
The state of school libraries in South Africa

Margie Paton-Ash and Di Wilmot

Abstract

Fewer than 8% of South African public schools have functional libraries (Equal Education, 2010, p.21). This is despite links made by research to student achievement and school libraries in South Africa and elsewhere. Our main contention is that if school libraries are to play a significant role in promoting and supporting a quality education, then we need to understand the issues and challenges that schools face. This article reports on a component of a broader qualitative study that investigated the issues and challenges facing school libraries in ten primary schools in Gauteng Province, South Africa. In this article we analyse and discuss the findings of the document analysis we undertook to understand key events and developments in public school libraries before and after the transition to democracy in 1994. By drawing on an array of different sources we were able to identify and discuss emergent issues and challenges within the broader context of South Africa in general, but more specifically with reference to the goal of the Department of Basic Education to provide quality education for all. We conclude that the critical issue that needs to be addressed is that of governance.

Introduction

Since 1994 the Department of Education (DoE), now the Department of Basic Education (DBE), and the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) have been mandated to address the inequalities of the past. The right to education has been achieved by making basic education compulsory, and the introduction of no-fee schools has gone a long way in achieving the goal of access to education for all. The DBE notes that “currently, the schooling system is characterised by high enrolment rates in compulsory basic education that comprises Grades 1 to 9 by children aged 7 to 15” (South Africa DBE, 2011b, p.1). In spite of the high enrolment figures the DBE recognises that this “does not necessarily translate into quality education” (South Africa, DBE, 2010d, p.72). More recently, the DBE acknowledged that quality of education was an urgent issue needing to be addressed. This is borne out by South African pupils’ “persistently low performance in academic achievement” compared to national curriculum standards and international assessment (South Africa, DBE, 2011b, p.3). The DBE’s Action Plan to 2014: Towards Realisation of

the Schooling 2025 prioritises “improving the quality of education and reducing the financial burden of education costs for parents, to improve access to quality education and to give effect to the right to education” (South Africa, DBE, 2011b, p.1).

Parallel to the development of the DBE’s strategic plan to address the issue of quality education, the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) was mandated to address the inequalities of the past. These include the uneven distribution and quality of library and information services and access to library and information services for all South African citizens. Drawing on the findings of international research, the DAC observes that there is “convincing evidence of the vital contribution of school LIS (Library and Information Services) to quality education and student achievement” (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p.38). This view is supported by the literature which reveals that links have been made to student achievement and the presence of libraries in South Africa and elsewhere (Lonsdale, 2003; Pretorius, 2005; Lance, Rodney and Russell, 2007; Bhorat and Oosthuizen, 2008; Scholastic Library Publishing, 2008).

This raises questions about the current status of school libraries in South Africa: What are the issues and challenges schools face and how are these being addressed?

Events and developments in school libraries

There has been a great deal of publicity and discussion about the state of school libraries in South African public schools. An analysis of newspaper and magazine articles (print and internet sources), blogs, research reports, marches for school libraries, debates, questions in parliament, as well as government responses, illuminates the contestations and problems facing public school libraries in South Africa at present.

Table 1 is a chronological summary of significant events and developments in school libraries in South Africa for the period 1994 to the present.

Table 1: Events and developments in public school libraries

Date	Development	Issue
Pre 1994	Lack of library facilities in public schools in black schools in particular (Dick, 2002).	Impact of Apartheid
1996	The <i>South African Schools Act</i> marks the start of our new education system but makes no reference to school libraries (Hart and Zinn, 2007, p.92).	Governance
1997	<p>The first of 5 draft policies on school libraries was circulated by the Department of Education (DoE). (Equal Education (EE, 2010a, p.7).</p> <hr/> <p>The government’s <i>School Register of Needs</i> estimated that eight million out of twelve million learners did not have access to libraries (EE, 2010a, p.18).</p>	<p>Governance</p> <hr/> <p>State of public school libraries</p>
1998	The <i>National Norms and Standards for School Funding Act</i> is passed which would not interfere unreasonably with parents’ discretion as to how to spend their own resources on their children’s education (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p.42).	Governance
1999	<p>The <i>Human Sciences Research Council</i> (HSRC) audit found that many school libraries were often used as classrooms or were shut for most of the day as the person in charge was a full time teacher. (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p.43).</p> <hr/> <p>The <i>School Library and Youth Services Interest Group</i> (SLYSIG) of the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) is established recognising the “common ground between public and school libraries” (Hart and Zinn, 2007, p.96)</p>	<p>Governance</p> <hr/> <p>Broadening awareness of the role of public school libraries</p>
2002	The DoE’s School Libraries Unit was closed (EE. 2010a, p.18).	Governance
2002	<p>The <i>Review of Curriculum 2005</i> found that the new curriculum was doing well in former white schools because they were better resourced (Hart and Zinn, 2007, p.100).</p> <hr/> <p>The Directorate of <i>Education Library and Information Technology Services</i> (ELITS) drew up its own school library policy in KwaZulu-Natal (Hart and Zinn, 2007, p.93).</p>	<p>Broadening awareness of public school</p> <hr/> <p>Governance</p>
2004	<i>White Paper on e-Education: transforming learning and teaching through information and communication technologies</i> commented that school libraries were collections of books that were inadequate to support resource based learning (South Africa. DoE, 2004).	Governance

2005	SLYSIG drew up information literacy guidelines rooted in the <i>Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS)</i> for Grades R to 12 in order to influence educational policy (Hart and Zinn, 2007, p.96).	Broadening awareness of public school libraries.
2007	The <i>Education Laws Amendment Act 31</i> of 2007 listed the availability of a library as a minimum uniform norm and standard for school infrastructure (South Africa, DAC, 2009). The <i>National Education Infrastructure Management System report</i> (NEIMS) indicated that only 7.23% of public schools have a functioning library and 13.47% have a library room that is not stocked. (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p.41; EE, 2010a, p.7).	Governance State of public school libraries
2007	The <i>National Survey into Reading and Book Reading Behaviour</i> of adult South Africans showed that half of South African households had no books and that there was “little articulation between homes, schools, and communities as sites of reading” (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p.79).	Literacy and school libraries
2008	The <i>Review of National Policies for Education: South Africa</i> by the <i>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</i> (OECD) linked the poor reading achievement results of our primary school pupils in the 2006 <i>Progress in International Reading Literacy Study</i> (PIRLS) to the lack of school libraries along with restricted access to books in the home and good quality preschools.	Literacy and school libraries
2008	The <i>National Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure</i> assumed that a school library is part of a learning space that every school must have (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p.43).	Governance
Dec. 5 2008	The Library and Information Services (LIS) <i>Transformation Charter</i> national summit was held in Pretoria.	Governance
July 2009	The 6th draft of the LIS Transformation Charter was published by the DAC and the National Council for Library and Information Services (NCLIS).	Governance
July 2009	Equal Education (EE) initiated <i>The Campaign for School Libraries</i> .	Popular support for school libraries
Sept. 2009	The <i>CREATE Education Roadmap</i> facilitated by the Development Bank of South Africa and adopted by the Minister of Education highlighted key issues in education and this included the lack of resources such as libraries, science laboratories and computers (Bloch, 2009).	Broadening awareness of school libraries
Sept. 22 2009	3,000 students marched to the Cape Town City Hall and 65,000 people signed a petition calling for a national policy on school libraries.	Popular support for school libraries

Sept. 25 2009	Member of Parliament, Dr. J.C. Kloppers-Lourens (DA) asked the Minister of Basic Education about the current state of affairs of school libraries and what steps were been taken to address the problem (South Africa, National Assembly, 2009).	Broadening awareness of the state of public school libraries
October 2009	<i>The Report of the Task Team for the Review of the Implementation of the National Curriculum Statement of October 2009</i> presented to Minister Motshekga of the DBE makes reference to the importance of books but does not make any recommendations to this other than the provision of textbooks (South Africa, DBE, 2009). The Minister of Basic Education stated that the department had recently finalised the sixth draft policy on school libraries, <i>National Guidelines for school library services</i> (South Africa, National Assembly. 2009).	Governance <hr/> Governance
January 2010	EE published <i>We Can't Afford Not To</i> outlining the situation with regard to school libraries and costing the provision of libraries in South African public schools. The Bookery is established by EE in Cape Town to address the shortage of libraries in the short term.	Popular support for school libraries
April 2010	The Development Bank of South Africa hosted a discussion between representatives of corporate South Africa, Dept of Basic Education's national and provincial representatives and Equal Education.	Broadening awareness of the state of public school libraries
April 19 2010	Member of Parliament, Mr J.R.B. Lorimer (DA) asked if all existing libraries in primary and secondary provincial schools were "functional; and if not, (a) why not and (b) when will they become functional: if so what constitutes a functional library?" (South Africa, National Assembly, 2010, April 19).	Broadening awareness of the state of public school libraries
June 11, 2010	DBE adopted a policy on school infrastructure, <i>National Policy for an Equitable Provision of and Enabling School Physical Teaching and Learning Environment</i> (NPEP), which includes school libraries.	Governance
July 30, 2010	5,000 people fasted to highlight the seriousness of the school library situation as well as highlighting the need to lower the price of books.	Popular support for school libraries
August 2010	10,000 learners wrote postcards to government leaders as part of the EE campaign and were supported by 100 global education leaders who wrote to President Zuma.	Popular support for school libraries
August 17 2010	Minister Motshekga of DBE wrote to EE and assured them that there is 'approval for library posts.' In its <i>Action Plan 2014</i> the DBE commits itself to a 'library in every school.' (EE, 2011a, June).	Governance

Sept. 3, 2010	Member of Parliament, Dr J.C. Kloppers-Lourens (DA) asked whether steps had been taken to resource school libraries fully; if not, why not; if so, what are the plans and proposed timelines for her department to provide every school in the country with a properly equipped library and a trained school librarian? (South Africa, National Assembly. 2010, September 03).	Broadening awareness of the state of public school libraries
Feb. 16, 2011	Presentation of the <i>LIS Transformation Charter</i> by Prof. M. Nkondo on behalf of the NCLIS to the select committee on Education and Recreation after public consultations had been completed by the DAC (South Africa, DAC, 2011).	Governance
Mar. 21, 2011	20,000 learners, teachers, parents, community members and activists marched on Parliament to demand the delivery of <i>National Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure</i> by April 1, 2011, the implementation date promised by the NPEP.	Popular support for school libraries
Mar. 31, 2011	A large march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria in support of EE's campaign.	Popular support for school libraries
April, 2011	EE sent hundreds of follow-up letters to the DBE venting their frustration (EE, 2011a, June).	Popular support for school libraries
April 14 and 15, 2011	Council of Education Ministers voted against the adoption of the <i>National Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure</i> .	Governance
April 18, 2011	EE met with the <i>Accelerated School Infrastructure Delivery Initiative</i> (ASISI) which is part of the DBE who presented their plan for dealing with mud schools and infrastructure backlogs, including libraries.	Popular support for school libraries
May 12, 2011	1,300 mothers of EE members sent an open letter to Minister Motshekga in her capacity as president of the ANC Women's League.	Popular support for school libraries
June, 2011	Countrywide assessment tests administered to over 9 million pupils in public schools in February 2011 found that literacy and numeracy rates of Grade 3s and Grade 6s was between 43% (Western Cape) and 19% (Mpumalanga) with Gauteng at 30% (Mtshali and Smillie, 2011, p. 1).	Literacy rates amongst primary school pupils
June 20, 2011	Debate at Wits School of Education on <i>School Libraries in South Africa: International Debate</i> where local academics, government officials and international speakers outlined the issues faced by school libraries in South Africa.	Broadening awareness of the state of public school libraries

June 21, 2011	The Gauteng Education Department’s <i>Showcasing School Libraries</i> highlighted schools with functional libraries.	Broadening awareness of the state of public school libraries
March, 2012	The <i>National Guidelines for school library and information services</i> are adopted (South Africa, DBE, 2012a).	Governance

Table 1 shows the different issues associated with school libraries evident in the documents. These include: the status of school libraries in South Africa; the impact of apartheid on school libraries; the link between literacy and school libraries; governance; the broadening awareness of the state of public school libraries, and advocacy (evident through growing grassroots/popular support for public school libraries). We acknowledge that this is not an exhaustive list of issues. There may be others that are relevant. However, for the purposes of our research, the issues listed in Table 1 were the most prominent.

The state of school libraries in South Africa

Equal Education [EE] (2010a, p.18) referred to the School Register of Needs which in 1997 sounded a warning about the state of public school libraries when it estimated that eight out of twelve million learners did not have access to libraries. The DAC (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p.43) cited a survey done by the Human Research Council in 1999 called, The South African School Library Survey, which reported that only 32% of schools in South Africa had an on-site library. Many of these libraries were shut as there was no dedicated librarian and the teacher in charge was busy teaching. The survey noted that 50% of Independent Schools had well-equipped libraries staffed by professionals (Hart and Zinn, 2007, p.93). In 2004 a provincial survey in KwaZulu-Natal confirmed the scale of the problem when it was found that 19% of the responding 5 156 schools had a central library while 31% had a storeroom or box library (Hart and Zinn, 2007, p.93). The rest of the schools either had no library or did not respond to the question.

Zinn’s study of trained school librarians (2006, p.29) showed that in schools ranging in size from 750–1 500 learners, no school library held more than 2 000 books. The school or classroom library however, was “cited most often as the source for reading material” for the reading programme, yet the school library was “quite inadequate for a successful school reading programme”.

This finding needs to be viewed in light of the link between school libraries and literacy.

By 2007 the situation had deteriorated further nationwide (see Table 1) as the National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS) reported that only 7.23% of South African public schools had functional libraries (EE, 2010a, p.21). These libraries were mainly in former Model C schools. To put this into perspective, of the 24,979 public schools in South Africa an “estimated 79.3% did not have any form of library infrastructure, meaning that only 20.7% had a room available for library purposes. Broken down further, 13.47% had a library space without resources, while only 7.23% had a functioning library” (EE, 2010a, p.22).

In May 2011 the NEIMS report did not show any significant improvements in the state of school libraries. While 21% of 24,793 schools had libraries, only 7% (5,252 schools) had stocked libraries and 79% (19,541 schools) had no library at all (South Africa, DBE. 2011a, p.23). These numbers are not evenly spread amongst the provinces as can be seen from Table 2. The two provinces, Gauteng and Western Cape, with the most school libraries were also the two provinces with the “higher number of fee-charging former Model C schools” (EE, 2010a, p. 22).

Table 2: Percentage of public schools with stocked libraries in each province

Province	2007 (EE, 2010a:22)	2011 (South Africa, DBE, 2011a:23)
Eastern Cape	2.9	3
Free State	8.9	9
Gauteng	18.4	19
KwaZulu-Natal	6.1	6
Limpopo	2.4	2
Mpumalanga	6.2	7
Northern Cape	11.8	12
North West	6.4	6
Western Cape	25.3	26

In her written answer to a question in parliament, Question 1188, concerning what constitutes a 'functional library' the Minister of Basic Education (South Africa, National Assembly, 2010, p.:2) listed elements such as enriching reading experiences and the development of learners' skills as independent learners; provision of resources for teachers and learners; support of teaching and learning; extending the curriculum; skilled staff with dedicated time in the library; up-to-date, attractive and suitable resources in a range of media; adequate funding to ensure ongoing maintenance and development; pleasant and stimulating environments; regularly monitored to assess their use as well as being guided by a whole school library and information development plan.

The IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto (2006) states that school libraries must have sufficient funding for qualified staff, resources, technologies and facilities. Furthermore, the school library should offer resources and learning experiences for children to become critical thinkers as well as "effective users of information in all formats and media" (IFLA/UNESCO, 2006). The DAC acknowledges that in reality South African public school libraries cannot be deemed functional, considering the many challenges they face (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p.40). These include the virtual non- existence of space, funding for reading, learning resources and staff. The absence of a national policy was a problem as well as the lack of capacity of the provincial school library support services. A further problem related to the misconceptions about the links between resource-based learning and the role of the library and the fact that the internet was seen as an alternative to the library which was perceived to house outdated collections of books. In reality however, the White Paper on e-Education reported that many schools lacked basic ICT infrastructure (South Africa, DoE, 2004) and a study done by Stilwell (2009, p.3) showed that if schools had computers they were not used "to generate knowledge or to integrate ICT across the curriculum," but were used mainly for administrative purposes.

Other challenges (South Africa, DAC, 2009, pp.14-16) faced by library and information services generally were the low status of the library profession and the fact that too few librarians are being developed at a tertiary level to meet present and future needs. There also appeared to be a lack of recognition of the role of the library and librarians as agents of change and development. Bot (2005, p.6) noted as a "consequence of historical backlogs and inequalities, exacerbated by the rapid expansion in schooling, there are considerable shortages in infrastructure and a large number of schools are poorly equipped to provide an adequate standard of education".

It is clear from the state of public school libraries, where only a small percentage of schools have functioning libraries, that books and information are not available and accessible to all South African children. As a result school libraries cannot be referred to as transformation spaces in our educational landscape as there are simply not enough functioning libraries to make an impact.

The impact of apartheid on school libraries

The Department of Arts and Culture and the Department of Education (since 2009 the Department of Basic Education) have been trying to redress the inequalities of the past, when the white child was favoured in terms of educational resources. Dick (2002, p.19) observes that in 1953 the Bantu Education Act “entrenched an inferior education for black South Africans under the apartheid Native Affairs Department,” which led to the “purge or closure of many existing black school libraries”. Stadler (1991) notes that this is attributable to the apartheid ethos, in terms of which “...black people were destined to be ‘un-thinking cogs’ in the labour machine, in no need of libraries” (Hart and Zinn, 2007, p.91). According to the Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Western Cape, five times the amount of money was spent on a white child compared to a black child during the apartheid era (O’Connell as cited by Pressly, 2011, p.19). This translated into serious inequalities in school infrastructure.

It must be acknowledged that much has been done in recent years to improve school infrastructure: e.g. in the period from 1996 - 2010 the number of schools without water decreased from 9,000 to 1,700 and the number of schools without electricity decreased from 15,000 to 2,800 (South Africa, DBE, 2010a, p.32). But despite efforts by the government to improve conditions, the legacy of apartheid has not been easy to erase, particularly in poor rural areas (Lotz-Sisitka and Janse van Rensburg, 2000, p.30). They cite Gordon (1999) who found that 57% of learners in South Africa attended rural schools which were “characterised by gross inequalities and affected by numerous issues associated with the previous government’s apartheid policies”.

Bloch contends that conditions and outcomes were worse for the mostly black learners attending rural and township schools, where 80% of schools were

dysfunctional. It was in these schools that the majority of learners failed to achieve the outcomes and levels of achievement that were considered standard for each grade (2009). A similar view is evident in Van der Berg’s research into poverty and education, which showed that historically white and Indian schools still outperformed the black and coloured schools at the primary school level, showing that “the school system was not yet systematically able to overcome inherited socio-economic disadvantage, and poor schools least so” (2006, p.2). Table 3, showing literacy rates amongst Grade 6 pupils in the Western Cape (EE, 2010b, p.3; EE, 2010c, p.2), illustrates this point:

Table 3: Percentage (%) of Grade 6 learners literate at the standard level of Grade 6

	2003	2005	2007	2009
CED (former ‘White’ schools)	82.9	86.9	No disaggregated results	Disaggregated results withheld from the public
HOR (former ‘Coloured’ schools)	26.6	35.5		
DET (former ‘Black’ schools)	3.7	4.7		
Aggregated result for all	35	42.1	44.8	48.6

It is a concern that after 15 years of transition to democracy in South Africa, the Minister of Education (South Africa, National Assembly, 2009) still referred to the “historical neglect of such services particularly for schools serving the poorest communities”. In 2010, in answer to Question 1188 tabled in parliament concerning the status of primary and secondary school libraries, the Minister of Education once again linked the absence of functional libraries in schools to the “past inequitable resource provisioning” (South Africa, National Assembly, 2010).

It must be noted that education receives an increasingly large portion of the state’s budget each year:

- In the 2005/2006 to the 2008/2009 budget year the average amount of money spent on education was 17.7% representing the largest

item of government expenditure (South Africa, DBE, 2010d, p.12; Appel, 2009, p.1).

- In the 2010/2011 budget education was awarded 20% of budgeted expenditure (Vollgraaff, 2011, p.7).

The fact that the amount of money allocated to education by the national government as a percentage of budget has been growing demonstrates the will on the part of government to provide a quality education for all. Despite this increased expenditure the inequalities due to past policy have not been redressed (Hart and Zinn, 2007). O'Connell notes that spending across all age groups is now equal but represented 30% of the previous spending on a white child; it was not possible to grow the economy to the extent that "the spending previously spent on a white child could be applied across the board" (Pressly, 2011). The authors of the Library and Information Services (LIS) Transformation Charter (South Africa, DAC, 2009) commenting on Mpumalanga's budget for 2009/2010, noted that the spending of R34 per learner was not enough to meet international standards of ten library items per scholar as set by the IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto of 2006. It would require R100 per learner to meet these targets (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p.47), and EE has acknowledged that given the situation in South Africa three books per learner is more realistic (2010a).

The present government and provincial education departments need to take responsibility for their inability to redress the inequalities in school libraries in the system. Towards the late 1990s the government attempted to cut costs, and books and stationery were "amongst the first to go" (Lotz-Sisitka and Janse van Rensburg, 2000, p.30). School libraries in South Africa have suffered a "serious decline since 1994" when library expenditure fell under Media Collections (Lotz-Sisitka and Janse van Rensburg, 2000, p. 42). These authors give examples of this:

- In the 1997/98 budget the Mpumalanga Education Department spent nothing and Gauteng spent R906.00 of their Media Collections budget.
- In Mpumalanga many good school libraries were closed due to "rationalisation and redeployment".

This is supported by the findings of the Transformation Charter (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p. 42) where a member of staff in the Eastern Cape Education department's school library support services reported that between 1994 and 2004 "no attention was paid" to school libraries; there were no school library posts and only the ex-model C schools had libraries.

The authors of the Transformation Charter pointed out the irony of the National Norms and Standards for School Funding Act of 1998 which would not interfere unreasonably with parents' discretion as to how to spend their own resources on their children's education (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p. 42). It had not helped government's redress strategy as the funding provisions in the Act favoured the libraries or library spaces in those schools "...patronised by middle-class and wealthy parents". In Gauteng the 200 functioning school libraries were all found to be in 'wealthy' areas with the school librarians being paid by the schools' governing bodies (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p.42). In reality, as Hart and Zinn stated (2007, p.90), school libraries "continue to be an indicator of class advantage".

In 2008 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OCED] (p.87) reported that our school libraries are in "poor shape", despite a lucrative (R9.6 million) commercial market in supplementary non-book materials such as wall charts mostly in the cities. The Transformation Charter (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p.55) highlighted another problem area with regard to expenditure: the differing approaches of the provincial governments, independent schools and ex-Model C schools (the last two being the only schools with budgets for school libraries). The trend was seen by the authors as *ad hoc* and unsustainable, with serious implications for public school libraries as there were no dedicated school librarian posts as well as "no strategic interventions for the uptake of ICT in school libraries and unwieldy tendering processes that delay provision".

Zinn (2006, p.21) observes that "by 2000, as specialist posts were abolished at schools, the training of school librarians trickled to zero". The fact that there is no budget for school librarian posts (Thomson, 2010, p.1) has implications for the service provided by the school library, as the responsibility tends to fall on members of staff who are full time teachers in the poorer no fee or low fee schools. This problem is highlighted in a recent COSATU research paper that states: "without dedicated librarians books are not enough. Even though there might be books in a school these are locked up in store rooms or are not used because educators do not know how to use them" (EE, 2010a, p.14). The

Transformation Charter (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p.47) also recorded anecdotal evidence of unopened boxes of books in schools and claimed that “there has to be someone in the school to manage the resources and to champion their productive use”.

The written reply to a question raised in parliament (South Africa, National Assembly, 2010, April 19), from the Minister of Basic Education about the steps the government is taking to provide for trained school librarians was vague and disappointing; “the provision of teacher librarians will have to be made within the context of broad post provisioning according to priority needs in the system” (South Africa, National Assembly, 2010 September). Even more disappointing is the fact that there appear to be no long-term plans for school library posts: the Action Plan 2014: Towards the realisation of schooling 2025 makes no provision for school librarian posts and librarian training, which is “crucial to providing functioning libraries” (EE, 2010d, p.14).

Several provincial library support services had provided schools with library materials as a result of public schools having no budget to spend on school library services (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p. 46). This was done on an *ad hoc* basis with amounts varying from nothing in several provinces to R5 million in the Eastern Cape for 2007, and R40 million in KZN between 2005 and 2007 (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p. 46).

Stilwell (2009, p.2) citing Zinn (2006), pointed out yet another problem in equipping school libraries. This relates to changes to the funding formulae for school library materials, which meant that the funds were “no longer ring-fenced”. The term used by government, ‘learning and teaching support materials’ (LTSM) includes “textbooks, books, charts, models, computer hardware and software, televisions, video recorders, videotapes, home economics equipment, science laboratory equipment and musical instruments”(South Africa, DBE, 2010c, p.4). The wording is too vague and the actual percentage of money that should be allocated to library materials is not specified (South Africa, DBE, 2012a, p.25). Gauteng for example ensured that 10% of the budget was reserved for this purpose (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p.47).

As stated in the Education for All report on South Africa, “while significant progress has been made towards the realisation of the right to basic education, a greater effort is required to make further education more accessible.

Moreover, much more is required to improve the quality of education provided” (South Africa, DBE, 2010d, p.10). The result is that by 2012 the issue of access to a school library for all children has still not been adequately addressed.

The link between literacy and school libraries

The concept of literacy has changed and developed over the past 50 years and now includes competencies in the basics (reading, writing and calculation) as well as in information and technology (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2006). Although the definition of literacy has changed it is significant to note that literacy has always included reading. An information literate person according to the American Library Association (1989) is able to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information."

South Africa kept up with international trends with regard to information literacy with Curriculum 2005 (1996) and later, the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS), (South Africa, DoE, 2002), which placed information skills very firmly as a critical outcome of learning. The 2002 RNCS describes the ‘desired learner’ as one who has these skills amongst others and lists seven critical outcomes and five developmental outcomes in the South Africa Qualifications Act (1995), some of these emphasising literacy and information literacy skills in particular.

This outcome was “library friendly” in “both its ethos and its pedagogies” (Hart, 2006, p.77) as the need for information literacy education was “widely accepted to be a specific mission of school librarianship” (Hart and Zinn, 2007, p.89). But the Transformation Charter (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p.40) observes that there is a “lack of appreciation of the links” between what is acknowledged as a ‘resource-based curriculum’ and school libraries.

Hart (2006, p.77) notes the impact of the increase in project work as a result of these outcomes on public libraries. Due to a lack of resources in their own schools learners have had to use public libraries in the afternoons, and Hart’s quantitative study in 2002 (2006, p.78) documented “the unmanageably large numbers and long queues of children at the photocopiers”.

Literacy is seen as both a right in itself and a means of achieving other rights: as “literacy is a key outcome of education, it is difficult to separate the right to literacy from the right to education or the benefits of literacy from those of education” (UNESCO, 2006, p.135). In 2002, UNESCO declared 2003-2012 the United Nations Literacy Decade and passed Resolution 56/116 placing literacy at the heart of lifelong learning, in terms of which literacy was seen as “crucial to the acquisition, by every child, youth and adult, of essential life skills that enable them to address the challenges they can face in life, and represents an essential step in basic education, which is an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century” (UNESCO, 2006, p.155). Their report on Sub-Saharan Africa (p. 1) notes that literacy is still a right denied to many in the region, which, at less than 60%, has one of the lowest adult literacy rates in the world. South Africa’s adult literacy rates stand at 78% (South Africa, DBE, 2010d, p.74).

Pretorius (2005, p. 790) showed that quantitative studies by the University of South Africa, between 1998 and 2001, of the reading abilities of undergraduate students demonstrated a relationship between reading ability and academic performance. The students who failed had “problems constructing meaning during reading. This limits their understanding of print-based material, and hence their difficulty in constructing new knowledge in the learning context” (Pretorius, 2005, p.807). This was supported by a study of South African teachers’ reading competences by Bertram (2006), which found that a third of teachers enrolled in a distance education programme in a SA university were reading ordinary academic text at frustration level, and that there was a strong correlation between reading competences and academic achievement.

In 2000 the review of Curriculum 2005 found that the new curriculum was faring well in formerly white schools because they were better resourced (Hart and Zinn, 2007, p.100). Hart concurred and stated that there were good examples of information literacy programmes centred in good school libraries and resource centres where learners created knowledge using various sources of print material. These examples are to be found almost always in independent schools or those schools that have been historically advantaged, such as the former Model C schools (2007, p. 3). This means that schools that serve poor communities in South Africa cannot afford a library or a qualified librarian and as a result find themselves at a disadvantage when it comes to implementing the very curriculum that was designed to redress past inequalities in education.

By 2009, Outcomes Based Education, which was introduced to support Curriculum 2005, was perceived as problematic, and another review of the curriculum was undertaken (South Africa, DBE, 2011b, p.4). One of the recommendations by a Ministerial Committee related to the quality of textbooks and the need for other learning and teaching material (LTSM) to be centralised at national level.

Systemic evaluations by the DoE of Grade 3 and 6 learners in the fields of literacy and numeracy painted a bleak picture of learner achievement in reading and mathematics. In 2001, Grade 3 learners achieved an average score of 39% for reading comprehension and 30% for numeracy, whilst Grade 6 learners in 2004 achieved 38% in language and 27% in mathematics (South Africa, DBE, 2008). The situation has not improved as the literacy and numeracy results in 2007 “were worse, with highs of 48% and 49% in Western Cape and lows of 29% and 24% in Limpopo” (South Africa, DBE, 2010d, p.35). The downward trend continued, as reflected in the large scale February 2011 assessment tests, Annual National Assessments (ANA), which found that literacy and numeracy rates of Grade 3s and Grade 6s were between 43% in the Western Cape and 19% in Mpumalanga (Mtshali and Smillie, 2011, p.1), with the best provincial figure being 46% for Grade 3 literacy in the Western Cape (South Africa, DBE, 2011c, p.6). These results were “well below what can be considered acceptable” (South Africa, DBE, 2011c, p.6) and reflected the continuing failure of the vast majority of South African primary schools to provide their learners with the fundamental literacy skills in the earliest grades.

The DBE also acknowledged that the poor performance of the schooling system as a whole was “brought to the fore each year in unsatisfactory Grade 12 examination results which reflect a serious under-representation of, in particular, African and Coloured learners, especially in subjects such as mathematics and physical science which are linked to critical career opportunities” (South Africa, DBE, 2010a, Part B, p.4). South Africa has participated in four comparative studies which measure school quality:

- In the second study, done by the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ II) between 1994-2004, of the achievements of mathematics and literacy amongst Grade 6 learners in east and southern Africa, South Africa came 9th out of 14 countries. 49.9% of our learners

were not able to understand the meaning of basic written information (EE, 2010a, p.5).

- South Africa's Grade 8 learners achieved the lowest average test scores in 1999 (out of 41 countries) and 2003 (out of 50 countries) in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), (South Africa, DBE, 2008).
- In 2006 in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) our Grade 4 and 5 learners achieved the lowest scores out of 45 countries tested by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (South Africa, DBE, 2008).
- The third study by the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ III) was not particularly encouraging as it showed that although by 2007 our Grade 6 learners had shown some improvement in reading and mathematics, the change was minimal (Makuwa, 2010, p.4; South Africa, DBE, 2010d, p.47). Less affluent countries such as Botswana, Swaziland, Kenya and Tanzania performed better than South Africa (South Africa, DBE, 2010d, p.47).

These studies showed that South Africa did not compare favourably to the rest of the world as well as other neighbouring African countries poorer and less developed than us. Taylor summed this up when he concluded from these studies that "South Africa is not getting value for money from its public school system" (2007, p.2).

There is a relationship between the lack of public school libraries and the poor results in reading that have been recorded in three of the studies above. As McKenzie (2010, p.1) insists, a thriving library programme was "central to the success of a school's reading and learning programmes". Schools where learner outcomes were poor were nearly all schools that were to be found in deprived areas, and it must be noted that these are the very schools that lack "the most basic resources to teach literacy and numeracy, or... have very few resources to make any difference in the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom" (South Africa, DBE, 2010d, p.64). This was evident in Pretorius's study (2010, p. 73) which showed that making books accessible to learners

was a “basic requirement for reading development yet one that is typically absent in poor schools”.

OECD (2008, p.187) makes the link between poor literacy rates amongst our underprivileged children in primary schools, mostly in the rural areas, and the lack of school or local libraries in these areas “despite 40% of teaching time being allocated to literacy during the Foundation Phase (grades R-3), and 25% to Language Learning Areas (including literacy) during the Intermediate Phase (grades 4-6)”.

EE (2010a, p.45) states that the majority of our learners are not learning to read because of the “simple inaccessibility of books”. This view is supported by Taylor (2002, p.14), who makes a strong case for reading and books. He argues that “progression in school learning is essentially about learning to read and write at successively higher levels of cognitive complexity while the different school subjects represent distinct areas of specialised knowledge and language. It follows that the quality of learning at each level crucially depends on the presence and productive use of good textbooks and other reading and writing materials”. Pretorius (2005, p.793) noted in her qualitative study of the first-year psychology students at Unisa who struggled to read, that they all came from township primary and secondary schools in Gauteng. She explained that “none of the students had much exposure to book reading outside of their school textbooks, none had been taught any reading or comprehension strategies at school, none of them went to libraries or read books for leisure, and none of them came from families in which the reading of books magazines or newspapers played any significant role on a daily basis”. A later study (Pretorius, 2010, p.73) suggested that when poor schools are helped by making books available together with the constant motivation of learners to read, reading levels improve.

The DBE is aware of the link between reading and books, as can be seen by this statement in the Report of the Task Team for the Review of the Implementation of the National Curriculum Statement: “providing a print rich environment, especially for children who come from homes that lack books and reading material, is critical to the development of the ability to read well” (South Africa, DBE, 2009, p.52). The latest version of the national curriculum (the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement [CAPS]) which is being phased at present places an emphasis on independent reading in English Home Language in the Intermediate Phase (South Africa, DBE, 2012b, p.15), and in Social Sciences children need “access to a variety of reading books and

visual material suitable for the grade” (South Africa, DBE, 2012c, p.8). It is evident that the role of a school library is as important as ever.

Governance of school libraries

Many aspects of governance have an impact on public school libraries. These include lack of policy, closing of the School Libraries Unit, unclear mandates between different government agencies with influence over school libraries, the lack of will by policy makers, as well as the *ad hoc* nature of interventions by government to provide solutions to the crisis in public school libraries.

Lack of a national school policy

Several draft school library policies have been circulated since 1997 by the DoE but none has been adopted. Hart (2006, p.76) cites Karlsson, who in 2003 referred to the process as “a slow and discontinuous process”. The Transformation Charter (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p. 43) saw the lack of national policy with unambiguous guidelines as stalling the progress of school libraries and reported that although some provinces (KZN, Free State and Mpumalanga) have developed their own policies there are limitations with these initiatives, especially with regard to the “provision of school librarian posts”.

In 2009, the Department of Education (South Africa, National Assembly, 2009) finalised guidelines called National Guidelines for School Library Services, as part of a broader strategy to provide practical guidance to provinces, districts and schools on how to ensure access to library services for all schools. In reply to Question 1188 by a member of parliament (See Table 1 April 19, 2010) the Minister of Basic Education wrote that this would be achieved by:

1. Roles and responsibilities on the four levels of government – national, provincial, district and school.
2. Development model options included – mobile libraries, cluster libraries, classroom libraries, centralised school libraries and school community libraries.

3. Also “physical infrastructure, staffing and training, administration and management, resource collection, programmes and activities, e.g. an information literacy and reading promotion programme, marketing and advocacy strategies and finally monitoring and evaluation plans to assist schools in ensuring that their goals regarding library and information services are achieved” (South Africa, National Assembly, 2010).

This was a disappointing response to the issue of a national school library policy. At the debate held in Johannesburg, School libraries in South Africa: international debate (2011), Zinn contended that these guidelines represented a downgraded or slimmed down version of a national policy document and suggested that guidelines would not pressurise schools into creating libraries.

Closure of the School Libraries Unit in the National Department of Education

The School Libraries Unit was closed in 2002 (EE, 2010, p.18). Stakeholders are calling for the re-establishment of the national school library unit within the Department of Basic Education and for this unit to draw up implementation plans for policy (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p.44). The implications for policy development and enforcement are worrying, as Hart and Zinn (2007, p.98) argue, because “without a national coordinating office, there is little or no direction and provinces cannot insist that schools ‘ring-fence’ their budget”.

Differing mandates between government agencies responsible for school libraries

The Transformation Charter (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p.48) makes reference to the problem that collaboration between departments was being hindered by the fact that school libraries and public libraries fell under different national and provincial government departments (DBE and DAC respectively), but at the same time both departments shared a role in education. Hart and Zinn (2007, p.94) note that a few school library support services have had to relocate from different departments such as the DAC and were often “hamstrung” by being placed in “inappropriate departments within education, for example sport”.

It took 19 months for the Transformation Charter (Table 1 - February 16, 2011) to be presented to the Select Committee on Education (South Africa, DAC, 2011), as public consultations, interviews with scholars and practitioners and the consultation of available academic literature were only completed in February 2011. This was a long time considering the urgency of the issues that the DAC's Transformation Charter and the DBE sought to address. Significantly, at the presentation there was a call for reform and changes to the way libraries and educational institutions conduct their business. The lack of a national school library policy on norms and standards as discussed earlier was identified as the core challenge (South Africa, DAC, 2011). Other challenges were the overlapping mandates across government sectors of the DBE, and the DAC as well as the different tiers of government concerned with libraries (South Africa, DAC, 2011; South Africa, DAC, 2009).

Yet the development of standards and policy for school libraries falls under the Department of Basic Education. Stilwell (2009, p.1) maintains that the actual provision of school library facilities is "a competence shared by the National Education Department, the provincial authorities and the school governing body". The 1996 Constitution determined the responsibilities of our different tiers of government, with national departments being responsible for laying down policy and the provinces mandated to implement policy and administer schooling (Hart and Zinn, 2007, p.93). All the provinces had a school library service in their education departments, whose influence in reality was "constrained by their rather low status within their parent education departments and the small size of their staffs" (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p.45). The exception was KwaZulu-Natal, the only province whose department had directorate status. Hart and Zinn (2007, p.93) have identified a further problem, the situation of school library advisors who were "placed in decentralised district offices, [and] report on a day-to-day basis to the district office's manager, who might have little understanding of the educational role of school libraries". All the provinces were battling to cope with the large number of schools "under their wings" (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p.45).

Lack of will by policy makers

Stilwell (2009) notes that until recently there were no champions for the library and information sector's role in education. According to Zinn (2006, p. 23), since 2001 there has been a "void at national education level, with

nobody taking the lead for the school library fraternity. Zinn (2006) cites Karlsson, who referred to this oversight as the department's "blind spot". The point was illustrated in the Western Cape, when the provincial education department offered solutions to the poor literacy levels amongst Grade 3 learners which did not include a school library (Zinn, 2006, p.23). Hoskins (2006, p.63) cites Boekhorst and Britz's study (2004), which looked at information literacy at school level. The authors concluded that the role that school libraries have to play in enhancing information literacy was "currently undervalued".

In stark contrast to the two examples above, the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education acknowledged the importance of the school library when affirming in 2003 that the school library was the "heart of the school and can play a vital role in helping the education system to achieve its goals" (Hoskins 2006, p.61).

Hart and Zinn (2007, p.101) argue that the DoE's lack of response to the librarians' submissions by the School Library and Youth Services Interest Group (SLYSIG) in 2005 (Hart and Zinn, 2007, p.96) on the RNCS and the failure to institute a national school library policy represents a 'lack of will' to "recognise the role of school libraries in the curriculum". Hart and Zinn (2007, p.94) point to another "stumbling block", the reluctance of school governing bodies in charge of schools at a local level to "recognise the need for school libraries". Hart and Zinn (2007, p.101) contend that there appears to be a "fundamental lack of understanding among educators and policy-makers of the role of a school library", and that this is true of educators across the board. Teachers, curriculum advisors and educational managers are "not convinced that libraries are beneficial and spend entire 'learning support materials' budgets on textbooks and photocopy paper" (Hart and Zinn, 2007, p.101).

A review of the relevant literature revealed that research shows that libraries have an impact on student achievement. In the light of this, and given the "evidence of the success of the new curriculum in well resourced schools", the lack of will is "puzzling" (Chisholm, cited by Hart and Zinn, 2007, p.98). It would appear that our policy makers in the education department were either not convinced or did not have the will to implement a national school library policy until Minister Pandor publicly made "the connection between the development of school libraries and improved literacy levels" in 2005 (Zinn, 2006, p.23). But Pandor is no longer the Minister of Basic Education.

Ad hoc nature of government interventions

Taylor (2002) makes reference to the systemic reform of education systems based on the need to align and mediate accountability. He points to large scale systemic reform in the United States and the United Kingdom in particular, where the largest and most successful initiative was launched by the British government in 1997. Known as the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NLNS), targets were set by the Minister of improving the average numeracy scores from 54% to 75% and literacy scores from 57% to 80% for all 11 year olds by 2002. By 2000 literacy had improved to 75% and numeracy to 72%. The success of the programme was attributed to the fact that there was a national plan setting targets, actions, responsibilities and deadlines; a great deal of money was spent especially on poorer schools and on books; the expectation that every child would be exposed to maths daily and a literacy hour daily; teacher training and ongoing professional training of administrators, principals and teachers to enable “every primary school teacher to understand and be able to use best practice in teaching literacy and numeracy”, as well as regular external monitoring and evaluation (Taylor, 2002, p.7).

The DBE has played a role in trying to improve literacy by developing a culture of reading through several initiatives which do not include providing a school library. In comparison to the NLNS, the department’s literacy policy seems to be piecemeal and without real accountability. These initiatives include: developing and finalising a National Reading Strategy which was sent to all schools; developing a Teacher’s Toolkit in all 11 languages; sending packs of books to a number of poor schools, suitable for Grades 1- 3, in a campaign known as 100 Storybooks Project, and deploying mobile library buses in all provinces (South Africa, DAC, 2009). Bloch (2010, p.6) refers to other initiatives by the DBE to expand library resources to schools and learners. These included the Drop All and Read campaign which has provided 30 000 learners and parents with books in all languages. In 2006 the Quids-Up programme provided 4402 poor schools with classroom library collections. The Foundations for Learning Programme recommended that schools set aside time to read every day, and the partnership with the Sunday Times aimed to put 500 000 books in 2600 schools through a storybook campaign. The DBE produced the mass literacy programme, Kha ri Gude, which was recognised internationally as one of its achievements to date (South Africa, DBE, 2011b). In 2011 standardised national workbooks for

Grades 1 to 6 were introduced to “improve classroom practices” (South Africa, DBE, 2011c, p.5).

The draft school library policies proposed several school library models, the implication being that providing every school with a library was not possible (South Africa, DAC, 2009). Options included classroom collections, mobile libraries, container libraries or clustering schools around one library facility or dual use school /public libraries. The DBE saw that the strengthening of partnerships with organisations that provide library and information services was key to their library and information services strategy, with its role being the provision of guiding principles for these partnerships. Bloch (2010, p. 9) reported that among the partnerships already in place were the Vodacom Foundation, which provided 50 mobile library units to primary schools in Northern Cape, Free State, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal. In 2009, ten mobile library units were provided to the Quids-Up schools of the Eastern Cape. The South African Primary Education Support Initiative provided 21 mobile libraries and 12 more were expected by mid 2010; TSB Publishers undertook to plan, build and equip ten libraries per year over the next ten years starting in 2011; A Book for Every Child Foundation agreed to establish 15 libraries in each province, using available space in the schools.

The provision of material resources to schools is an encouraging start to solving the problems of literacy in South Africa, but is a long way from addressing the need for a systemic approach of the sort evidenced in the United Kingdom. The issue of who teaches reading and information literacy skills is not addressed and one questions whether these resources will be optimally used without the use of a trained professional.

Of concern is the fact that school libraries are not seen as the first solution, as was demonstrated by the response to the Equal Education’s campaign to provide functioning libraries to all schools. Ms Hope Mokgathe, DoE spokesperson, stated in The Teacher supplement of the Mail and Guardian that: “A stand-alone library for every school would be unattainable, given the historical neglect of this... the department has focused on trying to ensure access to resources in a practical and implementable way. This involves creating and improving classroom library collections, mobile libraries, resources for schools in community libraries and stand-alone libraries that serve a cluster of schools” (EE, 2009, December).

In answer to a question in parliament about the state of school libraries and what government was doing about it, the Minister of Basic Education (South Africa, National Assembly, 2009) reported that 2000 stand-alone libraries had been built since 2000, and library services to schools included the provision of: classroom library collections, 21 mobile libraries serving just fewer than 500 schools with no access to libraries, the provision of library books to schools with inappropriate or inadequate library collections and the supplementing of school collections in community libraries.

As far as infrastructure is concerned, the DBE appears to be in a state of perpetual planning, as evidenced by the manner in which the issue of school libraries is being dealt with. The policy National Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure of 2008 stated that a school library was part of a learning space every school must have (South Africa, DAC, 2009, p.43). In June 2010 the DBE adopted a policy on school infrastructure which included school libraries, the National Policy for an Equitable Provision of and Enabling School Physical Teaching and Learning Environment (NPEP).

Meanwhile Goal 20 of the Action Plan to 2014: Towards the realisation of schooling 2025 as published on 2 August 2010 provided for libraries or media centres to be built in schools with the commitment by government “to promote mini-libraries within classrooms which can assist in giving learners access to materials until the school has a fully-equipped library” (South Africa, DBE, 2010a, p.28). Goal 20 (p.28) also indicated that new standards indicated “what kind of library or media centre a school should have, depending on whether it is a primary or secondary school, and depending on the total enrolment of the school”. On 14 April 2011 the Council of Education Ministers voted against the adoption of the National Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure. A few days later, 18 April 2011, a new plan, The Accelerated School Infrastructure Delivery Initiative (ASISI) was presented as the DBE’s plan to deal with mud schools and infrastructure backlogs.

Again the DBE’s approach to infrastructure planning seems makeshift and there has been no systemic approach to tackling the infrastructure issues. It must be acknowledged however that Part B of Action Plan to 2014: Towards the realisation of schooling 2025 represented an admission by the DBE (South Africa, DBE, 2010a) of the need for long-term planning to “discourage *ad hoc* and fragmented planning, to encourage everyone to think of the long-term implications of decisions taken, or not taken, now, and to provide inspiration in our current work by means of a clear picture of where we want to take

South Africa's schools". An encouraging sign was that the Delivery Agreement (South Africa, DBE, 2010b, p. 4) represented a "major overhaul of government's planning systems," and was linked to Action Plan to 2014 which focused on 12 outcomes to achieve quality education, with each outcome having a limited number of measurable outputs linked to a set of activities aimed at achieving targets and contributing to the outcomes. The Delivery Agreement has introduced a measure of accountability by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of various delivery partners (South Africa, DBE, 2010b).

In its comment on Action Plan 2014: Towards the realisation of schooling 2025, EE supported this new initiative and welcomed the plan as a "progressive attempt to coordinate efforts at addressing the crises that affect our education system" (EE, 2010d, p. 17). EE also welcomed the emphasis on proper monitoring and evaluation but added a condition that should be heeded by government, namely the setting of clear targets with regard to the provision of learning materials and school infrastructure. At issue is the fact that although clear targets have been set for the improvement of average language and mathematics scores of learners between now and 2025, there are no "clear targets for improving access to the learning materials" such as libraries, computers and better school infrastructure (EE, 2010d, p. 8-9).

Broadening awareness of school libraries

The Review of Curriculum 2005 in 2002 made a connection between student achievement and resources, and this was highlighted in the CREATE Education Roadmap in 2009. Among other initiatives depicted in Table 1 is the discussion hosted by the Development Bank of South Africa (2010), School Libraries – where do we go? The various representatives of the DBE, EE and corporate South Africa have highlighted the state of public school libraries and brought the issue to the attention of the wider audience in South Africa. Questions in parliament in 2009 and 2010 (Table 1) have also spotlighted the issue as have the two international debates on school libraries in South Africa held in Johannesburg and Cape Town in 2011. As the DBE (2010b, p.14) acknowledged; "access by learners to materials beyond their core set of textbooks and workbooks, in particular access to a school library and information through the internet" is much more in the open as a result of the "considerable attention recently in the public debates".

Advocacy

Two groups have represented the interests of school libraries in South Africa in particular. The School Library and Youth Services Interest Group in the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) is one group. This is a voluntary organisation whose members “have engaged in national and regional advocacy for library services wherever the opportunity arises” (Walker, 2007, p.15).

The other organisation, Equal Education (EE), is a movement described by Dugger of the New York Times (2009, p.1) as a “quintessentially South African answer to transform schools into engines of opportunity”. Founded in 2008, EE involves learners, parents, teachers and community members working towards “quality and equality in South African education through analysis and activism” (EE, 2010a, p.7). EE has successfully campaigned for the repair of broken windows in a school, and against late coming in Khayelitsha schools in the Western Cape (Toffoli, 2011, p.1). EE has also championed the cause of school libraries by launching a Campaign for School Libraries (1 School, 1 Library, 1 Librarian) in 2009. The struggle for school libraries represents the group’s “first attempt to tackle a national issue”(Dugger, 2009, p.2).

From the timeline (Table 1) it can be seen that the efforts by EE to heighten awareness of the plight of school libraries has led to a peaceful and active campaign over the past three years, working towards “ensuring that the government provides every school with a library; a trained, full-time librarian or library administrator; adequate shelving; computer facilities; 3 books per learner; as well as annual funding to service each library by ring-fencing 10% of the Learning Teaching Support Materials (LTSM) allocation” (EE, 2010a, p.8). This research shows that school libraries have a social advantage, as 50% of learners identified school libraries as quiet and stable environments in which to do homework and study for exams. They also offered access to books in communities where homes did not have books.

For EE the key demand was the need for the DBE to provide a national policy on school libraries and then to develop an implementation plan stating that the legal framework already exists in Section 5A of the South African School Act which “empowers the Minister of Basic Education to prescribe minimum

norms and standards for school infrastructure, including that there ‘must’ be ‘a library’” along with full-time librarians (EE, 2010a, p.9).

Conclusion

We have explained how an analysis of newspaper and magazine articles (print and internet sources), blogs, research reports, marches for school libraries, debates, questions in parliament, as well as government responses, helped us to illuminate the contestations and problems facing public school libraries in South Africa at present. We contend that the most fundamental issue that needs urgent attention is that of governance. As a matter of urgency we need to re-establish the national library service unit, finalise and implement a national school policy on libraries, resolve which government department has the mandate for school libraries, and implement government initiated and driven strategic actions that address systemic issues. Without effective governance, school libraries will not play the meaningful role that they should in achieving quality education. It is unacceptable that schools serving poor communities that cannot afford a library will continue to be at a disadvantage when implementing a resource-rich national curriculum that was designed to redress past inequalities in education. On a more positive note, it is encouraging to note the increasingly strong advocacy and activist roles being played by organisations such as Equal Education and The School Library and Youth Services Interest Group in the Library and Information Association of South Africa.

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Margie Paton-Ash
Di Wilmot
Department of Education
Rhodes University

margiepash@gmail.com
d.wilmot@ru.ac.za