

Art. # 1042, 10 pages, <http://www.sajournalofeducation.co.za>

## Issues and challenges facing school libraries in selected primary schools in Gauteng Province, South Africa

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There is no national policy for school libraries which compels school governing bodies and principals to have a library in their schools. It is thus not surprising that in 2011, only 21% of state schools had libraries, only 7% had stocked libraries and 79% of schools had no library at all (Department of Basic Education (DBE) Republic of South Africa, 2011a:23). This article forms part of a broader qualitative study which investigated 10 primary schools in Gauteng Province, South Africa that had libraries, or were in the process of setting up a library, with the intention of providing a rich description of the issues and challenges facing these schools. The 10 schools used in this study were chosen on the basis of their location and fee structures. They represented the full continuum of fees within the state structure. In this article, we discuss three core categories of predicaments faced by primary school libraries. These were resourcing the library, operating the library and the role of the library. Our main contention is that school libraries are not playing an effective role in supporting and enabling quality education for all South African children. This needs to be addressed by government as a matter of urgency.

**Keywords:** academic achievement; books; information and communication technologies; information literacy; literacy; national school library policy; quality education; reading; school librarians; school libraries

### Introduction

Achieving quality education is a problem for many developing countries including South Africa (African Development bank Group, 2011; Independent Commission for Aid Impact, 2012) and results in poor learning outcomes of school children (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and development (OECD), 2013). Since the transition to democracy in 1994, the South African government has been trying to address the challenge of providing quality education for all children in schools. It is an urgent issue due to South African pupils' "persistently low performance in academic achievement" (DBE Republic of South Africa, 2011c:3), particularly in literacy and mathematics, as compared to national curriculum standards and international assessments (DBE Republic of South Africa, 2011b; Equal Education (EE), 2010; National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU), 2013).

In May 2011 the *National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS)* report showed that although 21% of 24,793 state schools had libraries, only 7% (1,855) had stocked libraries and 79% (19,541 schools) had no library at all (DBE Republic of South Africa, 2011a). This is despite the links made by research regarding student achievement, and the presence of libraries in South Africa and elsewhere (Bhorat & Oosthuizen, pers. comm.; Lance, Rodney & Russell, 2007; Lonsdale, 2003; Pretorius, 2005; Scholastic Library Publishing, 2008; Zinn, 2006). More specifically, links have been made to the lack of books and the poor results in literacy in South Africa (DBE Republic of South Africa, 2010; EE, 2010; NEEDU, 2013; OECD, 2008; Pretorius & Currin, 2010).

This raises two important questions. The first, namely: what is the state of school libraries in South Africa? has been addressed in a previous article (see Paton-Ash & Wilmot, 2013). Secondly, what are the issues and challenges facing school libraries in South Africa? This article addresses the latter question. More specifically, we report on what emerged in the analysis of the empirical data. We provide evidence of how teachers and principals in schools with libraries are dealing with difficulties, and how this relates to broader debates on school libraries described in the literature. We also present the lessons that can be learned from our research.

### Trends and Developments in School Libraries

The literature on school libraries revealed a number of trends and developments, both internationally and locally, that helped to sensitise us to the issues and challenges faced by school libraries in developing countries such as South Africa today.

The literature, mostly focusing on school libraries in the United States and Australia, describes how the role of the school library has changed over time. The library has shifted from being a place where children had access to books for reading and information, to a place in which the learner is the focus. School libraries are no longer "depositories of information but transformational spaces" (Erikson & Markuson, 2007:ix), where information is not only accessed, shared and stored, but challenged and created (Erikson & Markuson, 2007).

The transition of the library into the school transformation hub has resulted in the re-organisation of library spaces, furniture and collections. The library needs to be the centre of the school, a dynamic and inviting place which has flexible, multifunctional spaces in which small and big groups can work, more than one class can be accommodated at the same time, digital media can be used and created, formal teaching can occur, and where the librarian can work collaboratively with teachers (Bolan, 2009; Erikson & Markuson, 2007).

Erikson and Markuson (2007) contend that the library is a place where students learn to use technology as a tool to explore the world of knowledge. Learners need to become life-long learners, who can not only find, but also sort and critically use large amounts of information from electronic sources, not all of which are necessarily reliable, useful or up-to-date. This has implications for the library collection (Valenza, 2010) as well as the school librarian, for both must be ready for a wide range of new and ever-changing technologies.

Library collections need to be diverse in terms of subject matter in order to cater for the needs of all learners and to attract existing and new users. In the case of books, this would mean fiction and non-fiction of differing levels, to cater for very able learners as well as those who struggle to read; as well as books in formats attractive to learners, especially non-readers, such as graphic novels, comic books and e-books. Non-book materials in the collection would include magazines, computers, audio-visual items such as audio books, DVDs, music, online resources, digital resources, games in board and electronic formats (Bolan, 2009).

The school librarian's role has changed and expanded from locating resources and providing the answer, or the sources of the answer, when a student asked for help to one increasingly geared towards the teaching of information skills (Kuhlthau, 2004) and the teaching of 'information literacy'. In this line of thinking, information literacy is defined as the ability to access, evaluate, and use information from a variety of sources (Brown & Sheppard, 1999). The librarian is seen as having to play a far more strategic role in the knowledge environment, which includes understanding how learning takes place, and working collaboratively with teachers and students to create an environment conducive to, and provide appropriate resources for learning (Hart, 2006; Reynolds, 2005; Sætre & Willars, 2002; Todd & Kuhlthau, 2005). The librarian also has a role organising and selecting resources for pleasure as well as learning and encouraging the habit of reading (Braxton, 2008).

The importance of reading and the school librarian's role in promoting high levels of literacy is recognised in the literature (Braxton, 2008; Krashen, 2004; Lance & Hofschire, 2012; Sætre & Willars, 2002). The OECD 2003 study done on 15-year-olds in more than 40 countries found that the most important predictor of academic achievement is the amount of time that students spend reading (Braxton, 2008). This indicator was more accurate than economic or social status, and thus has implications for all developing countries, including South Africa. The study concluded that the key to success lay in teaching students how to read, and then having them read as much as possible. Similarly, the findings of a study by Krashen, Lee and McQuillan in 2012 revealed that a well-stocked

library can "balance or can make up for the effects of poverty on reading achievement" (Krashen, 2014:3).

Blachowicz and Ogle (2008) report on research which supports the importance of a print-rich environment, either at home or at school, to the reading process. This has implications for schools in developing countries such as South Africa. Children who came from print-rich environments where they were given the time and encouragement to read, did far better at school when compared to children who did not have the same advantages. In South Africa the NEEDU National Report 2012 found that many schools are "grossly under-resourced with respect to reading materials" (NEEDU, 2013:42).

The school principal is seen as having an important role to play in the development of a school library (Hartzell, 2002, 2012; Hay, Henri & Oberg, 1999; Le Roux & Hendrikz, 2006) as they control the budget for the resources and staffing of a library. According to Hartzell (2002:1, 2012) many principals have overlooked school libraries and school librarians as contributors to improving learner achievement "because they have not been educated to the library's value [...]. Consequently, principals often leave library potential untapped."

International policy and guidelines for school libraries were developed by various professional organisations (American Association of School Librarians, 2009; Australian School Library Association Advocacy Kit, 2006; International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), 2006; Sætre & Willars, 2002). In spite of this level of advocacy amongst professional bodies, these countries do not have a national school library policy. Policy development has been a long and frustrating process for the South African school library profession. The absence of a national policy has implications for the capacity of the profession to fill school librarianship posts. Since 1994, the number of school librarian posts has declined in South Africa as the responsibility for funding these professionals was passed to governing bodies. This was compounded by the closure of the School Libraries Unit in the Department of Education (DoE) in 2002.

### Research Method

The broader study on which this article is based, sought to understand the issues and challenges school libraries are facing and how schools are responding to them. A qualitative research orientation and grounded theory methodology were adopted. Evidence was gathered through semi-structured interviews with librarians or teachers in charge of the library and principals or deputy principals in 10 schools, as well as with librarians in two public libraries located close to the schools being investigated. A well placed official at the

Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) was interviewed, who gave further insight into the issues and challenges faced by public school libraries. Observations were made and recorded on a checklist as to how the libraries visited were resourced and laid out.

The 10 Gauteng primary schools used in this study were chosen on the basis of their location and fee structures. The selected schools represented the full continuum of fees within the state structure. Five schools are located in two different areas of Soweto and five schools are located in the northern and western suburbs of Johannesburg.

The schools in Soweto (schools A-E) represented the low/no fee-paying schools in the continuum of fees within the state structure. These schools had classrooms and offices for administration, but no other purpose-built facilities, such as libraries or sports fields. The libraries were in converted classrooms. Two of the schools (schools D and E) were located in one of the oldest and poorest areas in Soweto.

The schools in Johannesburg (schools F-J) were representative of medium to high fee-paying schools. These schools were all ex-Model C schools with purpose-built facilities such as halls, sports fields and libraries. The exception was school I, which, like the Soweto schools, had converted a classroom into a library, but was in the process of designing a new library for the school. The two schools (G and J) which repre-

sented the medium fee paying schools (R4,000 - R10,000 per annum) required maintenance on their buildings which looked old. The higher fee-paying schools (schools F, I and H with fees over R10,000 per annum) had additional facilities such as pre-primary schools with suitably equipped playgrounds.

### Data Analysis and Discussion

Guided by Birks and Mills (2011) who argue that grounded theory is a flexible dynamic research design that evolves but has a set of essential methods that determine how data are collected and analysed, we used the process of constant comparative analysis to uncover important 'incidents' or concepts in the initial coding of the information. Using axial coding, we connected these concepts to build three core categories of predicaments faced by primary school libraries in Gauteng. These were: resourcing the library; operating the library; and the role of the library and the librarian. All participants were informed about the nature of the research in writing, and their approval was solicited. They were assured that their privacy and confidentiality would be protected.

### Resourcing the Library

The first category of predicament showed how the school libraries were resourced in terms of what was in the library (material resources) and how they were staffed (human resources).

**Table 1** Overview of library resources in all the schools visited

SCHOOL:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
	Low/no fee paying schools					Fee paying ex-Model C schools				
<b>Resources</b>										
Computers	1					1	1	1	1	1
Printer						Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Photocopier		Y				Y		Y		
Fiction	Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Non-Fiction	Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Textbooks	Y	Y	Y		Y					
Teaching		Y				Y	Y	Y		Y
Newspapers							Y		Y	
Magazines					Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Journals							Y			
DVD player						Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Video player						Y		Y	Y	Y
Television							Y	Y	Y	Y
Games						Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Furniture</b>										
Desks	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y		Y
Comfortable					Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Chairs										
Shelving	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Cupboards		Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Signage	Y				Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Posters		Y				Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
White		Y								Y
Boards/Smart										
Boards										
Other							Y	Y	Y	Y

### *Material resources*

The difference in the availability of material resources in the schools shown in Table 1 is derived from the checklist used when each school library was visited. The checklist was created according to the resources one would expect to find in a well-resourced library as described in the literature. It was used to indicate the type of resources available in the library. No attempt was made to count the number of resources that were available, it was only used to determine if the resource was present. Table 1 shows that fee-paying schools are at an advantage when it comes to resources. The variety of resources available to children was limited to books in the low/no fee paying schools of Soweto, a limited selection of magazines (school E), two globes of the world (school A) and posters and some unopened visual material aids (school B).

Two libraries (C and A) contained mainly textbooks. In contrast, one fee paying ex-Model C school (H) had the most diverse and comprehensive selection of resources of all the schools, and was the most representative of the ideal resources to be found in a library described in the international literature.

All low/no fee paying schools in Soweto had books donated to them. Three schools (C, D and E) relied solely on donations as their source of books and saw no problem with this fact. Donated resources were however a problem for some of the schools. As the heads of school A and B explained, most books were donated by people who had no use for them, but because their libraries had so few books they had no choice but to use them. The problem was that many of these books were not age appropriate, or in the children's mother tongue, or not relevant to their children as they were Euro-centric or American. Furthermore, most of the donated books were old '1960s books' according to one deputy-principal, and as a result, they did not relate to today's child. The children read them because they had no other options from which to choose. This reality, according to the teacher in charge of School A's library, could be a reason why the children did not like reading.

The lack of capacity of the library support division in the GDE compounded the problem. A visit to the division revealed a limited quantity of new and appropriate books that could be donated to schools, even though each facilitator had roughly 200 schools to support and mentor in their districts. Not one of the schools in the study had been visited or supported in terms of material resources by a facilitator from the GDE.

Of the fee paying ex-Model C schools, only one school (J) relied on donations of books or donations of money for books. The difference was that the librarian had a far greater say in the books

that were taken into her library, because of the cash donations.

Old, unwanted books were a feature of most of the schools, but the fee-paying schools (except for school J) in Johannesburg had big enough budgets to discard the books and replace them with new books. In contrast, low/no fee-paying schools in Soweto had so few books that they did not have the luxury of throwing out the old stock and replacing them with new resources. The limited number of books was a problem for the low/no fee-paying schools, as the principal of one of the Soweto schools (A) explained, "*if a child is good at reading, he will read all the books in a very short time, and then will have nothing to read.*"

Security was an emergent issue, especially amongst the low/no fee-paying schools. These schools had experienced theft of their computers on more than one occasion, with the result that they did not have fully-equipped computer laboratories. They simply did not have the resources to replace the stolen equipment. Security problems were not confined to low/no fee paying schools. Two of the fee-paying ex-Model C Johannesburg schools had problems with theft, but were better able to combat the problem by paying for extra security.

Not one of the libraries visited had computers that enabled children to access the internet for research purposes. Two librarians at the ex-Model C Johannesburg schools described how the library had been supplied with computers for research purposes, but they had ended up in the secretary's office or the principal's office as they were needed there.

All of the ex-Model C schools and two of the Soweto schools (B) had computer laboratories on the property linked to the internet, which were used to teach computer skills. One of the Johannesburg schools (G) had two fairly new computer labs, Gauteng Online connectivity as well as a fully sponsored computer room, right next to the library and were used for both computer skills and for research purposes.

It was clear that the primary schools in our study were not in a position to embrace information and communication technologies (ICT) as suggested in the literature. They did not have the required information and communication technologies in their school libraries, thus rendering them unable to comply with or fulfil government's stated aim of providing a quality education for all.

### *Staffing the school library*

Three out of the five fee paying ex-Model C schools had librarians (two were qualified school librarians); only one school employed a teacher on a part time basis (school I); and one school relied on a teacher to work in the library as part of her duties (school G). The low/no fee-paying schools

in Soweto did not have the funds to pay someone to run the library and had a full time teacher in charge of the library.

According to Dlamini and Brown (2010) this is a problem, as these teachers have no relevant training or experience with school libraries. This was demonstrated in our study of one of the library operating systems used by schools; the Dewey Decimal System. Only three of the librarians (all ex-Model C schools) used this system to teach the children how to find information. The other schools did not teach the children these basic retrieval skills. At the no/low fee paying schools, this was a result of not having the system in place. Despite having these tools available to them, the person in charge of the library at school H did not believe that children were capable of using these tools. School G had somewhat confusingly abandoned the system, probably as a result of the person running the library not understanding the system.

The interviewees did not regard ICT as being an integral part of the functioning of the library. This demonstrates a lack of awareness of the importance of the ability to search for information that was possibly due to an ignorance of the skills described in the literature. This was demonstrated by one librarian, who was a parent at the school, who questioned the purpose of surfing “*the net for three hours to find one item.*” It would appear it was important to this librarian that children access information easily, and that there was no attempt to teach the children the process of learning to find the information for themselves. The librarian did not understand her role in the teaching of information skills as described in the literature. This further illustrates the dilemma of using a volunteer who is not trained or equipped to be a school librarian.

Our visits to the low/no fee paying schools revealed a pattern of a locked library, reliant on teachers to man the libraries, as the teacher in charge of the library was busy teaching at the time of our visit. In contrast, fee paying ex-Model C school G had timetabled a library period and although the library was locked during the day, there was a teacher who took the periods and opened up the library for the younger children when she was teaching those periods.

The principals of school A and I, and the deputy principal of school B, pointed out that there were no posts for a school librarian. This is an obstacle for those schools wishing to have libraries. The consequences were most visible in the low/no fee paying schools and had a direct effect on the operation of the library as a facility.

We have presented evidence of the difference in resources, both physical and human, between the Johannesburg ex-Model C schools and the Soweto schools. These findings confirm the parlous state of school libraries in South Africa (Paton-Ash &

Wilmot, 2013), and also reflect the impact of apartheid on the range of resources available in schools in South Africa. The difference between the trends in resources and the use of ICT, which are described in the literature, and the reality of school libraries in South Africa, is brought to light.

#### Operating the Library

In discussing the operation of a library, we sought to ascertain how accessible the library was to the learners, what purpose they used the space for, and what form that space took. We also outline the contact the learners have with the Dewey Decimal system.

#### Access to the library

The lack of a library post in schools had repercussions with regard to how easily and regularly the library could be used. In low/no fee paying schools in Soweto, access to the library was restricted. Only school A was able to open the library for two of the grades twice a week. This was due to a volunteer offering her services. School A’s problem was the size of the school (900 pupils) as this meant that there was only enough time for two of the older grades to use the library on the two days it was staffed. As the principal explained, “*the rest hardly use the library, because there is no one to help them.*”

With the exception of school A from the low/no fee paying schools, only the ex-Model C schools had dedicated time for the children to spend in the library. Library periods were restricted to half an hour. School J had double periods for all the children, which meant that there was time to teach information skills, as well as to promote reading and allow children to take out books. One school (H) had allocated two periods for the library, but this was restricted to two of its grades. The time allocated to library periods was so restricted that it was difficult to achieve much with the children.

Four of the schools (F, G, H and J) opened the library after school with only one school (J) using the older children as library monitors. It is obvious that having no person dedicated to running the library creates an access problem for the children. This would seem to negate the very effort these schools have put into creating a library in the first place. None of the Soweto schools opened the library after school for the children. It is to the detriment of the children in these schools that they did not have the option of using the library after school, and had to rely on the public library to meet their needs. They were in a similar situation to the schools that did not have libraries, whose children also relied on public libraries.

#### Size and capacity of the library space

Not all the libraries were the same size. This was

the result of not having a purpose-built library. The low/no fee paying schools and one school (I) from the fee paying ex-Model C schools did not have purpose-built libraries. This inequitable access to facilities mirrors the issue of the legacy of apartheid. As the principal of one of the Soweto schools (A) explained when she wished for a proper library with sufficient books suitable for all ages of her children:

*this is not only a problem of our school only, it is a problem for all black schools. In fact our black schools have been robbed of the main things, things that really make a school a proper school.*

It was a tribute to these poorer Soweto schools without libraries that they had made a plan and, using their own initiative, had created a library, with one school converting outbuildings and the rest of the schools converting classrooms for their libraries. The libraries at the fee paying ex-Model C schools were all built as libraries, with the exception of school I, which used a converted classroom. Hart (2009:11) is of the opinion that one of the “huge problems confronting school librarianship in South Africa is the lack of space in schools. Many libraries have been taken over for classroom teaching”. This was true of School C, which had to sacrifice their library and convert it back to a classroom because of the large number of children enrolling at the school. This is not an isolated case, as a DBE report in May 2011 showed that 59% of the schools in Gauteng had a library, but only 19% were stocked with books, as many of the libraries were being used as classrooms due to the large number of children enrolled at the school (Mtshali, 2011). With the exception of School I, the other ex-Model C school libraries had features which made the library a functional, inviting space as referred to in the literature.

#### *Classroom libraries*

The low/no fee paying schools in Soweto (A, B and C) had library boxes in their classes donated by READ organisation several years ago, with the GDE assisting two of the schools (B and C) as well. During a walk around school C with the principal, a library box was pointed out, which was sitting on top of a cupboard, way out of the reach of children in a classroom. When the principal questioned the teacher about why it was there, it was clear that the teacher did not know what it was. The box had never been opened. The contact in the GDE acknowledges that this is not an isolated case, and that there have been other instances when book resources are not available to children, because the books are either locked in the principal’s office or are still in boxes. In the fee paying ex-Model C schools classroom libraries were used in addition to the library. In all cases the source of the books was the school library.

#### *Library systems*

The Dewey Decimal System is one of the retrieval tools that empowers users in the library to find information on their own. Knowledge of how the system works and posters on the wall listing the Dewey numbers allow for user independence in the library. Hart (2006:55) makes reference to the historically advantaged libraries, which are “better equipped with retrieval tools” as outlined. This was true in our study as all fee paying ex-Model C schools used the Dewey System, although school G had, somewhat confusingly, recently abandoned the system.

None of the low/no fee paying schools used the Dewey Decimal System to classify or shelve their books. Classification was limited to separating fiction from non-fiction, encyclopaedias and textbooks.

In three of the low/no fee paying schools there was no accessioning of books and resources or systems to record what resources were in the library and who had the resource. If a system existed, it tended to be very rudimentary as the teacher in charge of school E explained, “*we are not as professional as the city libraries; I choose one learner, like yesterday, one who writes the name of the book, and the person who takes it.*” Only one of the Soweto schools (A) had a card for each child on which all loans were recorded. Although this school had an issue desk with a computer, it was not in use, as there was no library software programme installed. In contrast, all the fee paying schools (see Table 1) had a computer at the issue desk with a library software programme. All the books were accessioned and issued through the computer to the children, whose names were also on the computer.

#### *The Role of the Library and the Librarian*

Contrary to the changing role of the library described in the literature, the findings of this study show that the school library is peripheral to – as opposed to central to – teaching and learning.

In all the schools that were involved in this study, the importance of having a library to create a culture of reading was stressed. In the low/no fee paying schools and the ex-Model C schools that charged the lowest fees, even this role was limited, as the libraries did not have sufficient books, and those that did have were old and did not appeal to their children.

The way reading in the library was promoted showed an interesting trend. In the low/no fee-paying schools, there was reliance, to a certain extent, on external factors to encourage reading, namely community/public libraries. These libraries worked with local schools and ran two reading competitions for the different age

groups. However, it was up to the children to visit the libraries to access books for their everyday reading requirements. A visit to one public library in the area revealed near empty shelves in the children's section due to the high demand for these books.

At school G, a lot of money (from school fees) had been spent to make the library more attractive so that the children would want to use the facility and read. The principal explained why they had taken the decision to refurbish their library:

*What we have ascertained is that the children are not reading like they used to, and what we have tried to do with the library is to encourage them to take books out so that we can get them reading again [...] . We are finding now that [their] Maths is weak, because they don't understand what they are reading, and our children are struggling with writing exams because they don't read. They don't know how to read the questions and they don't know how to interpret questions. Their comprehension is bad [sic]; their understanding of what they are reading [is poor].*

However, there is evidence that suggests that the link between libraries and literacy is not clearly understood by policy makers despite poor literacy rates. In the opinion of the GDE official, support for this link between the library and literacy by national government was not so clear:

*They see the link between the lack of resources [and learner performance], and so they are throwing books at the schools, but they are not thinking about who is going to open up the books, who is going to look after them, to see that the right book gets into the right hand[s]. They think that if the books are there, the children are going to read them, and everything will be fine.*

In all schools but school F, and to a limited extent school J, the role of the library as the source for information or the place where information literacy was part of teaching and learning, was secondary to reading. The fact that these were all primary schools, where the emphasis was on teaching children to read, could have been a factor in this omission.

The older children in the schools were expected to do projects in some of their subjects, but there was a limited understanding of information literacy and information skills, and the role of the library or librarian in facilitating this. There also appeared to be a limited understanding of the value of learning from a variety of sources. This could be because in these schools, the person in charge of the library was not a trained professional. The librarian, for example, at one ex-Model C school, made the telling comment that she used to teach information skills but *"they needed time for the 'proper subjects' [sic][...], so I don't teach them anymore."*

Three of the schools visited were teaching

basic information skills. As a result, the first steps towards empowering children to become information literate were being made. But, again there was a reliance for the children doing projects in the poorer schools on the public library. A librarian at a public library in Soweto estimated that their library served an area with 10 primary and senior schools, and explained how busy they were in the afternoons: *"immediately after school the first stop (for school children) is here. As a result ... we are overwhelmed."*

The internet was viewed as a source of information in a few cases. No guidance on using the internet was given to the children, however. The lack of guidance with regard to using the internet for information, an issue that was raised in the literature by Caviglia and Ferraris (2008), was evident in the schools visited.

The negativity of teachers' perceptions of the library was an unexpected finding of this study. There are various reasons for this. Despite having a large collection of teacher resources at school F, the attitude of the teachers was the librarian's biggest challenge. In her words, *"It is the co-operation of my teachers [that I lack]. They don't support me."* One sensed that she promoted information literacy without the collaboration of the teachers around her, who did not see her programme as part of the curriculum they were teaching.

The librarian at school I offered another explanation for the negative attitude from the teachers, which related to a lack of understanding by the teachers of the role of the librarian: *"They think we have an easy job, we just come here and do nothing all day! [sic]"* The principal of a no fee-paying school, explained why teachers in her school had a negative view of the library: *"It is very small. It does not attract them [...] they are just too busy doing their own things; they don't really have time for the library."* Another reason was suggested by the librarian at one of the fee-paying ex-Model C schools. This related to the background of the teachers, many of whom had not been exposed to libraries, because they came from areas which were deprived of libraries during the apartheid era. She stated: *"I would love to see them make more use of the library, [but] they don't really know how."*

Those teachers who did support the library saw it as a useful source of learning support materials. We contend that unless teachers see the library and the school librarian as part of the teaching and learning programme of the school and embedded in the curriculum, the role of the library will continue to be peripheral. Library advocacy amongst teachers is necessary in order to change teachers' perceptions and practices.

In the absence of a national school library

policy, schools are not compelled to establish a library if they do not wish to do so. It is through the initiatives of individuals and schools, together with support from principals that school libraries exist at all in the primary schools in Gauteng in this study.

The librarian of school J described how proactive her principal was with regard to the library. He had inherited a situation where the library had been shut for many years. He had secured the funding from a private company to get the library started again with a full time librarian. She described how the principal always approached the company, “*to hear if we can have another year [of funding].*”

School A had a principal and an enthusiastic teacher, who firmly believed that the library was important to the school. They converted a small outbuilding into a functioning library with the teacher voluntarily giving up her time in the holidays to set up the library. The teacher in charge of school library E had taught at a school where the library had been set up by some young volunteers. When she moved to her new school, with the support of her principal, she contacted these same volunteers who came and painted a classroom, and organised shelves and cupboards.

### Conclusion

This article has shed light on the difficulties in establishing and resourcing a school library, operating a school library, and the role of a school library. Key lessons that can be extrapolated from this study can be summarised as follows:

- The lack of a national policy and funding for school libraries has a negative impact on the establishment and the physical and human resources of school libraries.
- The lack of policy has financial implications for schools as there is no funding to create libraries or to staff them. Not one of the Soweto schools had attractive reading corners or suitable furniture where children could work.
- The lack of funding also affected the resources in the library. Only recently has there been a budget set aside for library materials but all the low/no fee-paying schools relied on donations. This meant that the stock in all these libraries was mostly old, unappealing and not perceived as relevant to the children the library was trying to serve.
- The lack of policy affects staffing the library as there are no school librarian posts. The absence of a librarian was most deleterious in schools serving the poorer communities.
- The lack of funding for school libraries meant that only schools that could afford to maintain and pay a librarian were all ex-Model C schools in the ‘wealthier’ areas of Gauteng. This confirmed that the impact of apartheid has not been easy to erase in poorer schools.
- There is a limited understanding of information literacy and the role of the librarian in facilitating this.
- None of the libraries visited in this study had computers for the children to use. The opportunity for children to use ICT was therefore limited.
- The findings of this study show that the school library is peripheral to as opposed to central to teaching and learning. The role of a school library is outdated and needs to change if the library is to play a pivotal role in promoting literacy and learning, facilitating and enabling quality education for all South African children.

We acknowledge that the study does not claim to tell the complete story of libraries in schools in South Africa; rather it attempts to provide a rich description of ten primary school libraries in Gauteng at a particular time. As the scope of the study is restricted to ten urban primary schools it is important to acknowledge that the findings may not apply to school libraries in other areas (including rural areas) or to secondary schools. Nevertheless, we contend that we have opened a window on the difficulties facing 10 primary school libraries in Gauteng province of South Africa, which could have relevance to similar schools in developing countries. We have provided clear evidence of the disjuncture between the role of a school library described in the international literature and what is happening in the schools that were involved in our study, and how the legacy of apartheid is still prevalent. The findings suggest that school libraries are not playing an effective role in supporting and enabling quality education for all South African children. This needs to be addressed by government as a matter of urgency.

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