study of the nearby Kuils River libraries that, while library staff on the ground know they are playing an educational role, this role is not recognised by their management structures and policies. She suggests that libraries' mission statements should reflect what they are really doing.

The Vista study suggests that this reality needs to be communicated forcefully to education authorities. It lends support to the argument that public library facilities and stock need extra financial support from the provincial Education Departments. This kind of provision would be a pre-requisite surely for any more explicit educational function for public libraries. Perhaps it is time for the national library association, LIASA, to intervene and to pick up the work of the National Committee for Library Co-Operation (2000) in which it participated.

The study points to the need for more systematic and programmed contact with the local schools or with at least selected grades and teachers. Perhaps then classes could come to the library in the mornings for a more structured experience. In this way use could be more evenly spread throughout the day. Perhaps the quality of learning in the library might then be enhanced.

The study documented *quantity* of use; it did not, however, examine quality of use. It did not, for example, determine whether the information needs of the learners are in fact being met or whether the experience in the public library is improving the information literacy of the learners. An earlier study of project work in a circuit of schools in Cape Town concluded that project work in itself does not guarantee information literacy (Hart, 2000). A tentative finding in Vista based on observation and staff interviews, which will be explored more deeply in the field study still to come, is that school learners get little support or guidance. Books deemed relevant for the current projects are placed on the project shelves and children help themselves to them. No education in the use of indexes, for example, was observed. Indeed there is no catalogue, database, or subject index available for public use. The only scaffolding provided is the Dewey signage on the shelves. In reply to a question on retrieval facilities, one of the librarians in charge made the comment, "We have to take them [pupils] to the shelves" (Interview 12 September). It is difficult to see how children can learn independent information retrieval skills if they are not provided with access to the library catalogue at least.

Another area in need of investigation is the capacity of the library staff for information literacy education. Their clear involvement in the educational programme surely calls for knowledge of information literacy theory and practice and for knowledge of the new curriculum and contemporary teaching approaches. As mentioned above, very few of the staff have tertiary level qualifications in either librarianship or education, a situation that might weaken the case for recognition of their role in formal education.

The study has hopefully provided empirical evidence valuable for the emotional debates being waged in public library circles over their taking on the work of school libraries. It provides useful information for educators in local schools and the Western Cape Education Department, who perhaps need more insight into the impact of Curriculum 2005 on libraries. Above all it might focus minds on the needs of school learners and on what needs to be done to meet them.

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