

**SCHOOL LIBRARIES AS A LITERACY INTERVENTION TOOL IN PRIMARY
SCHOOLS: ACTION RESEARCH IN ATTERIDGEVILLE**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Nicoline Wessels (Student Number 04650204), declare that *School libraries as a literacy intervention tool in primary schools: action research in Atteridgeville* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Nicoline Wessels

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Date

ABSTRACT

A high level of literacy is essential if a child is to be employable and determines the role a person will play in the globalised information age. In South Africa the literacy levels, including reading levels, of school children is extremely low. The study forms part of a longitudinal reading and literacy intervention project undertaken over a five year period in two disadvantaged primary schools in an urban township. The project focused on capacity building and resource building of the school community including the teachers, learners, school librarians and parents. This dissertation describes an action research study that focused specifically on setting up school libraries in each of these schools and the professional development of the teachers in order to contribute to the teaching and learning practices in the schools. It offers critical reflections on the process and findings and contributes to research on school libraries in South Africa.

Keywords: action research; information literacy; literacy; reading; school libraries; South African education

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABET	Adult Basic Education
ALRU	Academic Literacy Research Unit
CLRU	Children's Literacy Research Unit
COLTS	Culture of Learning, Teaching and Services
IBBY	International Board on Books for Young People
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
IFLA	International Federation of Library Associations and Institution
LTSM	Learning and Teaching Support Materials
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NEEDU	National Education Evaluation and Development Unit
NGO	Non- governmental Organisation
NLS	New Literacy Studies
NRF	National Research Foundation
NSNF	National Schools Nutrition Fund
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
RASA	Reading Association of South Africa
READ	Read, Educate and Develop
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9
SAALEd	Southern African Association for Learning and Educational Difficulties
SACBF	South African Children's Book Forum
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SANLI	South African National Literacy Initiative
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SAQMEQ	Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SGB	School Governing Body
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCING THE DISSERTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Literacy can be seen as the basis for survival in the 21st Century. Different types of literacy are distinguished, such as economic literacy, mathematical literacy, information literacy, language literacy and even emotional literacy. Language literacy refers to the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening as well as thinking and reasoning (South Africa. Department of Education 2002:20-21). This study is limited to the reading and informational aspects of literacy.

Illiteracy (unable to read) and aliteracy (able to read but lacking motivation) are world-wide problems. Literacy habits and practices are embedded within a socio-cultural context. In developing countries such as South Africa, where much of the population has no tradition of book reading or a reading culture, the problem is critical. Research shows a correlation between poverty and literacy levels; learners from high poverty areas and under-resourced schools tend to have lower reading levels and perform poorly at school (e.g. South Africa. Department of Education 2005b:iii; Neuman & Celano 2001:8; *PIRLS 2006* 2007). This tends to perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

Recent research projects focussing on testing of reading levels show that South African learners are performing well below the expected assessments standards, that the level of achievement at key points in the education system (for example Grade 3 and Grade 6) are poor and levels of illiteracy are still high (South Africa. Department of Education 2005b; Mothibeli 2005; *PIRLS 2006* 2007). Since the democratic government came into power in 1994 many school libraries have been closed and public libraries are struggling for funds (Williams 2006:79). Libraries have been included in Schedule 5 of the Constitution which means that the national government does not budget for libraries, but leaves the responsibility to each province. As a result libraries (including school libraries) suffer from a lack of funding (Parliamentary Monitoring Group 2009). At the same time there are huge backlogs in school and public libraries in the communities disadvantaged through previous apartheid policies and practices. The Government seems to believe that libraries (and even books) are unnecessary for developing good literacy

skills, that these can be replaced by the Internet, and that a computer will alleviate any or all literacy problems (Gyamfi 2005:22). There seems to be a lack of understanding that access to books and a range of reading material is essential to develop literacy, especially the high levels of literacy required in the knowledge society (Krashen 2004:57; PISA/PIRLS 2005).

Schools are responsible for many learners' only literacy experiences, but few have functional libraries or competent teachers who understand the importance of literacy. Against this background of low literacy South African schools wrestle with questions of funding, equity and infrastructure. There are excellent policies or draft policies on literacy issues in place, but policy finalisation, rollout and implementation are slow and even non-existent which leads to a gap between policy and practice (Baatjes 2003:8; South Africa. Department of Education 2005c).

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE *READING IS FUNDAMENTAL* LITERACY PROJECT

In an attempt to address the growing problem of low levels of literacy the Children's Literature Research Unit (CLRU), based in the Department of Information Science at UNISA, set up a Family Literacy Project in 2000 (*Linking literacy to development in South Africa* 2005:10). This was initially limited to two sites situated in crèches in Gauteng. The following year the project was expanded to:

- monitor an established family literacy project in KwaZulu Natal
- establish family literacy sites throughout South Africa together with a non-government organisation (NGO), Project Literacy, whose focus was on adult literacy

It was initially thought (and I still do) that family literacy is an ideal component for adult literacy training, as reading to preschool children would be a legitimate way of getting adult literacy learners to practise their newly acquired literacy skills on an uncritical audience.

In 2003 the CLRU decided to expand family literacy to public libraries and I joined the project at that stage. One of the reasons for choosing public libraries as sites for the Family Literacy Project was that lack of resources meant that the project was unsustainable in rural sites. Public

libraries are in an ideal position to sustain this type of project. They have the resources and networks (that is books, a trained staff and venues) and are well-situated in their respective communities. They also have the advocacy potential to develop good reading habits in their potential users (Machet & Wessels 2006:60). Although there were some positive results the research team ultimately felt that resources (from the point of view of research) would be better spent, if we focussed on one integrated project in one easily accessible location. Depositing books somewhere in a crèche or school has no value, unless intervention occurs simultaneously. The site needed to be easily accessible to the researchers to enable them to monitor the project. Previously much money and time was spent on transport and accommodation.

It was therefore decided that an integrated longitudinal study in one school in a deprived community be undertaken under the auspices of the Academic Literacy Research Unit (ALRU) based in the Department of Linguistics at UNISA. The project was called *Reading is FUNDamental* (from hereon also called the Literacy Project) and its overall aim was “to make reading a fun activity that learners will readily engage in, and at the same time to make reading a fundamental part of the daily activity of the school” (Pretorius 2004). The Literacy Project dealt with many facets that affect and influence literacy such as reading activities, text books, reading books, school libraries, methods of teaching and teacher motivation. The Literacy Project started in Bantabethu in Atteridgeville in April 2005 and was extended to Phuthumani in July 2006. Both projects were concluded at the end of 2009. (Pseudonyms are used for the participating schools, donor schools and learners for the purpose of anonymity.)

The Literacy Project was closely monitored to ensure research integrity and consistency. In the words of Naledi Pandor, the previous Minister of Education, a literacy intervention such as this “would be of little more than symbolic value, if they were not be accompanied by consistent and detailed monitoring and evaluation” (South Africa. Department of Education 2005b:iii).

1.3 BACKGROUND TO MY RESEARCH PROBLEM

My study focused on the school library component of the broader research project and I looked at conditions, situations, processes and events that influenced and shaped setting up school

libraries in two disadvantaged primary schools as well as my own understanding of literacy issues and consequent growth as researcher and lecturer. The dissertation is therefore limited to my own actions, research and experiences in the Literacy Project and does not profess to cover the full spectrum of the longitudinal literacy study.

For the purpose of this dissertation when referring to ‘literacy’ I base my discussion on the simplistic definition of Krashen (2004:ix) who defines basic literacy “as the ability to read and write on a basic level” with the main focus on ‘reading’, that is the decoding of sounds, word recognition and comprehension of text. I would like to add to read and write *competently*. Throughout my study the general term ‘literacy’ will be used, implying that it will refer to basic literacy as described above since it is the unit of analysis or object of study (Mouton 1996:91).

My interest in literacy issues partially came about as a result of teaching information literacy at a university. I worked in special and scientific libraries with scientists and engineers for most of my professional career. When I started my current academic and teaching career I assumed that students would have an acceptable level of information literacy. I have been involved in information literacy courses for students and facilitation of courses for qualified teachers in school library work, and it became evident that many of these students enrol for university education with no basic information literacy skills. Students do not have the skills to access and use information, do not understand libraries, cannot analyse different sources (printed or electronic) or draw their own conclusions. The issues with information literacy include the realities that there are very few functional school libraries (Hoskins 2006:65) and teachers are not familiar with or use libraries themselves (Olën 1993:121). The Department of Education does not budget for teacher-librarian posts (Zinn 2006:21) and teachers do not have the resources to teach learners information literacy even if they had the knowledge (South Africa. Department of Education 2005b:iii, v).

More disturbing to me at the time was the realisation that many students have an even more serious concurrent and perhaps concomitant problem. As a lecturer I experienced the decreasing levels of basic literacy in students. Not only do students lack information literacy skills, but their comprehension of their study material was severely compromised by poor reading literacy levels.

Pretorius (2002:193) conducted research at two universities that investigated reading skills and academic performance at undergraduate level and found that many students tested below their maturational levels and have low literacy levels. She concluded that “reading constitutes the very process whereby learning occurs and it lies at the roots of academic performance”. It is thus essential to pay attention to this vital skill.

There are two main strands of literacy here: reading literacy and information literacy. Students foremost need good reading literacy skills at a high maturational level to participate in the academic playing field and to perform academically. Without this skill students will be marginalised and will eventually drop out of higher education. In order to become successful students in higher education and to participate in the knowledge economy students also need information literacy skills and must understand the social, political, economic and ethical issues of information use (Gyamfi 2005:23).

It became evident to me that students inherited these problems from their school education and that the school system is to a large degree failing them. It seems as if the South African school system does not prepare learners adequately for either of these literacies. This has an adverse effect on their further education and working lives. The dearth of reading resources and absence of school libraries add a further complication. An examination of the literature shows that school libraries are essential resources for the acquisition of basic literacy as well as information literacy (e.g. Hoskins 2006:61-63; IFLA 2002). Exact statistics on school libraries in South Africa are undecided given the differences between the latest statistics, but it is clear that few schools have adequate libraries (e.g. SAHRC 2006:25; South Africa. Department of Education. 2008:8; *South Africa Yearbook 2006/07* 2007). In my experience many of the so-called school libraries in existence are dysfunctional, often locked, and used as storerooms for old and irrelevant stock. Classroom libraries or reading corners consist of tattered and torn magazines and text books. The situation is worse in former African schools (schools for the mostly black community in townships and rural areas), but even former Model C schools (Government schools in former white areas) have had to close their libraries due to lack of funding and no posts for teacher-librarians.

There are many different literacy research projects, but the integrated, holistic and longitudinal approach of the *Reading is FUNdamental* project sets it apart. This project combined a reading literacy intervention with improving accessibility to reading resources by setting up school libraries and endeavoured to involve the whole school community, including the parents, to some extent. It provided me with an opportunity to research the *status quo* of, and relationship between literacy and school libraries at grass roots level in two disadvantaged schools.

1.4 CLARIFYING THE MULTI-DISCIPLINARY AND MULTI-LEVEL NATURE OF THE LITERACY PROJECT

The Literacy Project is of special significance to me because it is multi-disciplinary (refer to Figure 1.1 below). As a member of the Department of Information Science I had the opportunity to work with staff members from the Departments of Linguistics, African Languages and English at UNISA. Multi-disciplinary work is important for global trends in business and education, which includes schools and universities. The project leader is a linguistics professor at UNISA and an NRF-rated researcher. The project was co-ordinated by a consulting project manager with vast teaching experience in disadvantaged schools. I was invited to join the project team and participate in the study as a library and information literacy consultant.

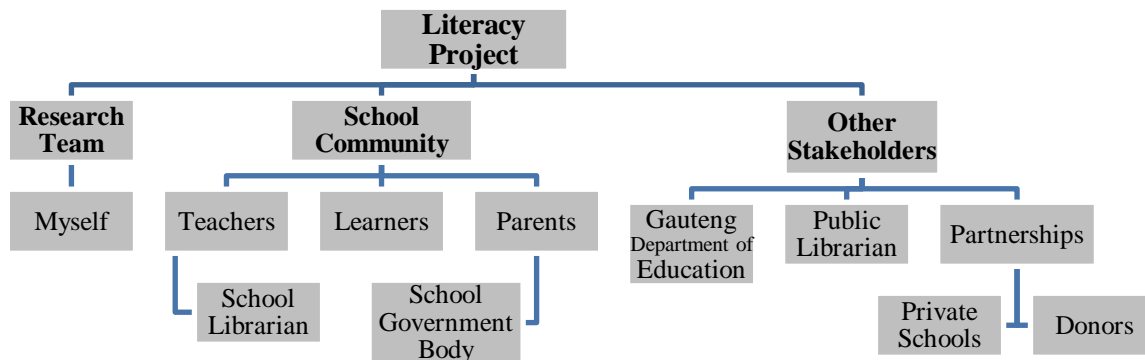
The school community consists of the teachers (including the principal), the school librarian, the learners, School Governing Body (SGB) and the parents or caregivers. I refer to parents in the study but it should be understood that parents are often absent or dead and caregivers such as grandparents, aunts or an older sibling may fulfill the role of parent. Schools are not only involved in investing in the future of their learners, but can also develop the future of the family, the community and as such the nation.

The Literacy Project had buy-in from the Gauteng Department of Education and a Memorandum of Agreement had been signed between ALRU and the Department of Education. These documents are kept by the ALRU Project Leader. Regular meetings between the project team and the Department of Education were scheduled to keep Departmental stakeholders informed.

Literacy schemes seem to be most successful when provided in partnership, between profit and non-profit organisations, and libraries should play their part (Agee 2003:351; Eyre 2005). This might also hold true for our small scale project where each school has formed a partnership with a private school in Pretoria to some degree. The level of involvement differs. Kamper (2008:3) postulates that cooperation between communities (in this case a privileged school and a poor school) can bring about meaningful change but “such co-operation must be sought and practiced in a spirit of mutual openness and dependency”. The funding for the Literacy Project came from various organisations and interested individuals. We endeavoured to leverage resources and funds that will ensure the continuation of the Literacy Project and support the continuous development of the two school libraries even though we will not be actively involved after 2009.

A relationship has been formed with the Public Library that services the area. The librarian often attends and speaks at family literacy events, inviting teachers, parents and learners to become members of the library.

Figure 1.1: Multi-level approach to the Literacy Project



1.5 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE DISSERTATION

The central aim of my study is to investigate the impact of a new initiative in two disadvantaged primary schools on the empowerment of their mostly oral-based communities where school libraries were introduced and developed as part of a literacy intervention project.

Derived from the overarching research aim, the research objectives are to:

- Explore the impact of a literacy intervention programme on me as a researcher in the tradition of participatory action research
- Explore the impact of the library on learners' reading literacy and information literacy
- Ascertain and affect teachers' understanding and use of the school library as a resource and method to facilitate their own teaching and their learners' learning development both for reading literacy and information literacy
- Observe learners' use of and familiarity with the school library
- Clarify my own assumptions on literacy in practice

I would also like to put a strategic aim on the table and that is to:

- Demonstrate to policy makers the strategic importance of school libraries

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND KEY ASSUMPTIONS GUIDING THE RESEARCH

Originally the overarching question that I wanted to investigate was:

Can a school library play a pivotal role in a literacy intervention programme in a disadvantaged primary school and contribute to literacy practices?

In order to answer this, my intention was to provide answers to the following sub-questions:

- Will setting up a school library with its print-rich environment provide an opportunity for teachers to instil good reading practices in the learners?
- Will setting up a school library provide an opportunity for teachers to instil information literacy practices in the learners?
- Will the teachers adapt their methods of teaching reading and information literacy?
- How will the learners benefit from the intervention programme?
- Will the new school library contribute to the development of a reading culture in the school community?
- Will the school community take ownership of the Literacy Project and strive to sustain the library?

Being trained as a teacher and coming from a library and information background with working experience in university, scientific and engineering environments, I have built up a specific theoretical knowledge base which includes certain general assumptions about literacy. Some of these assumptions are:

- Reading and literacy are integral to teaching practices
- Reading is enjoyable
- Functional school libraries contribute to teaching and learning
- Functional school libraries have positive consequences in schools
- Teachers use libraries to support their teaching
- Teachers teach information literacy skills
- Everyone reads if the right resources are available

After working in the Family Literacy Project as explained in section 1.2, I realised that assumptions have to be adapted and modified in different contexts, including different socio-economic and socio-cultural contexts. This was one of my aims; to test and try my own assumptions against the realities in the schools.

The above research questions and assumptions were tentative. I became aware of the possibility and perhaps the necessity to rephrase my research question as I gained new insights and

experiences. There is much theory about the relevance of school libraries, but not on the realities and impact of setting up a school library in a developing community without any literary tradition, where teachers and parents incorporate literacy in their lives only to a very limited degree.

I eventually decided to add a broader and more simplistic research question to the original question:

What sort of “school library” will work in an education system with huge disparities in resources, teacher training and facilities? What type of school library makes sense in an environment where there are no books, parents have low literacy levels, teachers struggle to teach basic reading and literacy skills and learners perform poorly in reading and numeracy tests and assessments?

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research undertaken in school libraries in South Africa predominantly follows a quantitative approach (although there are qualitative studies), and in education a qualitative approach. The changes in social and educational research paradigms and the complexity and scope of the umbrella research project prompted me to look for an alternative, more encompassing and possibly eclectic methodology. I wanted a methodology that would acknowledge my role as a researcher but also includes that of storyteller and not mainly that of observer or analyst. I chose a mixed methods approach with action research as my overall design. Action research is the process by which practitioners seek to improve their practice and put action at the core of the research process in order to effect change (Pickard 2007:134). This type of research is considered relevant where the dual aims of the research is as the name implies action and research. Action research by definition involves a wider approach to the analysis of the impact of a literacy intervention programme and school library on the teaching and learning in a school.

Action research (and action learning) gives me, as the researcher, an opportunity to be a team member with opportunities for participation and collaboration as well as self-development. This

understanding allows me to foster an inquiring approach to my own teaching and research practices and to assess these in terms of the Literacy Project. Action research allows for social change and learning processes that might occur throughout the project. In this context I have looked specifically at the professional development of the teachers and changed methods of teaching and learning brought about by the literacy intervention as well as changes in my own understanding, learning and teaching.

My study combines fieldwork and literature engagement and draws information from empirical data such as interviews with teachers, observations, questionnaires and reading test results. Sources consulted for the theoretical writing include scientific journal articles, academic books, websites, educational policies and newspaper reports. Dick (1993) argues that action research cannot be based only on action, but requires more library work. Apart from the traditional literature searches and theoretical discussions, the action researcher often has to go back to the literature to challenge or corroborate findings. Documentation collected at the schools includes project reports, term reports, work plans, my reflective diary with notes on the project and photographs taken at the schools during project activities. Two primary schools in Atteridgeville are the subject of the study. The data and information collected are based on setting up and implementing two school libraries in these schools. Both schools are typical examples of schools in low-income areas in urban townships and regarded as underprivileged.

Action research as a research design in relation to my study is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

1.8 CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to sketch the background and motivation to my study and to lay the groundwork for the discussion in the rest of the dissertation. I defined the research problem and set research questions.

I list and briefly describe the division of the rest of the chapters below.

Chapters 2 and 3 provide a theoretical framework and literature review on literacy issues.

Chapter 4 documents the overall research design and choice of methodology.

Chapters 5 and 6 tell the empirical story.

Chapter 7 analyses and interprets findings and offers insights and lessons learned.

A bibliography and six appendices complete the dissertation.

CHAPTER 2: CONFRONTING LITERACY AND LITERACY DISCOURSE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Literacy raises various questions at both the conceptual and the practical level. What is literacy? What is a literate nation and how can the quality of education influence it? What are the current literacy levels in South African schools? The focus of this dissertation is on the impact of school libraries within the context of a literacy programme in two historically disadvantaged primary schools. Literacy is a basic human right and the lack thereof is regarded as a global problem that concerns teachers and librarians. Understanding literacy is therefore core to the discussion. In this chapter I briefly discuss literacies mentioned in the dissertation such as pre-literacy, family literacy, functional literacy and information literacy. I look at literacy statistics, some reading and literacy practices in South African schools and consider school libraries as literacy tools.

2.2 LITERACY DEFINITIONS

Although I use Krashen's (2004:ix) simplistic definition of literacy "as the ability to read and write on a basic level" as a baseline for this study, it is enlightening to consider other definitions as well. There are no universal definitions or standards of literacy. The term 'literacy' has been defined and redefined to progressively include a multitude of literacies apart from the basic skills of reading and writing. The concept *literacy* is not static and changes constantly to include new philosophies and technologies, becoming increasingly sophisticated with a differentiated scale of skills. I focus on text/print-based literacy, but to place it in context I borrow a streamlined diagrammatical presentation from Bruce (1998).

Figure 2.1: Literacy transformation

- Primitive symbol systems
 - Complex oral language
 - Early writing
 - Manuscript literacy
 - **Print literacy** (emphasis added)
 - Video literacy
 - Digital/multimedia/hypertext literacy
 - Virtual reality

Technology as literacy medium has always played a role in the presentation and teaching of literacy, and will do so in future. Different literacies involve different technologies and media. Literacy in early human communities was linked to the available technologies of the time such as oral sounds, gestures and petroglyphs. These technologies continued to evolve which led to developments such as the alphabet and other sets of symbols to represent speech, the use of stylus and pen to reproduce these symbols, and eventually the development of the printing press (Bruce 1998; Lankshear, Snyder & Green 2000:25). Bruce (1998) points out that information on the Internet is often represented or enhanced by brief visual images, sound images and icons. Many of the changes occur in the presentation and communication of text and not in the text itself. This implies that basic reading and writing skills are still the building blocks to engage in the new technologies, irrespective of changes in presentation or representation.

PIRLS (PISA/PIRLS 2005) defines literacy as “the ability to understand and use those written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual. Young readers can construct meaning from a variety of texts. They read to learn, to participate in communities of readers in school and everyday life, and for enjoyment”. This definition includes elements of literacy such as reading for pleasure and indicates that reading occurs in a specific socio-cultural context. It also addresses the philosophy of constructivism, which is the process of constructing knowledge, which underlies the South African outcomes-based school curriculum (Dubazana & Karlsson 2006:2).

PISA (PISA/PIRLS 2005) states that literacy is “the ability to understand, reflect on and use written texts, in order to achieve one’s goals and participate effectively in society”. This definition shows a high-order and perhaps almost an idealistic expectation to be able to handle complex text in order to participate and succeed in life. However, it is clear that literacy increasingly encompasses not only the ability to read and write but also the ability to evaluate and effectively use the information that is read.

UNESCO declared 2003 – 2012 as the Decade of Literacy and its main aim is to bring literacy to people without literacy access, an estimated one in five adults (UNESCO 2003:2). This initiative has been supported by all participating developed and developing nations, and is an indication of worldwide recognition that the “promotion of literacy is in the interest of all, as part of efforts towards peace, respect and exchange in a globalising world” (UNESCO 2005a). UNESCO (2003:1-2) sees literacy as “the use of written communication”, as a learning tool and as a social practice. The organisation supports an integrated needs-based approach to the teaching of adult literacy, but acknowledges the teaching of the three R’s (reading, writing and arithmetic) as core to the acquisition of literacy in primary and secondary schooling (UNESCO 2003:13).

Although New Literacy Studies (NLS) does not fall in my line of study as an information scientist, I think some mention of this approach is relevant given that I use action research as the overall research design, the link with UNESCO’s position on literacy as a social practice and the inclusiveness of various community role players in the Literacy Project under investigation. NLS developed as a response to traditional cognitive models of reading and writing. Street (2003:77) explains that NLS acknowledges multiple literacies which vary according to time and space and focuses on actual learning situations and not on structured experiments. He states that literacy practices “refer to the broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts” (Street 2003:79). Stephens (2000:12-13) points out that fieldwork observation of the community is supportive in teaching literacy, but that literacy should still be regarded as de-contextualisable in order to understand “the problems and potentialities of the ability to read and write across differing social and linguistic contexts”. I

view literacy as a set of cognitive skills, complemented by the affective and psychomotor domain, rooted in a specific socio-cultural environment. Researchers who worked extensively in deprived communities in South Africa underline that literacy is “culturally bound” (e.g. Lyster *et al.* 2007:40; Machet & Pretorius 2004:39). The various approaches to the study of literacy can be complementary and NLS can bring about a greater understanding of the reading processes in a community as long as a balanced approach is followed. These approaches can work in tandem and can enrich the teaching and study of literacy.

2.2.1 Pre-literacy

Researchers have identified various pre-literacy skills as essential in helping children to become literate more easily by the time they start primary school: letter recognition, the ability to distinguish between print from other marks on a page, the knowledge that the written word represents the spoken word, how to hold and page through books, visual literacy, being able to differentiate between the beginning and end of a book, understanding of story schema and many others (e.g. Ntuli & Pretorius 2005:93; Snow & Ninio 1986:118). These pre-literacy skills (also referred to as early or emergent literacy skills) are precursors to and direct foundations for eventual academic achievement. There is an underlying assumption by teachers and in teaching methodology that children already have had experiences with literacy and have mastered certain pre-literacy skills by the time they start school.

Extensive research shows that acquiring pre-literacy skills starts long before formal schooling and are best taught and transferred by parents or caregivers reading aloud to children (e.g. Anderson *et al.* 1985:23; Machet & Olën 1997:78). Pre-literacy is influenced by the community, the family and home environment and factors such as literacy activities, access to books and other forms of text and language interactions.

2.2.2 Family Literacy

The family has always been a primary place of learning. Family literacy can be defined as literacy practices within families by parents or caregivers and children at home, work and school

and in the community. Research has shown that parent or caregiver involvement in children's pre-literacy and formal literacy learning plays a significant role in their literacy success rate (e.g. Magara 2005:11; Michigan Department of Education 2001). Talan (2001:15) identified four basic components of family literacy programmes: adult literacy, emerging literacy for children, intergenerational activities and parenting. These components imply that learning can be an individual as well as a family experience with a range of literate behaviours. Family literacy has the potential to benefit all family members, regardless of their literacy levels. It often involves parent or caregiver training on how to become involved in literacy activities. Machet and Pretorius (2004:40) point out that family literacy programmes are diverse and are shaped by the context and environment in which they are offered. Family literacy programmes have proved to be successful in improving literacy practices in disadvantaged communities in South Africa (Lyster *et al.* 2007:48; Machet & Pretorius 2004:40).

2.2.3 Functional Literacy

Levine (1986:43) defines functional literacy as “the possession of, or access to, the competences and information required to accomplish transactions entailing reading and writing which an individual wishes – or is compelled – to engage”. Functional literacy is the lowest level at which a person can function successfully in his/her social environment and used to be the ability to read and write short simple sentences at a basic level. This level has consistently risen and today basic literacy as described by Levine is not adequate in many social environments and a much higher level of literacy is required. It is problematic in many South African schools where teachers still regard the above as sufficient and do not know how to cope with the changing literacy scenario. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development sees functional literacy as “whether a person is able to understand and employ printed information in the home, at work and in the community” (National Literacy Trust 2007). Literacy drives for adults are geared towards reaching functional literacy in a specific community and the level of training will depend on that community's requirements and expectations. Functional literacy is often linked to vocational training and bound up with the development and economic role of a person in a specific community.

2.2.4 Information Literacy

Information literacy is increasingly regarded as part of literacy acquisition. The *Draft National School Library Policy* defines information literacy as the “ability to locate, critically analyse, integrate and apply information, as well as the ability to determine the validity, integrity and reliability of information” (South Africa. Department of Education 2005c:3). Central to this definition is the ability of a literate person to make cognitive and critical judgements about the need for information, the quality of information and to use information effectively. Cognitive skills, not information technologies, form the basis of information literacy (Davis 2002:219). However, information and communication technology (ICT) is the main reason for increased attention to information literacy skills. UNESCO highlights the importance of information literacy in education and sees the relationship between information literacy and ICT as follows: “information literacy is an important prerequisite for harnessing ICT for education and fostering equitable access to information and knowledge” (UNESCO 2008).

Information literacy is often used synonymously with other related skills-based terms such as computer literacy, library literacy, media literacy and Internet literacy, as well as knowledge-based digital literacy. Bawden (2001:251) suggests the term “literacy for an information age” which encompasses the more recent forms of literacy. These literacies all seem to be prerequisites for a person to be functionally literate in the complexity of the information or knowledge society and are used for formal learning and day-to-day decision making. Boekhorst and Britz (2004:65) argue that information literacy is one of the most important skills that is needed in the knowledge society and see it as an essential outcome of formal education. I will use ‘information literacy’ as an umbrella term for the above literacies. According to Bawden (2001:235) information literate people will be able to adapt to “rapidly changing environments” and be effective in “an information/ technology” environment. Information technology is an aid to information literacy and not the end in itself.

2.3 LITERACY IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS: THE STATISTICAL REALITY

Why is a literate society necessary? Literacy is the key to the prosperity of any country and it is generally acknowledged that reading and literacy assessments indicate the success or failure of a country's education. Furthermore, the 21st century requires a literate society constituting of people with the ability to effectively use different forms of literacies and not mere interpretation of lines of text. Sturges (2005:7) points out that information literacy is now "the entry requirement for admission to the world of the informed". This increasing focus on literacy expectations is even more worrying in the light of research done by Aitchison and Harley (2006:92) showing that 32% of adult South Africans are illiterate which means that around 8.5 million South Africans cannot read or write.

It is a sad reality that many schools in South Africa do not provide quality education necessary for continuous social and economic growth and development. Three separate studies that have been done over the last few years namely SAQMEQ (Mothibeli 2005), the *Grade 6 Intermediate Phase Systemic Evaluation Report* (South Africa. Department of Education 2005b) and *PIRLS 2006* (2007) confirm that South African learners perform below standard in reading and numeracy, and it is alarming that there seems to be little improvement despite various efforts and initiatives from the Government. One of the first reading campaigns in the new South African democracy was the Ithuteng "Ready to Learn" in 1996, COLTS in 1997, SANLI in 1999 and the 2001 Masifunde Sonke which should have continued until 2004, but only lasted for a year (Baatjes 2003:1). Baatjes (2003:1) described the last two campaigns as "failing projects, poorly conceptualized and poorly funded".

The Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) supported by UNESCO and comprising the Ministries of Education from Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zanzibar and Zimbabwe tested reading and numeracy skills of 46 560 Grade 6 learners from 2493 schools between 2000 and 2002. The survey examined school system success and established criteria for minimum and desirable performances across the countries. Results showed that 19.1% of South African learners had not reached the minimum reading level and

would be unable to complete the next level of schooling successfully (Mothibeli 2005; UNESCOPRESS 2002) .

In 2003 the Department of Education (South Africa. Department of Education 2005b) undertook a systemic evaluation study to determine reading, writing and numeracy levels of Grade 6 learners in order to provide information on the performance and health of the education system. The study tested 34 015 learners from 998 schools in all nine South African provinces. The scores for each learning area were low and the mean score for the language of learning and teaching was only 38%. The study found that the majority of Grade 6 learners have not achieved the expected assessment standards. Early reading difficulties unfortunately tend to persist over time. Learners are not prepared for the high school curriculum and cannot perform successfully in school.

In 2005 a reading literacy study called the *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)* under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) was conducted in South Africa and coordinated by the University of Pretoria Centre for Evaluation and Assessment. International comparative data and benchmarks were used to assess a range of reading comprehension processes with literary and informational reading purposes. The study tested 16 073 Grade 4 learners at 432 schools and 14 657 Grade 5 learners at 398 South African schools. South African learners achieved the lowest scores compared to learners in 39 other countries. Testing indicated that only 22% of Grade 5 learners had developed the basic reading skills necessary for learning (*PIRLS 2006 2007:70*).

2.4 BARRIERS TO LITERACY

Poor literacy in South Africa is usually associated with historical disadvantages, poor socio-economic conditions and socio-cultural issues. These barriers to literacy have been discussed (but not overcome) *ad nauseam* in research articles and research papers, by the National Education Department and in Government circles (e.g. Baatjes 2003; De Waal 2004; Karlsson 1996; Machet & Olën 1997; *PIRLS 2006 2007*; SAHRC 2006; South Africa. Department of

Education 2005a; South Africa. Department of Education 2008). I touch on some of the myriad of issues and problems, in this chapter and in Chapter 3.

According to Lyster *et al.* (2007:40) most families in South Africa are poor, intergenerational, extended, often not related and headed by single parents or caregivers, mostly women. Parents and caregivers have low literacy levels and find it difficult to understand and help with the tasks their children have to do (South Africa. Department of Education 2008:9). This means that the majority of school-going children function at home in an oral society which is not text-orientated. Reading is not perceived to be important except for study purposes, and not for enjoyment or for enrichment (Machet & Wessels 2006:58). Because of these low literacy figures and economic factors very few books are found in most homes. Concomitant problems are language issues, insufficient publications in indigenous languages and a lack of bookshops, especially in townships (Hofmeyr 2005; South Africa. Department of Education 2008:9-10; Wafawarowa 2006). It takes three generations of library readers to create a new generation of book buyers (Jordan 2007:8) and many South African children lack both access to libraries and bookshops.

Some of the organisations concerned with reading and especially making reading enjoyable are the Centre for the Book, Biblionef, the South African Children's Book Forum (SACBF) and the non-governmental organisation READ. Biblionef South Africa is a book donation agency that commissions the reprinting and publication of children's books in African languages and donates new storybooks to disadvantaged children (Williams 2006:79). The SACBF is the South African section of IBBY and an independent organisation which supports and publishes quality books for South African children (IBBY SA n.d.). READ is involved in the improvement of language and learning competencies as well as the publication of children's books through their publishing company READing Matters (Sailors, Hoffman & Matthee 2007:372). The Centre for the Book is a specialist unit of the National Library of South Africa which publishes First Words in Print books. These books are written, illustrated and published by South Africans in African languages (Centre for the Book n.d.). Too few children's books are published, especially in African languages, despite commendable efforts by the above-mentioned organisations, various authors and publishers.

In addition to limiting home environments, schools are hampered by poor facilities and infrastructure, lack of textbooks and other learning resources, too many learners in classes, too few teachers, poor leadership, discipline issues and poor safety in and around schools (e.g. Jansen 2008; SAHRC 2006; South Africa. Department of Education 2005a). The accessibility of texts is reflected in and exacerbated by too few and poorly resourced public and school libraries (De Jager, Nassimbeni & Underwood 2007:136; Hart & Zinn 2007:91). There are approximately 1800 public libraries which serve a population of more than 47 million people and 9416 school libraries which serve more than 12 million learners (*South Africa yearbook 2006/07* 2007). I discuss the *status quo* of school libraries in more detail in section 3.6.

Unfortunately the social landscape at grass roots level has changed little since studies done by authors such as Karlsson (1996) and Machet and Olën (1997) mentioned these issues. Of more concern is the continuation with literacy efforts despite the given barriers.

2.5 READING AND LITERACY PRACTICES IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

There are more than 12 million learners enrolled in South African public schools (Hart & Zinn 2007:90). Many of these learners come to school unprepared for the learning environment and with poor pre-literacy skills (e.g. Menkveld & Pepler 2004:47; Ntuli & Pretorius 2005:91-92). Unfortunately it is specifically in schools in disadvantaged areas where learners usually have inadequate teachers, lack books at school and at home and have minimal pre-literacy experiences. This results in the cumulative ‘Matthew effects’ concept that the rich-get-richer and the poor-gets-poorer and is based on findings that children who had advantageous early education continue to perform well in school and in their personal lives (Stanovich 1986:381). This analogy is also used in reading performance where the better readers read more with greater understanding and better vocabularies, and the poor readers spend their time just trying to achieve basic reading skills (Pretorius & Mampuru 2007:54; Stanovich 1986:381).

The *Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9* (RNCS) (South Africa. Department of Education 2002:20) lists the outcomes for the Language Learning Area as:

1. Listening: The learner is able to listen for information and enjoyment, and respond appropriately and critically in a wide range of situations.
2. Speaking: The learner is able to communicate confidently and effectively in a spoken language in a wide range of situations.
3. Reading and viewing: The learner is able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in text.
4. Writing: The learner is able to write different kinds of factual and imaginative texts for a wide range of purposes.
5. Thinking and reasoning: The learner is able to use language to think and reason, and access, process and use information for learning.
6. Language structure and use: The learner knows and is able to use the sounds, words and grammar of a language to create and interpret texts.

These outcomes imply the continuous promotion of reading activities, to facilitate learners' ability to read with comprehension, and knowledge of information literacy skills. However, teachers interpret and act upon these outcomes according to their diverse training, experiences and contexts. Many teachers are reluctant to change and tend to continue to keep to familiar routines and to use old methods of teaching such as memorisation and rote learning (e.g. Du Toit 2008:85; Hoskins 2006:65; NEEDU 2009:59). School days are mostly taken up by procedures such as "cleaning, praying, writing, corrections and taking dictation" (SAHRC 2006:27) and time-on-task for teaching is limited. The high-order literacy expectations as defined by PISA in section 2.2 such as 'reflect on written texts' is noticeably absent in these outcomes as well as in the seven critical outcomes in section 3.3. NEEDU (2009:25) came to the conclusion that the majority of teachers do not have the ability to reflect on their own teaching practices, abilities and competencies. How would they then be able to direct learners towards effective reflection?

The *National Reading Strategy* regards reading as a "foundational skill for all learning" (South Africa. Department of Education 2008:11). Baatjes (2003:5) says that in schools with good teaching practices, literacy education is seen as integral to schooling, but that reading is mostly encouraged in the primary grades. Although many learners have not acquired basic literacy competencies by Grades 3 or 4, little reading instruction and reading facilitation are provided in the higher grades (Baatjes 2003:5; Menkveld & Pepler 2004:46). Reading activities should continue throughout the school years and should not be abruptly discarded after the Foundation Phase. According to Menkveld and Pepler (2004:46) the *Revised National Curriculum Statement*

stresses the importance of language development especially in the primary grades, but does not provide guidelines on how to teach and facilitate literacy acquisition at this level. It seems as if primary schools pay too little attention to developing reading skills.

Baatjes (2003:2, 4) advocates an official reading policy with standards that “defines reading competence in relation to educational levels”. The Department of Education has responded to various surveys on poor reading levels in South African schools such as the aforementioned, not with a policy, but with a *National Reading Strategy*. It acknowledges in this document (South Africa. Department of Education 2008:8) that

Many teachers in South Africa have an under-developed understanding of teaching literacy, reading and writing. Many teachers simply don't know how to teach reading. Too often, teachers know only one method of teaching reading, which may not suit the learning style of all learners. Teachers don't know how to stimulate reading inside, and outside, the classroom.

The two main approaches to teaching early reading is phonics and whole language. A combination of these approaches called the balanced or interactive approach, helps to create an interest in words in learners and can help to develop a love of reading (Menkveld & Pepler 2004:50). This is also the preferred approach stipulated by the *Revised National Curriculum Statement for Languages*. According to the *National Reading Strategy* (South Africa. Department of Education 2008:8) many teachers misinterpreted the outcomes-based education (OBE) curriculum and believe that learners will learn by themselves how to read with teachers as passive facilitators only. Reading, however, is a skill that must be taught (Machet & Pretorius 2003:41). Teachers are not trained to teach reading, cannot help learners who have reading problems and rely on rote learning (South Africa. Department of Education 2008:8). Teachers are also not capable of developing their own reading programmes and reading material as the OBE curriculum requires. *PIRLS 2006* (2007:9) reports that in South Africa textbooks are still used as the only foundation of reading instruction.

The combination of lack of reading material and poor teaching of mastering reading suggests *inter alia* that learners do not reach any level of successful independent reading. This is essential in terms of promoting independent or self-regulated learning. The ideal would be if the basic

principles of self-regulated learning can be adopted to fit the context of self-regulated reading. De Waal (2004:65) has found that teachers regard the poor reading levels of learners from historically disadvantaged backgrounds as a serious inhibiting factor to the successful implementation of the OBE curriculum. According to De Waal (2004:65-68) these learners struggle to work independently and lack the capacity to understand and utilise OBE principles of learning. There is a possibility of a causal connection between the problems learners experience with OBE and a lack of reading comprehension. Two main components of reading are decoding and comprehension (Machet & Pretorius 2003:8). Decoding is the process of recognising the abstract symbols on the page and translating them into language. Neuman and Celano (2006:180) state that learners who are efficient decoders can concentrate on the meaning of the text. Comprehension is the process of understanding what is being read and to derive meaning from the text. This process is partly a matter of vocabulary and requires practice. However, reading teaching in many South African schools appears to focus primarily on decoding and not on comprehension (Pretorius 2002:172).

It is accepted in education that literate individuals, who have learned how to learn, becoming information literate and lifelong learners in the process, will ultimately succeed. There seems to be an awareness in Higher Education circles of the importance of information literacy as reflected in various projects and research reports, noticeably the ‘Senn Breivik report’ as discussed by Underwood (2002). On the other hand research into information literacy in South African schools is limited, despite the opportunities created by the OBE curriculum (Zinn in UNESCO/IFLA 2007:150). Library science and education literature suggest that information literacy should be integrated in the school curriculum. The basic literacy skills of reading and writing are insufficient in today’s world; learners also need to be able to determine when they need information, know how to find it, evaluate it and use it effectively to solve problems.

However, as Hart (2000) points out, information literacy in South African schools “takes place in contexts different from those described in much of the international literature” which imply the existence and availability of well-stocked school libraries, skilled school librarians and other learning resources. Her research in primary schools shows that principals and teachers have limited frames of reference and theories of teaching and learning and they do not understand the

need to teach information literacy. This creates a vacuum in the learning process. Information literacy outcomes should be part of the curriculum and must be indicated explicitly in outcomes-based textbooks to support and guide teachers (Boekhorst & Britz 2004:63; Hart 2000).

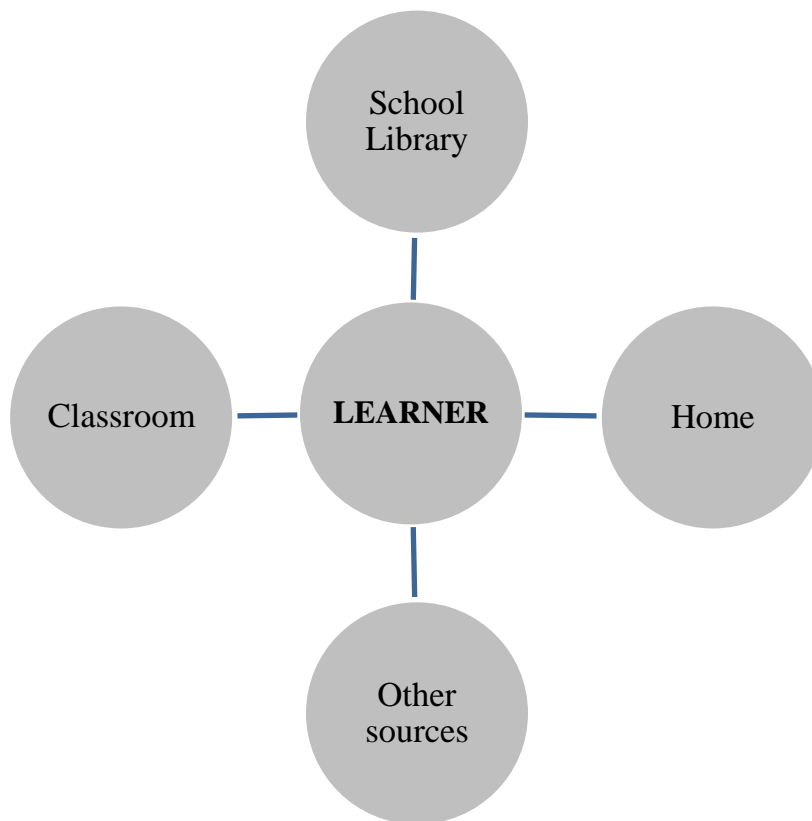
In her doctoral thesis Olën (1993:369) warns that less than 25% of South African teachers are library users and understand the value of information literacy skills. Information literacy is not a new concept in South Africa and has been promoted by educators such as Bester (1981:44) since the seventies and eighties, but the political dispensation at the time excluded most of the school and student population from these benefits.

2.6 SCHOOL LIBRARIES AS A FOCUS FOR LITERACY

Literacy is a learning tool, and needs a literate and print-rich environment in which to flourish. The school library can help to create and sustain a literate environment. The importance of the school library is well-documented in the literature. UNESCO (2003:13-14) advocates that schools “have sufficient and varied reading materials” and at least “have a small library with children’s books”. According to the Library Association (2000:1) “Libraries empower pupils, not only by supporting the teaching and learning in the school, but by giving them the freedom to make their own choices about reading and learning experiences.” There is a correlation between lifelong reading and learning and the use of libraries. Literacy skills need to be practised and used to ensure literacy growth; if unused these skills will fade (Sturges 2005:7).

The issue of availability of and access to books is very important to this study. Figure 2.2 below shows the ideal in terms of availability and access to books (and other information and reading sources) to learners at the point of use in the classroom and at home, nearby in the school library and beyond the school in places such as public libraries, bookshops and Internet cafes.

Figure 2.2: Availability and access to reading resources



Celano and Neuman (2001:15) contend that the need for libraries, school and public, has increased and should address literacy as a lifelong learning process. This is especially valid in disadvantaged communities and developing countries where a reading culture has to be nurtured, homes have few books, families do not have the disposable income to buy books, bookshops are scarce, public libraries are not always easily available and houses are small, noisy and often without electricity (Machet & Olën 1997; Machet & Wessels 2006). Krashen (2004:57) underscores the importance of a print-rich environment. Functional school libraries in South Africa can provide many learners with such an enriched environment.

Many learners come to school without any significant pre-literacy skills and poor vocabulary and the materials in the school library can provide much needed opportunities to practise and improve their literacy skills. The school library is a quiet and safe venue where learners are exposed to a print and text-rich environment and where they can be immersed in reading

activities. These activities help learners to improve their vocabulary and comprehension of text. They also learn through reading about structuring of text for example sequencing of facts or story events. Learners who spent more time in the library improved their reading achievement significantly (Celano & Neuman 2001:45; *PIRLS 2006* 2007:10).

Ninio talks about books as “a source of enchantment and wonder” (Snow & Ninio 1986:121). School libraries can be instrumental in opening the door to this magical world and in the process contribute to the acquisition of literacy. Schools need to create a community of enthusiastic readers and school libraries can support this goal by providing a diverse and accessible range of reading material that reflects the interests and reading abilities of the learners. Ross and Postlethwaite (as cited by Machet & Ölen 1997:80) researched reading in 32 countries and a factor that consistently affects reading achievement is access to books in schools. Krashen (2004:58-59) re-analysed research done over the years and concurs with the findings that access to classroom and school libraries results in more reading. Access to books is not only important to practice learners’ reading ability, but also to develop a reading habit. Latent reading ability and reading skills correlate with the volume of reading done by the learner and the quality of library collections. Learners who attend schools with high quality school library collections tend to have high reading comprehension scores (Krashen 1995; Krashen 2004:70; South Africa. Department of Education 2005b:31). The size of the library collection has also been found to correlate with children’s reading scores.

Gyamfi (2005:26) supports the use of libraries for teaching information literacy where learners are already familiar with the resources. This presupposes the existence of a library, knowledge of the resources in the library and established reading practices. The same rule that applies to the practice of reading skills, applies to the use of information skills. These skills need to be practised to avoid atrophy (Underwood 2002:9). Todd (2002) builds onto Kuhltau’s premise that effective engagement with information resources enables the construction of knowledge. He underlines the importance and centrality of the school library (and school librarian) in this process and states that the reason for its existence is “making actionable all the information and knowledge that a school possesses or can access so that students can construct their own understanding and develop their ideas in rich ways”. Bawden (2001:2 33) points out that

information literacy is embedded in resource-based learning. OBE goes “hand in glove” with resource-based learning (Zinn 2000:50). Resource-based learning recognises learners as active and central to the learning process and relies on a broad range of appropriate print and non-print resources including the school library.

The lack of school libraries in South Africa may have a deleterious effect on literacy development. The *Draft National School Library Policy* clearly states that school libraries must “promote literacy and reading in schools through the development and encouragement of reading for recreation, enjoyment and personal development” (South Africa. Department of Education 2005c:36). The question remains: Where are those libraries?

2.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter provides a theoretical framework to my study on literacy. Literacy cannot be encapsulated in a few definitions and complementary explanations, but it is evident that people without access to literacy cannot communicate in a globalised world and are at a distinct disadvantage. The scope of functional literacy has broadened and it now involves a higher level of textual literacy than South African learners are currently achieving. There is also a growing need for information literacy skills in today’s world which many South African teachers and learners lack. However, most literacies still depend to a large extent on competent reading skills. Meek (2008) stresses that “reading is the foundation for all learning”.

The literature shows clearly that school libraries are valuable tools in attaining and retaining a variety of literacy skills including reading and information literacy skills, especially in resource and print-poor environments. School libraries can bridge this gap and provide learners and teachers access to reading and literacy resources, personal knowledge growth and classroom support. School libraries can be the centre for converging streams of literacies as well as learning opportunities regardless of the educational model in use.

In Chapter 3 I continue with the theoretical framework and literature review for my dissertation.

CHAPTER 3: CONTEXTUALISING THE SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL LIBRARY: A SEARCH FOR ILLUMINATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I explore some external and internal contextual issues that affect and influence reading and literacy activities in schools, as well as the process of introducing and setting up school libraries in underprivileged schools. We live in an increasingly globalised world and the expectations of the knowledge society should be reflected in education. This necessitates the discussion of the knowledge society. Other key issues that currently play a role in schools are outcomes-based education, language challenges and teacher realities. I briefly describe the current *status quo* of South African school libraries and school library policies. This is necessary to understand the challenges and opportunities faced in a literacy intervention programme as described in my dissertation.

3.2 THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

We currently live in a knowledge society and are driven by a knowledge-based world. In his State of the Nation address in 2004 President Thabo Mbeki pointed out that the development and expansion of the knowledge economy is the key to continue building South Africa (News24/SAPA 2004). UNESCO (2003:25) considers the knowledge society, where the successful use of knowledge and information characterises human endeavour, as a challenge in its literacy campaigns. The organisation sees literacy “as 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 2005b).

Some of the underlying forces of this society are globalisation and technology, especially information and communications technologies (ICTs), but with people as the key element (Oxbrow & Abell 2002). Its foundation is a highly skilled and literate workforce that is committed to lifelong learning. Clarke (2001:192) argues that knowledge as a resource and learning as a competence are strategically important for organisations in the knowledge

economy. People (including teachers) are required to manage and process information more than ever before and the ability to read and write well with speed, precision and understanding are key skills. Kader Asmal in his capacity as the then Minister of Education stated that “the economic and social health of our people depends on building a literate nation – one that is able to read widely for practical purposes, and also for pleasure” (South African Government Information 2003). Organisations (including Governments) are dependant on advanced forms of technology and the local economy, and social and economic structures are shaped by events occurring globally, but the main need is for human intelligence and ingenuity.

In South Africa we have to contend with a schooling system which delivers learners who are not intellectually ready for the complexities of higher education (Pityana 2005) nor equipped for the workplace and this creates a gap in the workforce. One of the contributing factors is poor reading skills (Pretorius 2002:187; South Africa. Department of Education 2008:4). The country’s current unemployment rate is 25,6% and is mainly due to unskilled employees (South Africa. Department of Labour 2006). There is especially a lack of skilled labour and many vacancies are not being filled in essential services in all spheres of Government, health care, information technology and engineering. South Africa needs to enable citizens to become problem solvers, effective enquirers, cooperative workers, self-starters, information managers and flexible thinkers. How can South Africa succeed in developing a skilled workforce with a view to joining the knowledge economy if we do not support basic literacy development in schools? Pallo Jordan acknowledged in a news statement that “South Africa has a weak reading culture. You are not internationally competitive if you can’t read...” (News24/SAPA 2006). Government’s initiatives to improve skills shortages will not be successful if they do not address literacy starting at primary school level.

Unfortunately there seems to be a general belief in Government and education circles that computers and the Internet can obviate the need for high level literacy skills as well as school libraries. This is a mistaken attitude because we are in reality exposed to more complicated texts due to the Internet and need to be able to decode and comprehend at much higher and complex levels to make sense of the flood of information. In order to interrogate text on screen one needs good traditional literacy skills such as reading and writing. The knowledge economy is not

synonymous with information technology (World Economic Forum 2003). Only one child at a time can consult a computer so unless the Government is planning for every learner in school to have a working networked computer, a school library is still essential. To meet the challenges of the global knowledge economy, access to and interpretation of online and web-based information, as well as traditionally published documents are essential. Perkins (2007) posits that with e-mail, instant messaging (sms, Mixit) and social networking (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, blogs) text is becoming more important and that especially in developed countries teenagers have a big appetite for media, actually read more, and view books as just another form of media. Sadly, this is not the case in South Africa and most children seldom read anything for enjoyment.



Human development is central to achieve a sustainable knowledge economy in South Africa. Teachers have the responsibility to empower learners for the knowledge economy, facilitating the mastering of the necessary skills, helping them to understand how to move from information to knowledge by constructing their own meaning and to find, evaluate and utilise information effectively. In fact, the information cycle is now becoming democratic and participative. According to Michael Gorman as quoted in Le Roux (2005:11) “children can only benefit from technology when they are firmly established as readers”. The focus in our primary schools should be to inculcate learners with a passion for reading and learning. In this regard functional

school libraries can be powerful support and provide access to the tools of the knowledge society. Tanner (2000) regards the school library as a gateway to the Internet and multimedia technologies and an enabler in establishing a knowledge culture. Learners and teachers have to learn how to use the new electronic resources effectively, not only the process, but as tools for learning.

3.3 OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION (OBE) AND RESOURCES

Since 1994 South Africa has been undergoing significant changes on many fronts, including the education sector. Systemic change has occurred and an outcomes-based system of education was introduced in 1998 in an attempt to eradicate the inequities of apartheid era education (South Africa. Department of Education 2002:5). The many different education departments were replaced by one national Department of Education which is responsible for the national education policy. It shares a concurrent role with the nine provincial departments of education for school education and other training initiatives such as Early Childhood Development and ABET. Provincial Departments have to adhere to national policy, but may set their own priorities and implementation programmes (*South Africa Yearbook 2006/07 2007*).

In the earlier period of transformation emphasis was on access to education for all and the basic right to education (from Grade 1 to Grade 9) and much has been done and achieved in this regard. However, access to basic education and high enrolment figures are not sufficient. Research shows a high drop-out rate after Grade 9 and that only 52 out of a 100 learners who start Grade 1 reach Grade 11. Focus now needs to shift to quality education (South Africa. Department of Education 2005b:5; SAHRC 2006:16, 18). Education is one of the Government's highest priorities and 5,5% of the gross domestic product is allocated towards achieving the goal of quality education for all (*South Africa Yearbook 2006/07 2007*). The weighted average of government education expenditure for 132 countries for the period 2000 to 2002 was 4.9% with Kenya at 7%, the United States at 5.7%, South Africa and the United Kingdom at 5.3%, Botswana at 2.2% and Zambia at 2% (United Nations Human Development Programme 2008). Despite the relatively generous allocation of money the South African education system delivers less than it should, often by a large margin. Baatjes (2003:1) emphasises literacy as the most

important element of quality education and yet the lack of basic literacy and numeracy competencies emerged as some of the problems experienced with the OBE curriculum (NEEDU 2009:48).

There have been many negative reactions towards OBE in South Africa including from educators and academics such as the so called father of OBE William Spady, Linda Chisholm and Jonathan Jansen (Spady 2007). Noted academic and former anti-apartheid activist Mamphela Ramphele criticized OBE and argued for a return to the “four Rs” of reading, writing, arithmetic and reasoning (Ramphele 2009; Smook 2008:7).

Spady (2007:7) defines OBE as “defining, designing, building, focusing, and organizing everything in an education system on the things of lasting significance that we ultimately want every learner to demonstrate successfully as the result of their learning experiences in that system”. The focus is on student learning and the process of learning is as important as the content to be learned. The *Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) for Grades R-9* and the *National Curriculum Statement (NCS) for Grade 10-12* are the planned curriculum frameworks that underlie OBE in South Africa, but for the purpose of this discussion the concepts are dealt with as one. The *RNCS* is not a new curriculum, but a streamlined and less nebulous version of the original *Curriculum 2005* emphasising communicative language and literacy teaching (Prinsloo & Janks 2002:33). More time is allocated to language and mathematics. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) identified seven critical outcomes that learners at school and in higher education must achieve and which guide the OBE system. These outcomes are:

- Identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking
- Work effectively with others as members of a team, group, organisation and community
- Organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively
- Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information
- Communicate effectively using visual, symbolic and/or language skills in various modes

- Use Science and Technology effectively and critically showing responsibility towards the environment and the health of others
- Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognizing that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation (South Africa. Department of Education 2002:11)

All these outcomes imply a high level of literacy, and even meta-literacy skills. Two of these outcomes specifically to “collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information” and “communicate effectively using visual, symbolic and/or language skills in various modes” arguably cannot be achieved without good literacy and information literacy skills, and an effective school library. OBE emphasises that learners should be actively involved in the learning process. Its philosophical base is the constructivist approach where learners build on their existing knowledge and experience to create new knowledge and relate this to their daily life. In reality many learners attend school without the necessary information and knowledge base which are required to achieve certain learning outcomes. They need prior knowledge to make sense of and comprehend what they read (Meek 2008). De Waal (2004:68) reasons that “there exists a misalignment between their everyday knowledge (knowledge obtained at home) and the formal school knowledge with which they are expected to interact”. Neuman and Celano (2006:180) talk about the knowledge gap which refers to “the differentials in information acquired and retained by individuals”. Effective school libraries can help to bridge this divide. Phrases such as “creative thinking”, “critically evaluate” and “problem solving” refer to the cognitive information literacy skills that are necessary for lifelong learning and to create new knowledge as discussed in section 2.2. These skills are characteristic of information literate people who understand the use and organisation of information and knowledge.

Boekhorst and Britz (2004) compared information literacy training in schools in South Africa and the Netherlands and found that school libraries in the Netherlands are regarded as ICT and learning centres supporting the curriculum whereas school libraries in South Africa are undervalued. The SAHRC (2006:42) considers “adequately resourced libraries” as essential to teach within the context of OBE. De Waal (2004:64) in his study of challenges teachers face in achieving the goals of the OBE curriculum mentions the lack of school libraries as a constraint.

This is in stark contrast to a discussion on quality education by the then Gauteng MEC for Education, Angie Motshekga (now Minister for Basic Education), who ignores libraries and only mentions the Internet as a useful resource apart from textbooks (Building quality education for all 2007:5). De Jager, Nassimbeni and Underwood (2007:141) point out that the Government focuses on information technology literacy and not on information literacy. OBE requires a holistic approach to resources; teachers should not be the main source of information, nor a textbook or a computer. Effective interaction with a variety of learning resources is essential to ensure that the critical outcomes of OBE are achieved and this includes the school library. It should be stocked with diverse sources, fiction, non-fiction, reference works, audio and audio-visual media as well as providing access to ICTs such as the Internet.

3.4 TEACHERS: THE SOUTH AFRICAN REALITY

NEEDU (2009:48) states that the “culture of teaching and learning has, for all intents and purposes, disappeared from especially rural and township schools”. The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC 2006:3) identifies teachers as “the most important role-players within the education system”. Unfortunately various reports point out that teachers are not adequately trained in implementing the OBE curriculum and teaching within such a context (NEEDU 2009:17; SAHRC 2006:3). The majority of state schools attended mostly or entirely by black learners still perform badly, despite high government spending. Experts agree that the professional development of teachers is crucial in improving these schools and education in general. Jansen (2008) opines that good teaching worldwide depends on good teachers and that “quality depends, more than anything else, on a present and competent teacher”.

The OBE curriculum has brought along many challenges for teachers and learners. Killen (2003:6) stresses that teachers need to have a thorough grounding and understanding of their fields of specialisation and OBE strategies to ensure effective learning. Teachers must also be able to relate subject matter of their learning area of specialisation to other learning areas and this requires general knowledge and an enquiring mind. In the *Grade 6 Intermediate Phase Systemic Evaluation Report* (South Africa. Department of Education 2005b:v) Duncan Hindle, Director-General of the Department of Education acknowledged that especially in primary schools “the

continued scarcity of teaching and learning resources including good teachers” is still a major obstacle to quality education. Hindle (2008:10) stresses this problem again in 2008 when he says “about one-third of teachers and pupils are not doing what they should”.

The country has around 30 000 unqualified teachers and in addition many teachers trained at poor quality teacher colleges in former homelands under apartheid rule with inferior Bantu education as their aim (SAHRC 2006:26; Sailors, Hoffman & Matthee 2008:369). There are many dedicated and hard-working teachers, but too many who are the opposite, abusing the system and learners. Drunkenness, absenteeism and overpolitisisation of the teaching profession are prevalent. Teachers must become more productive and work competitively to improve the quality of teaching. We need more teachers, more qualified teachers, relevant professional development and in-service training for the existing teacher corps, teacher supervision and teacher support (e.g. De Waal 2004; Mothibeli 2005:8; SAHRC 2006:26-27). The mastery of learning outcomes can only improve if the qualifications and professional development of teachers improve.

A concomitant issue to too few and poorly trained teachers, is the fact that many South African teachers are aliterate and do not read themselves. Teachers often complain about learners’ poor reading skills, but they themselves are not readers and their own literacy practices are poor (e.g. Hart & Zinn 2007:102; Prinsloo & Janks 2002:36). Ramphele (2009) laments the poor knowledge base of teachers which leads to the poor academic performance of learners. Even more distressing is the lack of understanding of reading and literacy practices by decision makers (Baatjes 2003; De Jager, Nassimbeni & Underwood 2007:10). It is difficult to bring about a culture of reading if some of the main role players do not, or worse, cannot participate. Bailey (2003:59) contends that concrete and practical steps have to be taken “to institutionalise the objective of reading as a lifelong skill, and especially among the teachers who teach reading so badly to our children”. UNESCO (2003:13) points out that teachers should create a suitable learning environment for reading and writing achievement. Capacity building of teachers is essential to reach this goal.

Teachers lack in-depth knowledge of how learners acquire literacy and which methods of teaching should be used to best empower learners in this process. Teachers need to know how to teach and what the relation between facilitating literacy achievement and learning is. Teachers should set examples as readers and as information users (Hoskins 2006:65). This seems to be problematic in other countries as well (Webster, Beveridge & Reed 1996:38), but is compounded in South Africa by poorly trained teachers and learners' low literacy levels. Scrutiny of the seven critical outcomes indicates that OBE requires literacy acquisition to be imbedded in the curriculum and taught across the boundaries of different learning areas. Teachers must be sufficiently trained in OBE. Superficial orientation and focus on terminology is insufficient and in-depth content knowledge is needed (De Waal 2004:81; Prinsloo & Janks 2002:36). They must be able to apply their new OBE knowledge in practice and must focus on the curriculum as their core business.

The American Library Association (in Carr 2003) recognised that the “information age is divorced from most teaching styles” and that teacher education should be adapted accordingly. Teachers must be information literate in order to teach learners how to find and use information and how to process information into knowledge. Kuhltau (1995:3) emphasises that the ability to construct meaning from information is core to information literacy and essential to cope in a complex world where people have to cope with information-overload. Simultaneously there seems to be a lack of understanding at all levels about the use of ICTs as tools to literacy and not as the end itself. Technical computer proficiency does not guarantee an understanding of text and content. ICT developments such as the Internet require information literacy skills for navigating the various multimedia available and even more importantly, skills such as evaluation in order to assess the information on the Internet. Books in functional school libraries are usually already evaluated.

3.5 LANGUAGE CHALLENGES

South Africa has eleven official languages: Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, SiSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu. The *Revised national curriculum* acknowledges all of these languages as languages of learning and teaching as well as sign

language and Braille and recommends the use of home language for learning and teaching where possible, especially in the Foundation Phase (Grades 1-3) (South Africa. Department of Education 2002:20). Schools have a responsibility towards learners to ensure that their language rights are met. This proves to be difficult in a multilingual and multicultural environment where learners and teachers in the same school may speak different languages and different dialects of the same language. The *National Reading Strategy* (South Africa. Department of Education 2008:7) refers to language “mismatches” meaning that the languages spoken at home and at school often differ. This also applies to language resources.

English dominates the economy, politics and education in South Africa and is used as the language of communication between people from different cultures. It is also the language of learning in secondary and higher education (Wessels & Knoetze 2008:292). However, De Jager, Nassimbeni and Underwood (2007:134) warn that English is not so widely understood by South Africans as the general image conveys. Only one third of the population readily understands English. As a consequence schools must bridge the gap between mother-tongue and English. This is often problematic since teachers are often not proficient in English (Wessels & Knoetze 2008:293). Despite these issues parents want their children to be taught in English in order to have access to a global economic language.

In addition learning resources are published predominantly in English and to some extent in Afrikaans which constitutes only two of South Africa’s official languages and very little is available in most learners’ mother-tongue. There are in the region of 4000 titles available in the indigenous languages. The READ organisation is now trying to encourage teachers to write books in indigenous languages to improve literacy as part of the Ithuba project supported by the Department of Education and international role players such as USAid and the University of Texas at San Antonio (Rademeyer 2008:9).

3.6 SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN SOUTH AFRICA CIRCA 2010

IFLA (2002) states “The school library is integral to the educational process”. School libraries are important, not only in relation to learner development, but in the implementation of the

learner-centred, research-orientated OBE approach and curriculum and the continuing training of teachers. They are also essential components in any strategy aimed at improving information access. Although the ‘school librarian’ is not mentioned every time the school library is discussed, I have to explain that this role is intertwined with that of the existence of an effective school library. A school librarian’s duties are three pronged; to support lifelong learning by supporting and encouraging literacy and teaching information literacy, to collaborate with classroom teachers on the curriculum and to handle resource management and library administration (e.g. IFLA 2002; South Africa. Department of Education 2005c).

Although South Africa has been a democracy since 1994 and significant changes have been made to develop an integrated education system, the inequalities and inequities of the past still linger on and pervade the school library scene. School libraries and school librarian posts have been phased out (Hart n.d.(a); Zinn 2006:21). School Governing Bodies (SGBs) now have the authority to approve spending of school funds, but many of them do not show an understanding of the need for school libraries (Hart & Zinn 2007:94). The few school libraries that still flourish with trained school librarians are paid for by SGB funds and are mostly found in affluent schools. School communities who are most in need of resources may be the most affected by this situation. SGBs in disadvantaged schools may also have the least money to spend, especially in no-fee-paying schools. Reflecting on the situation Hart (n.d.(a)) comments that the fate of the school library is even more precarious than in 1994 and Hart and Zinn (2007:89) note that the optimism and potential for school libraries brought about by OBE is a “promise [that] remains unfulfilled”. In 2010 the situation has not changed. Learners have to do research and the overcrowded and under-funded public libraries cannot meet the demand. This is to some extent proof of the need for school libraries (Hart & Zinn 2007:91).

In 2006 there were 12 million learners, 366 000 teachers and 28 000 schools in the South African public education system (*South Africa Yearbook 2006/07* 2007). Statistics on school libraries vary and may not be accurate. According to the *South Africa Yearbook 2006/07* (2007) there are 9416 school libraries in South Africa, which means almost 34% of schools have school libraries. The SAHRC (2006:25) mentions that 80% of the schools have no school libraries. According to *PIRLS 2006* (2007) 60% of South African primary schools do not have a library or classroom

library compared to the international situation where on average 89% learners attended schools with libraries. The *PIRLS* statistics seem high and optimistic and it is questionable if these so called libraries are functional. The figures provided by the *National reading strategy* document might be a more accurate reflection. It states that “Only 1817 of schools had library space that was stocked with books, i.e. just over 7% of the schools in South Africa” (South Africa. Department of Education 2008:8).

The *Grade 6 Intermediate Phase Systemic Evaluation Report* (South Africa. Department of Education 2005b:102) observes that a particular concern that has been reported by 46% of the learners evaluated is the lack of a school library. The Report (South Africa. Department of Education 2005b:102, 31) continues to state that “if schools are to function as centres of learning, then adequate and well-functioning libraries for learners are essential” and “the number of books to which a learner has access also influences that learner’s reading habits and abilities”. The importance of school libraries is mentioned throughout the report (South Africa. Department of Education 2005b:v, 1, 28, 31, 33, 54, 102, 103, 115, 116). The SAHRC (2006:42) identified school libraries as basic infrastructure for the provision of basic education and this is supported by Ramphele (2009) who sees school libraries as “essential infrastructure”. The *National Reading Strategy* regards libraries as “the backbone of reading communities” (South Africa. Department of Education 2008:18). This is reflected by Bloch (2008:12) who regards a school library as one of the basics for effective education.

If the arguments presented in the previous chapter are correct and if we are to build a literate nation with a reading culture, access to books is *inter alia* essential. We have to accept that despite many worthwhile initiatives, literacy activities in many South African homes are currently inadequate to support pre-literacy and early literacy acquisition. The problem is compounded by the lack of suitable books at home. According to data released by *PIRLS 2006* (2007) 54% of the learners tested had access to 10 or less books at home. Against this background adequate and functional school libraries are essential and will be a major source and often the only source of reading material for both teachers and learners. Learners need to be exposed to learning opportunities within their environment and the school library is one such an opportunity.

From a school library perspective it is important to note that South Africa has no national policy or guidelines for school libraries. The most important policy document dealing with school libraries in South Africa over the last few years is the final draft of the *National School Library Policy* (South Africa. Department of Education 2005c:5). The policy builds onto a discussion document completed in 1997 called *A National Policy Framework for School Library Standards* (South Africa. Department of Education 2005c:6). The premises of the policy are that school libraries are integral to the current OBE curriculum and central to learning and teaching. The policy was finalised in 2005, but is at this stage in 2010 still in draft format and not an Act or a White Paper. It seems to be largely ignored by Provincial Educational Departments except for KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape where there is some official activity on the school library front (De Vries & Van der Merwe 2004:121; Du Toit 2008; Hoskins 2006:60; Zinn 2006:22).

The policy advocates the importance of the school library not only as a physical facility that provides access to resources, but also as a method of teaching learning which is particularly relevant to the OBE curriculum. Goals of the school library include curriculum support, access to learning resources as well as sources for teaching, information literacy acquisition, development of a reading and writing culture and provision of ICTs (Department of Education 2005c:7). These goals are highly commendable and should make a positive difference in schools if policy can be put into practice. A big challenge in education circles is the implementation of policies. Unfortunately there is no clear recognition by educators, policy-makers and opinion leaders of the central role libraries have in education (De Jager, Nassimbeni & Underwood 2007:10; Hart n.d.(b)). These findings are supported by Du Toit (2008:84) who researched school library policy in South Africa and believes that “librarians and teachers are not convinced of the value of libraries”. There is a policy versus practice dichotomy and a lack of political will to implement school libraries. Karlsson (1996:1) stressed already in 1996 that “the links between learning resources, school libraries and the curriculum and between improving education quality and school libraries, are often overlooked by education planners”.

As a matter of comparison I briefly mention a programme called Improving Literacy through School Libraries (LSL) launched in the United States of America (USA) on national scale and supported by two acts on education (U.S. Department of Education 2005). This programme

infers a link between school libraries and literacy and is one of several reading skills and literacy programmes in the USA. Grants are given to schools with 20% learners coming from low-income families. Funds are used in the school libraries to buy up-to-date resources, acquire and use advanced technology, improve information literacy and thinking skills of learners, provide Internet access and additional training for school librarians. This programme acknowledges the school library as an essential learning and teaching tool.

According to Sturges (2005:7) librarianship in Africa is in a “permanent crisis” and part of the problem is that government officials and librarians themselves have a poor understanding of the centrality of libraries (school and public) to literacy. This is reflected in the South African school library scene where schools currently have to use their own initiatives to develop and run some form of school library.

3.7 CONCLUSION

The literature review in Chapters 2 and 3 provides me with the groundwork and a sound base for the discussion on the literacy and school library project intervention described in Chapters 5 and 6. We live in an information-rich and technology-based world, but it cannot be accessed without basic literacy skills. I discuss the interrelatedness of contextual issues to quality literacy education and the provision of school libraries. For these reasons priority should be given to ensure that learners have access to a school environment with some form of library and to the best possible teachers and teaching schools can provide.

The next chapter provides a discussion of action research, the research design followed.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains my choice of research design and methods used to investigate the Literacy Project intervention, with the development and role of the school library as focus, and to report research outcomes. The research design is the programme that guides scientific research from beginning to end (Bless & Higson-Smith 1995:63).

I use a mixed method approach with action research as the overall research design. Action research is a research approach with the dual objectives of *action* and *research* outcomes and achieves a good balance between theory and practice (e.g. Dick 1993; McKay & Marshall 2001:48). The research component guides and evaluates the action and the action component keeps research relevant, initiates further research and creates opportunities to implement research findings (Bless & Higson-Smith 1995:59). This approach is ideal to use in locally based research such as the Literacy Project where real life problems exist and where:

- The project team and teacher corps want to bring about change and improve the literacy practices in the two school communities.
- The environmental or community context of the project is central to the research.
- Members in the school community wish to continually improve their knowledge base and skills, in this case on reading and literacy, so they can model them for learners.
- The researcher (in this case myself) uses analysis of and reflection on the overall project research findings to improve my participation in the project and my own research, as well as my teaching practice.

4.2 ACTION RESEARCH: AN APPROACH

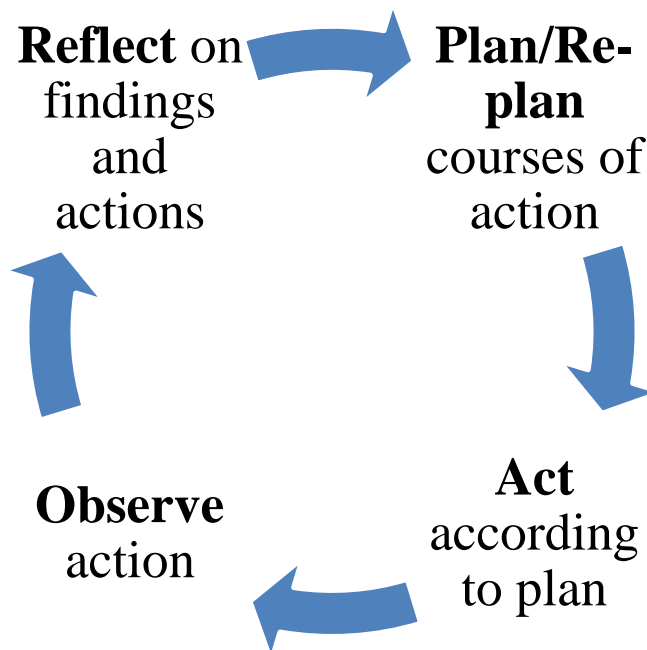
Action research is a broad movement without a neat definition. It is a social research approach and encompasses enquiry with people rather than research on people. Reason and Bradbury (2006:xxi) regard it not so much as a methodology, but as an orientation of inquiry that

endeavours to “create a quality of engagement, of curiosity, of question-posing through gathering evidence and testing practices”. Action research is organic in nature and allows flexibility as participants broaden their understanding of the issues to be addressed. Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998:24) explain the difference between an action research approach and other social science approaches as “being more obstinate about changing particular practitioners’ particular practices, rather than focusing on practices in general or in the abstract”.

Koshy (2005:1-2) defines action research “as an enquiry, undertaken with rigour and understanding so as to constantly refine practice; the emerging evidence-based outcomes will then contribute to the researching practitioner’s continuing professional development”. This definition draws attention to the real-world and collaborative aspects of the action research approach. I regard myself as a partner in the research process, together with the teachers, school librarians and the other researchers. Action research affords me as a team member as well as a Masters student a way of conducting research in the schools as learning organisations which should benefit both the schools and the body of knowledge documented by means of a dissertation (Zuber-Skerritt & Perry 2002:173). I believe that this research enhances my own teaching practice in formal higher education by providing me with experiences at grass roots level and practical insight in primary school realities of setting up and usage of school libraries. At the same time, teachers as part of the learning organisation are engaged in action research activities on their individual and group practices regarding the teaching and promoting of literacy.

Action research projects usually follow alternative processes that are more cyclic and iterative than the structured and linear processes found in traditional research. It involves a spiral of continuous self-reflective cycles which includes planning, acting, observing, reflecting and re-planning (e.g. Altrichter *et al.* 2002:130; Grønhaug & Olson 1999:9; Kemmis & Wilkinson 1998:21; Smith 2001b) as depicted in Figure 4.1, in this case of reading and literacy activities in the classroom as investigated by the teachers, the role of the school library and my own practice as lecturer responsible for professional development.

Figure 4.1: Basic single action research cycle



This cycle is not a neatly demarcated process; cycles overlap and become spirals, plans become obsolete and insights change. It is interesting to note that OBE also promotes making use of an iterative learning process. There are variations on the cyclic theme for example Kolb as discussed in Smith (2001a) describes the experiential learning cycle with four elements: concrete experience, observation and reflection, forming abstract concepts and testing in new situations. Action research has been influenced by and builds onto this experiential learning cycle.

The participative and reflective nature of the action research approach can contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between the theory on literacy and the practical teaching of literacy in the classroom. During the action research cycle a great deal of theory on literacy is covered in the workshops and meetings, but with the main aim to translate it into good classroom practice, making it relevant and practical. Reflection in action research includes the steps or active verbs to analyse, synthesise, interpret, explain, and to draw conclusions (Zuber-Skerritt & Farquhar 2005:28). Participation of stakeholders is necessary to ensure change and learning. Action research takes into account the ordinary and everyday knowledge of all participants and focuses on the empowerment of all stakeholders. It allows responsiveness in the research

situation and is extremely appropriate in the changeable and even volatile school context. Action research is quite common in research in education and although this study is undertaken from an information science perspective it also researches educational issues within an educational environment. This research method is also gaining popularity in information research (Pickard 2007:133). Action research in school library settings have been used (noticeably by Todd 2002), but to my knowledge the only instance in South Africa is by Zinn in her masters thesis (Zinn 1997). The professional literature reports few cases of action research in school libraries except for the 1997 July issue of *School libraries worldwide* (Action research 1997).

Where a synchronous action research model is used by a researcher, the same research principles are used by the researcher (facilitator participant) and co-researchers (practitioner participants) in tandem (Du Toit 2008). This has been adhered to as far as possible in the Literacy Project, but it is necessary to qualify the relationship between facilitator participants (other co-researchers and myself) and practitioner participants (the school communities, mainly the teachers and school librarians, but also learners and to a lesser extent parents) as set out in Chapter 5. Carr and Kemmis (as cited in Zuber-Skerritt & Perry 2002:178) differentiate between technical, practical and emancipatory action research. Technical action research aims for professional development, the facilitator participant's role is that of outside expert and practitioner participants are co-opted. Practical action research aims for deeper understanding by practitioner participants, the facilitator participant encourages participation and self-reflection and co-operation from practitioner participants. Emancipatory action research has the same aims as technical and practical research, but also includes emancipation from, and critique and transformation of the organisation and its systems, all responsibilities are shared and collaboration is equal. The Literacy Project uses technical action research and achieves participative practical action research to some extent, but emancipatory action research or "shared engagement in communicative action" (Kemmis 2006:104) is more difficult to achieve since there is a lack of a reading culture and no evidence of a research culture in the schools.

4.3 RESEARCH METHODS

Action research involves collecting, analysing and reporting data concerning the documentation needed to perform at a higher level. Greenwood and Levin (2007:92) contend that all known social science methods can be used as action research tools. Various research methods are employed for the purpose of this study, including quantitative and qualitative methods, therefore my claim that a mixed methods approach is followed.

4.3.1 Qualitative Methods

Mouton and Marais (1990:156) describe qualitative research as “those approaches in which the procedures are not as strictly formalized, while the scope is more likely to be undefined, and a more philosophical mode of operation is adopted”. Qualitative research views reality as subjective.

For the purpose of the part of the study reported in this dissertation qualitative information was collected by data gathering tools including:

- participation observation recordings,
- questionnaires and interviews,
- the keeping of a reflective diary or research journal and
- other documents that are germane to the Literacy Project such as term reports, agendas and minutes, school monitor book reports, work plans, project schedules, other administrative documents and photographs. (Refer to Chapters 5 and 6 for photographic documentation.)

Since action is continuous, these tools were utilised during action research cycles that occurred for the duration of the Literacy Project, but the formal reporting thereof falls beyond the scope of this dissertation. The same goes for all data gathering and research activities that are described in this dissertation; what I report is what happened as part of this study.

The collection and analysis of the documents as noted above are generally common to the qualitative research paradigm. In writing this dissertation I work with what Mouton (1996:169) describes as “a wealth of rich descriptive data” and depend to quite a large extent on some form of discourse and conversation analysis. Mouton (1996:169) explains that this means staying close to the subject, reconstructing significant structures and self-understanding.

Dick (1993) recommends that researchers should use the language of the community where the action research takes place. This is unfortunately not feasible in the multi-lingual environment of the schools. English is used as the language of communication during the literacy intervention between researchers and the teachers. This is the language used in official Department of Education documentation. English is also the language of learning and teaching in Phuthumani Primary School from Grade 1 and is used in Bantabethu Primary School from Grade 4. Teachers use various indigenous languages to communicate with learners, parents and amongst themselves. Sepedi is the home language of most of the learners in both schools.

I provide more detail about language issues in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

4.3.1.1 Interviews and questionnaires

Initial data were collected by means of interviews. The interviews were conducted with the purpose of providing contextual information and background to teachers’ own literacy practices. This is a common technique in field research and in most interventions. Interviews were mostly conducted at the beginning of the literacy intervention in each school during formal school days.

Informal but structured interviews were held with teachers using questionnaires drawn up with mostly open-ended questions (refer to Appendices A and B). This allows respondents freedom to interpret and answer the questions to the best of their ability.

4.3.1.2 Observation

Observation played an important role to gain insight into various situations in my research context. It covered events in real time and on the site of the literacy activities (mostly the schools) as well as the context of events in non-structured environments. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:43) mention two commonly found types of observation namely simple observation and participant observation. I used simple observation to observe school activities but was mostly concerned with participant observation which requires the researcher to join the group of people being studied in order to “observe and understand their behaviour, feelings, attitudes and beliefs” (Bless & Higson-Smith 1995:43). However, in this case observation was modified in that participation was not continuous and the group was aware of the researcher’s participation.

Grønhaug and Olson (1999:12) use the action research cycle to describe the action researcher’s observation and interpretation activities and presuppose adequate theoretical knowledge. The action researcher must:

- be able to make adequate observations (and select and make use of other available data) (1);
- interpret and make sense of observations, which requires conceptualization and theory (model) building skills (2);
- plan (and execute) (adequate) actions (3);
- plan, collect, analyze and interpret data to examine the outcome of the action (4 and 5), etc.

There are various observation contexts including library activities, classroom activities and professional development interventions such as workshops. Observation was directed at casual data collection activities (for example during workshops) as well as at more formal protocols to measure and record activities and behaviours (for example classroom observation). Observation was mostly done by specialist observers from the research team, but some peer observation by teachers also took place.

4.3.1.3 Reflective diary

I recorded my observations in my reflective diary and made entries after each visit to the schools, the various teacher workshops and meetings which I attended as well as reflective meetings with co-researchers since the beginning until the end of the Literacy Project. These entries largely focus on my personal experience on setting up the two school libraries, training the librarians and attending teacher workshops and researcher team meetings. I made notes on what happened including any change, what needed to be done and on what I learned in the process. Due to the distractions associated with a busy work and home environment, entries range from brief notes to more in-depth reflections. During the writing of this dissertation I read and re-read my personal raw data as well as observations in the form of term reports and classroom observations by other participants.

I reflected on the possibility of using analytical software such as Atlas TI, but decided to continue with the manual analysis of my own diary and other qualitative data for various reasons. Most of my notes are either handwritten or if typed not in electronic format and I find that in the process of manually working through the information I elicit more meaning from the text and that this process enhances my own understanding of my own and other participants' observation. The notes can be divided in two parts, namely observational notes that are as reliable as I could construct them and are based on what I saw and heard. The other part consists of reflection which is more personal and interpretive of my own participation.

4.3.1.4 Document analysis

Document analysis refers to the analysis of descriptive data collected through methods such as journals and reports. Mouton (1996:169) says the "meaning of the data is more important than the specific meaning of its parts". The documents from which I generated data are anecdotal such as my diary and teacher reports.

4.3.2 Quantitative Methods

Mouton and Marais (1990:155) describe quantitative research as “that approach to research in the social sciences that is more highly formalized as well as more explicitly controlled, with a range that is more exactly defined, and which, in terms of the methods used, is relatively close to the physical sciences”.

Quantitative data is collected and can be divided in two main groups namely school library statistics and statistics on reading literacy levels. School library statistics are mainly collected in the automated school library management system called *Powerlib* and include information and data on collection development, library use, circulation figures of resources, book titles in various languages, preferred titles, and preferences for non-fiction or fiction etcetera. Thoughtful analysis of the quantitative library data can be correlated with reading scores to see if there are patterns that indicate using the library make a difference in the schools. Personally I am more involved in and knowledgeable about the library statistics.

Statistics on reading literacy levels have been collected since the beginning of the Literacy Project in each school. Baseline entry and exit reading levels were determined during the first year to monitor and assess the efficacy of the programme. The same pre-tests and post-tests were developed in Sepedi and English to facilitate comparisons across languages. Tests are conducted on a regular basis throughout the school year (Pretorius & Currin 2006b:11; Pretorius & Mampuru 2007:46). Initially only Grade 1 and Grade 7 learners were tested, but the tests were expanded to include other grades as well at teacher request if and when manpower allowed.

4.3.3 Triangulation

The complexity and scope of this research calls for triangulation of data. Triangulation refers to the use of different or multiple methods of data collection which can increase the reliability of observation (Mouton & Marais 1990:91). It is better to look at something from different angles than to look at it in only one way and a study using both quantitative and qualitative research is

more comprehensive. The main emphasis in this study is on qualitative information, but it is supported by the quantitative data.

Dick (1993) states that one of the key principles of action research is “to let the data decide”. An advantage of my multi-method approach, or triangulation, is that the rigour of the research is improved and produces a more accurate account. It allows for the use of best practices from the various methods.

4.4 VALIDITY

In all research, issues of validity arise. In action research validity like everything else seems to be dynamic.

Reason and Bradbury (2006:350) provide several issues or questions of validity to consider which I reproduce here.

- Is the action research:
- Explicit in developing a praxis of relational-participation?
 - Guided by reflexive concern for practical outcomes?
 - Inclusive of plurality of knowing?
 - Ensuring conceptual-theoretical integrity?
 - Embracing ways of knowing beyond the intellect?
 - Intentionally choosing appropriate research methods?
 - Worthy of the term significant?
 - Emerging towards a new and enduring infrastructure?

According to Altrichter (1991:84) the differences in validity between traditional research and alternative research such as action research have been overestimated. He argues that the process of validating any study is in itself a second research study and subject to challenges to its validity. Rigour is achieved by combining qualitative description and critique with quantitative measures. Fals Borda (2006:33) says that validity criteria can to some extent be derived from common sense. According to Pickard (2007:140) action research is solution-based and as such does not offer generalisations. I believe the advantages of action research overshadow the possible disadvantages of non-validity.

4.5 ETHICAL MEASURES

Action research is carried out in real-world circumstances and involves close and open communication among participants. Researchers have to adhere to ethical principles and must take the necessary measures to ensure that all participants are informed of principles guiding the research and decisions made about the research.

The schools and teachers who participate in the Literacy Project were made aware of the purpose of the research study and that data and information collected and analysed during the project can be used in research publications and other academic activities. The appropriate consent was given. The schools and participants have the right to confidentiality and stay anonymous. I refer to the schools under pseudonyms (Bantabethu and Phuthumani) throughout the study. The Literacy Project is supported by the Gauteng Department of Education. A memorandum of agreement to implement the reading and literacy programme in the schools and use results in research outcomes such as my dissertation was signed with the Department.

4.6 PERSONAL REASONS FOR MY CHOICE OF RESEARCH APPROACH

There seems to be an impression in some of the research methodology literature (Bless & Higson-Smith 1995:61; Pickard 2007:136) that action research is only used in short term research projects needing immediate answers; an almost quick fix method. This is refuted by Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002:177-178) who argue that action research is an appropriate and effective research approach to use in Masters and PhD studies which is relevant to professional practice and organisational learning. Grønhaug and Olson (1999:9) opine that action research is longitudinal research in context and “emphasizes gradual learning and improvements”.

When I started to explore action research I felt that it could contribute more in a personal and broader context to the dissertation I eventually wanted to write. It provided me with an opportunity to bring a different perspective to the Literacy Project where proven researchers already made a significant impact. It is important to underscore the fact that a project team is involved in this longitudinal study and that I use research data collected not only by myself, but

also in some instances by other team members using different methods. I believe that action research guards me against the easy route of purloining ideas unintentionally and provides an opportunity for an individual and original contribution to the knowledge in my field.

Defining (and redefining) the research question(s) in action research is a continuous process and an indication of the learning process (Greenwood & Levin 2007:93; McNiff 2006). I envisage that this is also true for research assumptions. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:59) indicate that depending on research results, redesign of the original planned action may be needed. Dick (1993) talks about the ‘fuzziness’ of the research question(s) in action research and it is something I experienced personally. McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (92:3) say that action research accepts the fact that research does not always have final answers or conclusions. Action research allows for changes in plans, mixed methods and flexible timelines and accepts that there are not always final answers or conclusions, which are often important issues in the South African education scene.

The policy document *Norms and Standards for Educators* (South Africa. Department of Education 2000) formalised specific roles for all educators and trainers including that of “scholar researcher and lifelong learner”. The document states that the educator “will achieve ongoing personal, academic, occupational and professional growth through pursuing reflective study and research in his learning area, in broader professional and educational matters, and in other related fields.” Action research can be an empowering tool to teachers in becoming reflective and scholarly educators in their own school environment. The Literacy Project caters for just such an opportunity.

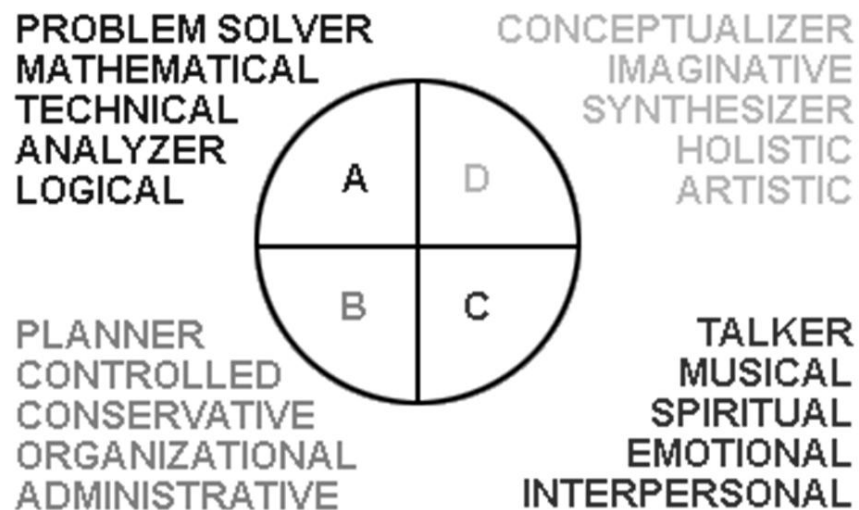
Another point I found interesting and relevant was the convergence between action research, constructivism and learning. Trunk Širca and Shapiro (2007:102, 105) contend that action research reflects the fundamentals of the constructivist approach in its process and practice. Outcomes-based education is underpinned by the process of ‘meaning-making’ and the construction of knowledge as discussed in Chapter 3. Action research focuses on a search for meaning, knowledge creation, learning and understanding (e.g. Dick 1993; Grønhaug & Olson 1999:9; McNiff 2006; Reason & Bradbury 2006:11). Du Toit (2006:61) states that outcomes-

based education “shifts the emphasis primarily to the learners” who should become self-regulating learners.

Action research presupposes action learning, action learning leads to meta-learning with its cycle of planning, acting/implementing, observing/monitoring and reflection/evaluating. It is crucial that teachers and learners reach a level of independent or self-regulated learning. Reflection is integral to self-regulated learning (Du Toit 2006:9). The reflective nature of learning requires whole-brain development and flexibility from educators and learners to accommodate all learning styles and aptitudes. Du Toit (2006:39) further points out that effective learning takes place if the whole brain is involved in learning. The whole-brain thinking model in Figure 4.2 developed by Herrmann (Herrmann brain dominance...2008) characterises various learning skills, and can be a tool to understand learning including the understanding of how learners attain reading and literacy.

Figure 4.2: Whole-brain learning according to Herrmann

THE HERRMANN BRAIN DOMINANCE MODEL



The basic principles of self-regulated learning can be adapted to fit the context of independent or self-regulated reading, the focus of the Literacy Project. Webster, Beveridge & Read (1996:40) devised a framework with various models to explain literacy learning and I recognise reflections of these in the whole-brain learning model. The model of literacy as a set of skills to be handed over (for example how to decode) reflects the planner educator in quadrant B (sequential thinking) and is teacher-driven. The model of literacy as “a garden of delight” where the learner is immersed in books is child-driven and activities such as listening to and expressing ideas and looking for personal meaning is reflected in quadrant C (interpersonal thinking) and quadrant D (imaginative thinking). The model of literacy as a dialogue in the making is learning-driven and can be seen in Quadrants A (analytical thinking) and again in quadrant D (imaginative thinking).

An in-depth discussion of whole-brain theories is beyond my remit but I believe it is worthwhile to recognise its roots and its potential influence on the understanding of literacy learning. Tyrer (2008) stresses the importance of stimulating whole-brain learning in the teaching and learning of literacy to ensure that learners retain literacy skills. It also links with action learning and OBE expectations.

4.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I discussed action research as a research design approach and the various research methods that support and assist the research process. Action research allows integration between theory, research and practice and acts as a framework to guide my research. It allows research that is simultaneously explorative, investigative, participative and contextual. I motivated my own reasons for choosing action research.

In Chapters 5 and 6 I narrate the empirical story of the Literacy Project and field action undertaken.

CHAPTER 5: FIELD ACTION AT TWO PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN ATTERIDGEVILLE: THE EMPIRICAL STORY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a brief overview of the *Reading is FUNdamental* Literacy Project. The empirical story involves many stakeholders who deserve to be mentioned and whose voices should be heard in order to understand the project and my specific responsibility of setting up the school libraries as discussed in Chapter 6. Naturally, some changes in staff, learner numbers and school activities have occurred along the way. The focus, targets and activities of the project have also changed to some extent over the period of involvement in the schools according to problems and challenges that emerged, but the fundamental aims have stayed constant.

In traditional research the term fieldwork is used, but I have coined the term field action to describe my engagement in the field. Chapters 5 and 6 contain qualitative feedback by teachers, librarians and learners as well as project members obtained by document analysis of reports written. Photographic documentation of the Literacy Project is also included.

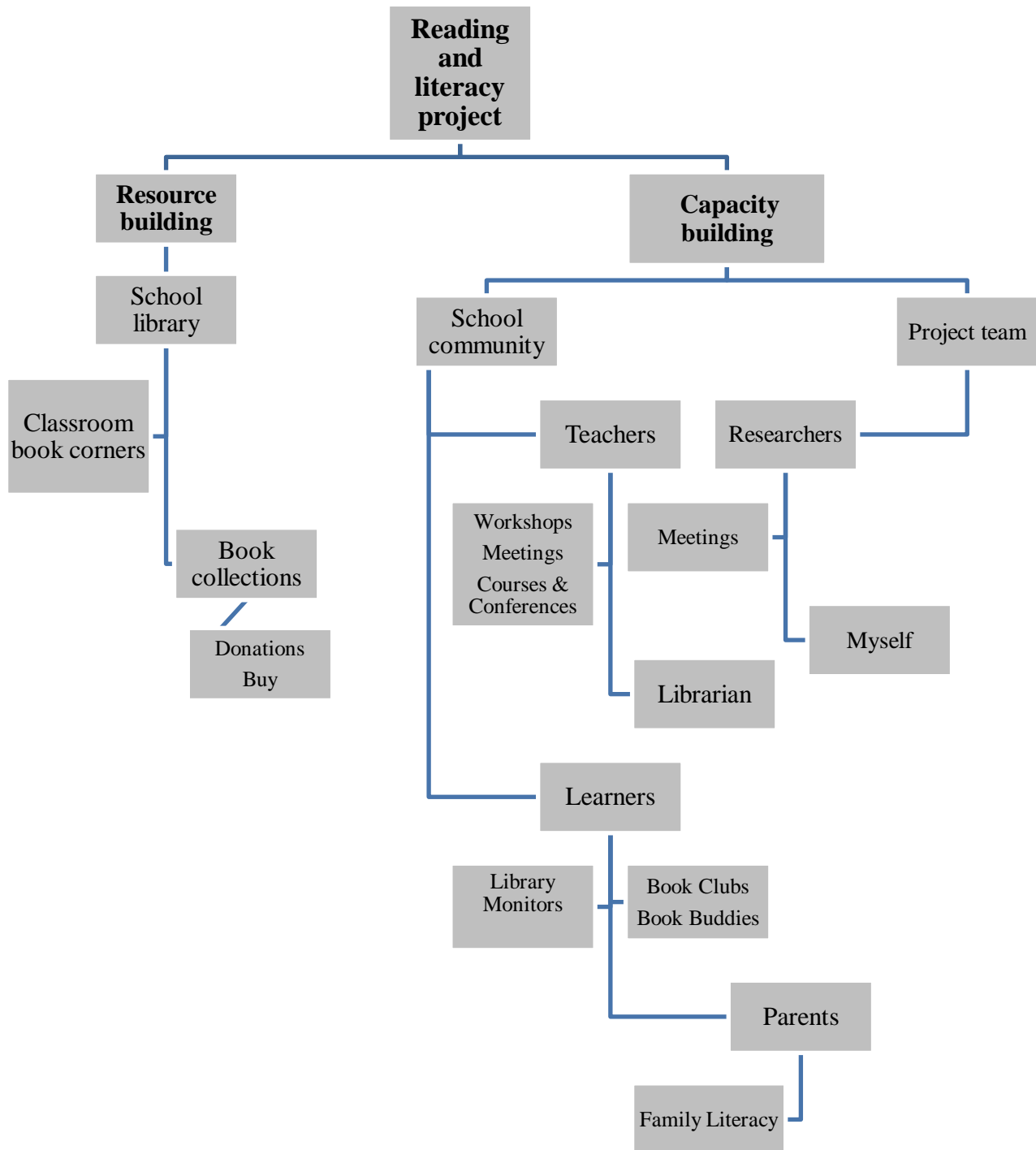
5.2 THE CONTEXT AND GROWTH OF THE LITERACY PROJECT IN BANTABETHU PRIMARY SCHOOL AND PHUTHUMANI PRIMARY SCHOOL

The original aims of the Literacy Project in the schools as set out by Pretorius (2004) were to:

- Assess learners' reading and comprehension levels and skills
- Build reading capacity amongst teaching staff and learners
- Initiate and build up a school library

Two main components in the project process at each school are capacity building and resource or asset building as set out in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Capacity and resource building



The focus of the capacity building component is on the teachers and the learners, but it also includes the development of the school community as a whole (including parents and caregivers)

and impacts on the research team members. We use a cascading model relying on a cascade or snowball strategy to bring about change in literacy behavior and skills. We work mostly with the teachers in the expectation that literacy knowledge will be cascaded down to the learners and to some extent to the parents. The resource component includes building up book collections in the schools and establishing functional school libraries. I was involved in the capacity building, but was mostly concerned with the resource component.

5.3 BACKGROUND TO THE TWO SCHOOLS AND THEIR STAFF

The Literacy Project identified and selected two primary schools which I named Bantabethu and Phuthumani for the purpose of this study in order to protect their identity. Bantabethu and Phuthumani are both situated in the Atteridgeville Township west of Pretoria where the impact of apartheid era inequality is still apparent in the quality of education and basic infrastructure. Many of the learners from both schools come from informal settlements and low-income families in the vicinity. Some of them experience socio-economic problems such as physical and emotional abuse, the impact of AIDS and feelings of abandonment as well as learning problems and malnutrition. Eighty percent of the children participate in feeding schemes provided at the schools. The schemes are supported by the Government's National Schools Nutrition Fund (NSNF) and supplemented with donations from the schools' respective partnership schools. Many of the learners live with caregivers such as grandmothers and aunts. Parents and caregivers typically come from oral-based communities, have low literacy levels and very few everyday literacy activities occur in the homes.

Low literacy levels are symptomatic of a wide range of problems within the school community such as poor reading comprehension skills, too few reading and literacy activities in the curriculum, little understanding of the importance of reading for enjoyment, and a lack of literacy resources at home and at school. Other issues are poorly built school buildings with overcrowded classes staffed by teachers who mostly use a chalk-and-talk style of teaching where teachers are the only sources of knowledge and learners are expected to listen and not actively participate. Teachers also tend to teach learners to "bark at literacy" (that is to merely memorise without getting meaning). Teachers also do not understand the reading process which is a further

aspect of literacy learning that impacts negatively on the successful literacy practices of learners. These social and literacy problems impact on learners' literacy development and school performance.

The success of a project of this nature depends on various factors including the choice of committed participants. Bantabethu and Phuthumani were chosen to participate in the Literacy Project based on the following criteria:

- Buy-in of the principals
- Willingness of teachers to participate
- An understanding that results will be used for research purposes
- Agreement to build up reading resources and to set up some form of library

The Literacy Project was initially started in Bantabethu, mainly because the principal approached the project leader for assistance in reading skills at the school. Previous experience by project team members had shown that one of the major backbones of a successful intervention project is the attitude of management, in this case the principals. Another premise for the success of a project of this nature is to have the participants on board. There are of course no guarantees, but the teachers must at least agree to the intervention. Most of the team members are lecturers at UNISA and as such research is a motivator in the Literacy Project. Participants have the right to know that they and their environment are being studied and why. In this case participants are also part of the solution to the literacy problem. As the research has shown books and libraries are essential resources in literacy and reading endeavours (refer to Chapters 2 and 3) and necessary for the success of the Literacy Project.

5.3.1 Bantabethu

Bantabethu Primary School was built in the 1950's and is located in a cul-de-sac next to an open field and sport grounds close to a busy through road. The school is a typical red-brick, single story building with an office wing and 14 classrooms which are in constant need of repair due to their age. Bantabethu has a computer centre which is filled with outdated computers and

software packages. The learners do not use the computer centre, because the school does not have a teacher who can teach them computer skills or the funds to keep the computers updated and in working order. The computer centre has been broken into on a previous occasion. The school has running water and electricity but too few toilets. The finishes used at the school are of poor quality. I once opened a classroom door and the whole door collapsed as the handle broke off in my hand. Because there is so little money to spare, repairing anything takes a long time which can be de-motivating for especially the teachers, but also for the learners. The school has no school hall, but uses the lawn area in front of the classrooms for assemblies. Some of the classrooms have sliding doors and open up into a large room which can be used for meetings with parents and family literacy events. The schoolyard is reasonably neat, but with little shade. There are rough sports fields for netball and soccer for the older learners and a few swings for the Grade R learners, but no outside seating. Regardless of these negatives one always sees learners singing and playing games.



Photo 1: Bantabethu school grounds

The principal has been at the school for six years. The school has an average of 16 teachers and a learner population of 600. Average class sizes are made up of 38 learners. Classrooms are overcrowded and at one stage there was only one Grade 7 teacher with 60 learners in her class.

Bantabethu offers home language instruction in Sepedi (North Sotho) from Grade 1 to Grade 3 and switches to English as the language of instruction from Grade 4 to Grade 7. Code switching

from English to Sepedi is the norm. Angie Motshega, the current Minister of Basic Education announced that as from 2010 English will be introduced earlier than Grade 3 for learners who use English as language of learning (*Infolink Digest* 2009). The school is classified as a quintile 1 no-fee paying school, which is an indication that the annual gross income of households in the area is very low. Bantabethu has an unofficial partnership or twinning relationship with Waverley, a private school in Pretoria, and receives both financial and teaching support from this school. The Literacy Project was started in the school in the second term of 2005 and continued for a period of almost five years until the end of 2009.

5.3.2 Phuthumani

Phuthumani Primary School is located in the centre of a middle class suburb against a hill. The school is approximately 38 years old. The school buildings have been painted recently, but the 15 classrooms are still rundown and need constant attention. It has an office wing and a concrete-covered area which is used for assemblies and other functions. The school has no computer centre and the only access teachers have to computers are the two computers used by the administrative staff. Break-ins have occurred and the school's administrative computers have been stolen on more than one occasion. The school has running water and electricity and basic toilet facilities. The school grounds are small with pockets of neatness, but with areas covered with rubbish including garden refuse, an old car and dilapidated furniture. There are signs of a vegetable garden, but it has never really made much headway.

The principal has managed the school for seven years. Phuthumani has a population of 18 teachers and 650 learners, with an average of 36 learners in a classroom.

Phuthumani follows a straight going-for-English-only language policy from Grade R to Grade 7. The school has been classified as a quintile 4 fee-paying school, regardless of the fact that most of the learners come from informal settlements surrounding the neighbourhood. Many of the people who live in the area send their children to more affluent schools. Although the school is a low-fee school which charges R150 per child per annum, many parents are unwilling or unable to pay. As a result the school experiences severe funding problems. Phuthumani has a more

superficial relationship with a private school Cramer in Pretoria, whereby the latter donates material on an ad-hoc basis and visits are exchanged sporadically. For example this school has donated books to the fledgling library. The Literacy Project was officially started in Phuthumani in the third term of 2006 and continued for a three and a half year period until the end of 2009.



Photo 2 and Photo 3: Phuthumani school grounds

5.3.3 Teachers

To provide background information on the teachers at Bantabethu and Phuthumani and to broaden the consultation process two questionnaires were devised to collect data for the reading project (refer to Appendices A and B). These questionnaires were administered in structured interviews. The first questionnaire dealt with a general profile of the teachers and collected information about their gender, qualifications and training, and teaching experience.

The second questionnaire, which I administered, investigated various aspects such as teachers' own reading habits, use of libraries for reading and teaching purposes, use of technology, awareness and knowledge of information literacy and perceptions about the information society. In total 20 teachers from the two schools were interviewed or completed the questionnaires. Thirteen teachers were female and seven male.

The questionnaires solicited the following information. Fifteen of the teachers completed a two-year primary school teacher certificate course and five of the teachers were studying to improve

their qualifications. The principal at Bantabethu was enrolled for a Masters degree. Almost all of the teachers watched TV regularly and subscribed to DSTV, with one exception. They all owned cell phones, but only two had computers at home. Teachers were not computer literate and even the few who used e-mail and the Internet did not understand the difference between the Internet and e-mail. Except for one none of the teachers had heard about the information society or globalisation.

The teachers did very little book reading themselves and newspapers such as the *Pretoria News*, *Sowetan*, *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Times* and magazines such as *Drum* and *True Love* constituted their main reading material. Reading storybooks for pleasure was not a common pastime, although one teacher said she liked stories but “they must not have sad endings”. Although four of the teachers said they read novels, only one could mention a title. Fifteen of the teachers owned only a few books and titles usually included *The Bible*, textbooks and self-help books. Two teachers and the first school librarian at Phuthumani said they were members of the nearby public library, the first school librarian at Bantabethu was a member of the community library in town, one teacher said he was a member of the Gauteng Teacher’s Library and two teachers who were busy with post-graduate studies were members of their respective university libraries. However, not one of them used these libraries to take out books for leisure reading, except the first librarian at Phuthumani who took out picture books for her young son.

The sources teachers mentioned that they used in lesson preparation, if any, were newspapers and old magazines, but they could not explain how these were used. One teacher mentioned teacher guides and learner books provided by the Gauteng Department of Education. A Grade 7 teacher said she consulted with experts such as the Fire Brigade and used pamphlets on various topics such as health, AIDS, safe sex, voting and community events that she collected from the public library. Two teachers said some of the learners bring newspapers and magazines to the schools.

All of the teachers said they would like to have a school library at the school, but were vague or uncertain about the role a library would play. That learners should use the library to do some form of research was most commonly mentioned, but not to read storybooks. Only three said that

teachers should also use the school library. Four of the teachers did not know what literacy skills were, but fourteen of them knew that literacy skills involved reading and two included writing, listening and speaking as well. Again with one exception none of the teachers have heard about information literacy skills.

Condy (2004) argues that “Every child deserves excellent reading teachers because teachers make a difference in children’s reading achievement and motivation to read.” She further contends that South African schools and learners need “world teachers” i.e. teachers who understands globalisation, new ways of learning and new technologies. The picture of the teachers that was revealed by the questionnaires was one of teachers who did not read themselves, were unsure about the role a school library would play in teaching, were not computer literate and did not know what information literacy skills were.

5.4 THE PROGRAMME PROCESS

In order to build capacity and to achieve the aims of the Literacy Project, regular interactions were scheduled between participating parties and appropriate activities were organised. The project team and especially the project coordinator worked constantly to ensure that all stakeholders were on board and worked around a unified vision for a reading school. Stakeholders included the school community (principals, teachers, school librarians, learners, parents and caregivers and the SGB), the Gauteng Department of Education District Tshwane South, donors, partnering schools and all project team members. The premise on which the project was based is that proper groundwork in literacy must be laid at primary level. Many capacity building opportunities and activities were arranged over a period of time for the school community, outlined in this chapter and in Chapter 6.

When we started out with the Literacy Project I visited the schools weekly, but once the libraries ran reasonably smoothly and the librarians found their feet I went to the schools on a needs-driven basis to specifically help with library issues or to attend meetings and workshops. It is perhaps necessary to explain here that apart from the project coordinator most project team members are fulltime lecturers at UNISA and are involved in the Literacy Project on a part-time

basis as researchers and community workers. This is an internal intervention working with teachers using a cascading model as explained above in section 5.2.

Past experience of the Literacy Project team members and others in similar projects (e.g. *Linking literacy to development in South Africa* 2005; Machet & Wessels 2006:69) has shown that once the support of the project team was withdrawn the school or library could not continue on its own. One of the steps taken to prevent the schools from lapsing into old habits was the appointment of a dedicated project coordinator who visited the schools continuously throughout the Literacy Project.

The sustainability of the reading and literacy programmes introduced at the two schools is a constant concern of the project team. Not only is it important and necessary from a research point but also from an ethical perspective to ensure that the schools are able to continue even after the project team withdrew - an issue that cannot be resolved easily (refer to Chapter 7).

5.4.1 Meetings and Workshops with Teachers

The Literacy Project organised and presented a series of after school meetings and workshops for teachers to provide a reading and literacy framework. The goal of these meetings and workshops was to work together to investigate issues, sometimes in an investigative mode and at other times teachers receiving direct instruction from presenters to solve problems. Learning opportunities for teachers (and incidentally for me) ranged from formal activities such as listening to a lecture on storytelling and the weeding of books to informal activities such as actually reading a story to the other teachers in a role play session and working together in the library weeding books. There was an average of three workshops and meetings per term. (Refer to Appendix C for a list of workshops and visits.)

Contact sessions were arranged on approximately a fortnightly basis during the first three terms of each year. Fewer activities were arranged for the first term of the year while everyone still seemed to be finding their feet and also during the last term of the year due to examination obligations. We found that the second and third terms were the most fruitful and effective period

to arrange workshops. This was also sometimes compromised; for example during the month long teachers' strike in the second term of 2007, very little teaching took place and almost no Literacy Project activities. All participants were issued with project files to store workshop handouts and notes as well as project schedules for reference and time management purposes.



Photo 4: Teachers and project team workshop at Bantabethu



Photo 5: Project leader discusses assessment figures at Phuthumani

The workshops initially familiarised teachers with the Literacy Project and its objectives, and covered a multitude of related topics such as

- reading and literacy factors that impact on teaching approaches
- emergent literacy
- decoding and comprehension
- reading attitudes
- how to use storybook reading in the classroom to facilitate reading
- objectives of family literacy events

Teachers needed to understand that it is essential to read stories aloud to children from an early age and that they should continue with this activity throughout the grades. They needed to grasp that "...the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children" (Anderson *et al* 1985). The teachers had been

exposed to the use of storybooks in classrooms in workshops, demonstrations and role modeling sessions.

Storybook reading has been experienced positively by the teachers as a reading activity and a teaching tool, especially Foundation Phase teachers as the following shows:

Respondents	Source	Text
Grade 1 teachers at Bantabethu	Bantabethu Term Report 21 June 2005	The project has renewed our teaching spirit. It has made us realize that nothing impossible if you really want things to happen. We already started seeing the value of reading as educators. We thought that reading/telling stories was only to while away time, but as we read stories we realized that they are very important for developing language and enjoyment. We also enjoy the stories.
Project Co-ordinator	Phuthumani Project Term Report 27 November 2008	I again observed a real focus on reading and other literacy activities. This is paying off as many learners are reading with confidence and enjoyment. Even Gd 1s are reading books! Storybook reading has become an integral part of the weekly routine (both in classrooms and library).

(Please note that all quotes in the dissertation from teachers, librarians and monitors are reproduced exactly as contained in the qualitative data from reports without correction of spelling and grammatical errors.)

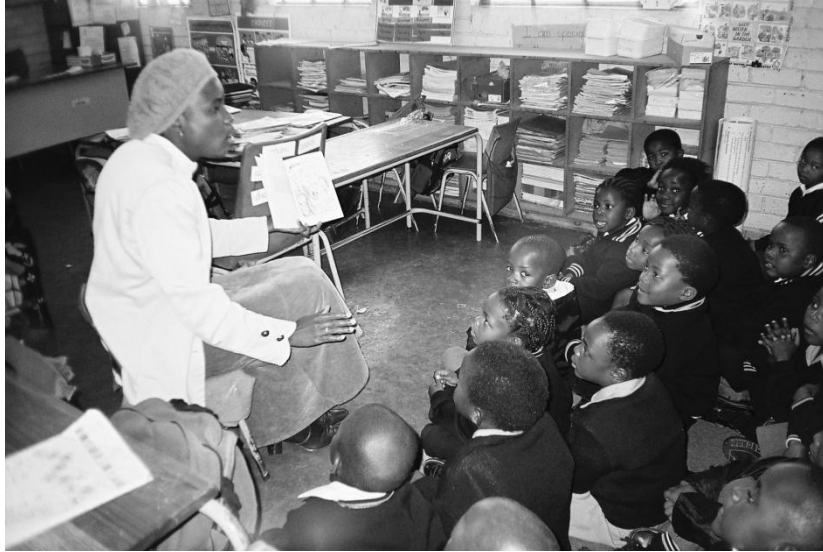


Photo 6: Foundation Phase teacher at Bantabethu reads a storybook to Grade 1 learners

The Literacy Project team responded to needs as they arose. Issues discussed in the workshops were sometimes repeated using different approaches. Looking back the workshops can be divided in four broad categories:

- Self-development for example time management
- Teaching development such as the use of regular assessment tests, creating teaching materials, developing storybook reading skills
- Literacy issues such as what is reading, developing reading speed, phonics, reading schema
- School library issues

Workshops that specifically targeted library issues covered basic library practices and information literacy and how to incorporate the library and library resources into literacy practices at the school. I found that apart from the principal at Bantabethu and one or two teachers at both schools even this low level approach to information literacy was too challenging to the teachers. Most teachers in these two schools were clearly not familiar with libraries or had very superficial knowledge of how to use a library. We had to go back and discuss the basics several times: how a school library works, the distinction between fiction, non-fiction and

reference works and how the Dewey Decimal Classification system is used to organise collections and information, call numbers and subjects. I had to explain that books have authors and titles, the basic parts of a book, i.e. title page and verso, publisher and publication date, contents page, index and the role of illustrations. We had practical sessions in the school libraries on these themes as well as the use of storybooks and non-fiction to broaden both teacher and learner insights. I believe to some extent more learning about the library took place incidentally during these working sessions than in formal sessions. We also gave workshops on how the school library can be integrated with OBE outcomes (refer to section 3.3). The interrelated skills of location, selection, organisation, presentation and evaluation of information were not easily understood by the teachers and they were not able to transfer these skills to the learners.

An ideal opportunity to illustrate the integration of the library into teaching activities came about when the caretaker at Bantabethu killed a snake on the school grounds during one of my visits. The librarian, the Science teacher and I browsed through the collection and found a traditional story on snakes in Sepedi, an abridged Disney book on the film *The Jungle Book*, and a few non-fiction books on snakes. I showed them how to find information in the explanatory dictionaries, the Sepedi/English dictionaries we bought for the classrooms and the entry on snakes in the *World Book* set of encyclopaedias. It became clear that the teachers needed a lot of support to use the library effectively in order to develop appropriate learning opportunities.

Workshops were participatory and we followed a collaborative approach. We continuously invited teachers to put problems and concerns on the table. Some teachers participated and offered their insights and experiences, but it was clear that they are not used to freely offer of themselves. It was important that teachers understood the purpose of the activities, what activities to perform, how the various activities related to each other and how they related to their teaching goals. We intended that these workshops would encourage the teachers to discuss any issues which they encountered and use new ideas as models and guidelines. Critical reflection was difficult to obtain and discussions and feedback tended to be superficial and conversational in nature.

After the much touted and successful opening of the library at Bantabethu on 27 October 2005 the principal commented in her Term Report of 29 November 2009:

This project, to a larger extent has promoted teamwork in our school. Teachers plan in teams, coach and advise each other. All the success towards the official opening of the library bears witness to this aspect.

5.4.2 Visits

In order to raise literacy awareness and to provide a broader frame of reference with regard to literacy and literacy practices, teachers took turns to attend reading related activities or to visit other schools. The Foundation Phase (Grades 1- 3) and Intersen Phase (Grades 4-7) teachers attended visits and other activities separately to ensure a continuous teacher presence at the schools as well as for practical and logistical reasons. Sometimes activities were arranged to take place at Bantabethu and Phuthumani. Examples of visits were to READ, Woza Bona on storybook reading and a visit to the academic library at UNISA. Teachers who attended any activities gave feedback to the other teachers during literacy meetings. (Refer to Appendix C for a list of workshops and visits.)



Photo 7: Bantabethu teachers visit the UNISA Library

Informal visits by Bantabethu and Phuthumani teachers to partnering schools were organised on a continuous basis so that they could observe successful literacy practices, how to build reading skills in the schools, various reading activities and the use of resources such as classroom collections and central library facilities. Bantabethu and Phuthumani teachers also observed partnering school teachers in their classrooms during lessons to observe good reading practices. A Phuthumani teacher wrote in the Reading Project Final Report of 8 December 2009:

The trips to our sister schools with learners and fellow teachers were also very beneficial. We got to see how they do their things in class. The teachers also benefited a lot from these little trips as they got to engage with their colleagues and to gain lots of insight.

5.4.3 Training and Conferences

The schools nominated several teachers who were enrolled and passed the Parent Involvement Certificate Course at UNISA. The Literacy Project financed the enrollment fees. Six teachers from Bantabethu and six teachers from Phuthumani completed the course. One of the Foundation Phase teachers at Bantabethu also completed a course on learner behaviour.

The Literacy Project funded 26 teachers to attend national conferences and workshops organised by SAALED (Southern African Association for Learning and Educational Difficulties) over a period of three years. Four teachers attended the annual RASA (Reading Association of South Africa) conference. The school librarians and interested members of the school library committees attended school library events such as the 2009 two day seminar *School Libraries vital for Teaching & Learning* hosted by the Gauteng Department of Education & IASL Region: Africa Sub-Sahara. The principal and second librarian at Bantabethu gave a presentation at a school library meeting, giving the school its own voice.

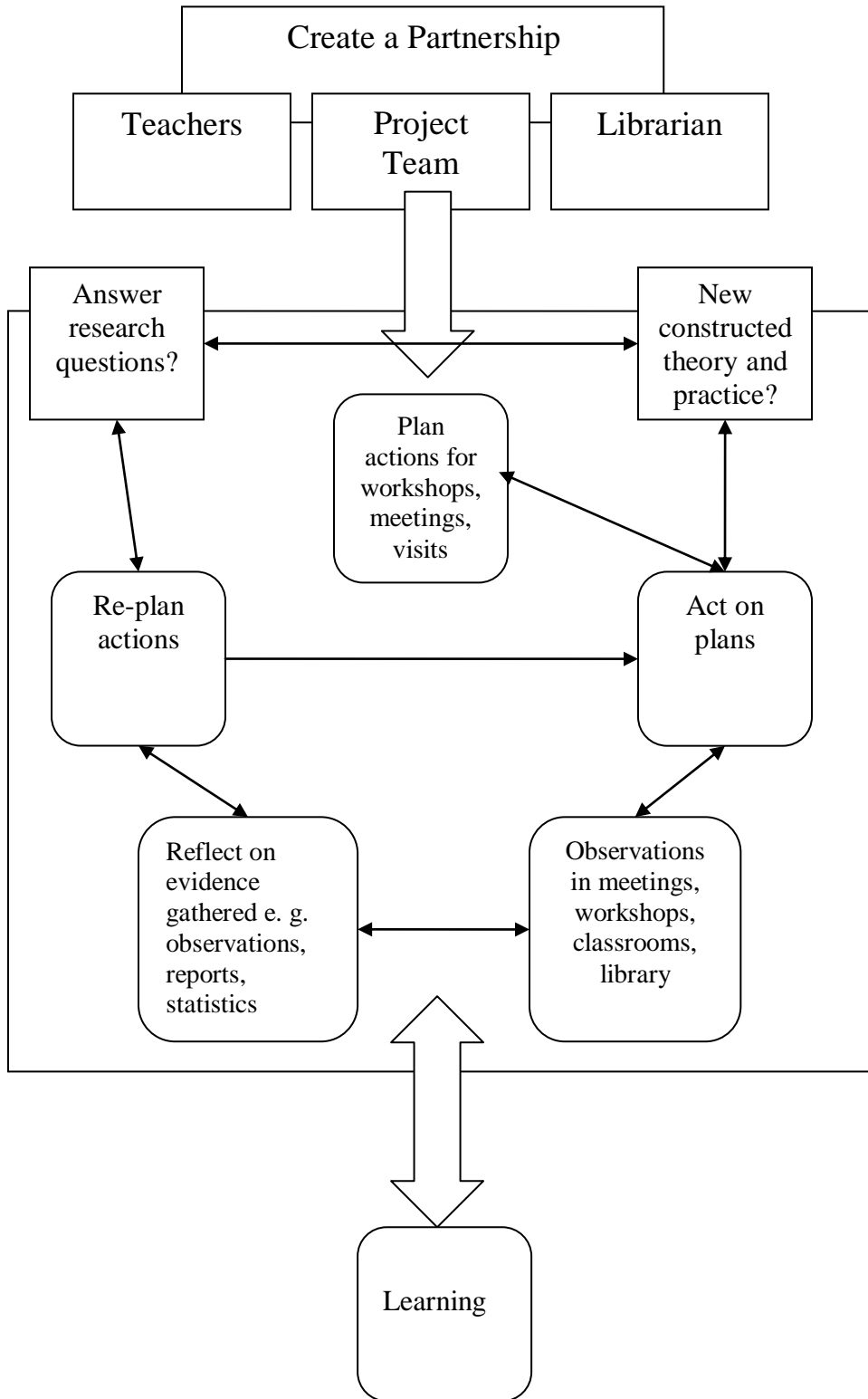
The two participating schools had some joint initiatives: work-shopping and visiting other schools together. They also organised a joint “Literacy Day” for the learners. The Project team hopes that this will eventually lead to sharing of knowledge and ideas and that it will be a factor in the sustainability of the reading and literacy programmes.

5.4.4 Research Team Meetings

The project or research team met regularly on a biweekly or monthly basis. These meetings acted as a platform where we analysed the previous weeks' activities and observations, adapted strategies, exchanged ideas, aired our concerns and frustrations and did forward planning. The meetings cemented a close relationship between the team members and helped in facing the reality of the schools. Although the school communities were welcoming and a spirit of goodwill generally existed between all participants, it was frustrating at times to turn up to present a workshop and to be told that the teachers had to attend another meeting, or the school librarian is ill and the school library is closed for the day, or more seriously, after months of intervention the reading assessment tests did not show significant improvements. After these meetings I often had to carry out another short literature review to identify relevant documentation relating to the teaching of reading from a linguistic and didactic perspective, this not being my field of expertise. We sometimes invited the principals and librarians of Bantabethu and Phuthumani to attend the meetings depending on the points of discussion and needs of the Literacy Project.

These meetings and the workshops with teachers were loosely based on the cyclic approach in action research. Figure 5.2 below is a contextualised model of the general action research cycle discussed in Chapter 4. Actions and observations had to be reflected on, plans had to be reconsidered and then acted upon again with the constant question "Are we making a difference?".

Figure 5.2: Workshops and meetings as a cyclic approach



5.4.5 Organised Learner Activities: Paired Reading and Book Clubs

The shockingly low levels of learners' reading ability in South Africa (refer to Chapter 2) are reflected in Bantabethu and Phuthumani. Initial results of reading assessment tests in the two schools indicated that learners decoded text below expectations according to the assessment standards of the Department of Education as set out in the *Revised National Curriculum Statement* and they comprehended little of what they read. This has improved to some extent over time. Two of the activities that were introduced to make reading practices more enjoyable were the paired reading system and book clubs. These activities could increase time spent on reading. Good reading practices have to be role-modeled and a book buddy reading system and book clubs provide such opportunities. One of the potential barriers to fluent reading and reading with enjoyment can be an affective stumbling block which is difficult to overcome if learners are anxious and do not experience a sense of pleasure and fun in reading. Paired reading and book clubs can provide a more relaxed atmosphere in which to read and practice reading. Well managed book-sharing activities can become language and learning opportunities and challenge the learners to be actively involved.

5.4.5.1 Paired reading or book buddies

The paired reading system paired older learners with younger learners and emphasised reading for enjoyment. Older learners adopted a younger learner and regularly read storybooks to the younger child. This system provided older and younger learners with the potential opportunity to simultaneously practice and improve their reading skills and to regularly engage in reading activities in a non-threatening way. Learners were encouraged to choose their own storybooks. The system can also be adapted and peers can become book buddies. We tried this to some extent with the monitors who read together with their own peers.

Teachers had to monitor the buddy system and could also use the system in the schools' official literacy or reading period. (I discuss the literacy periods in more detail in section 5.5.) A workshop was presented on paired reading strategies and teachers received a handout in both English and Sepedi.

5.4.5.2 School book clubs

Early on in the Literacy Project the project team invited a good storyteller to come and read three stories to the Grade 3 learners and the Foundation Phase teachers in Bantabethu. Listening to stories being read to them and answering questions about the stories were new experiences for the learners. They seemed overwhelmed and did not participate in any discussion on the text. One of the tactics teachers introduced was to ask questions during storytelling. Asking questions helps learners to become more involved in the story, to concentrate and to make inferences.

The same was true for the Grade 6 and 7 learners who started to participate in the book clubs. We observed that they were not used to listening to stories being read to them and then to discuss the story, which is a common learned response. The learners had to realise that this was supposed to be fun, and not a test. They also had to learn to interrogate the text and not just regurgitate it, an issue that is also apparent in classroom practices. Part of the problem can be traced back to the heavy emphasis on rote learning methods used in the classrooms and poor comprehension skills of the learners. Talking about books in a school book club did not come naturally. In addition, choosing books suitable for this activity required careful thought to find something that is interesting, has quality but can still be easily understood. In time some of the learners became more interactive and started to answer questions and even asked some questions of their own.

A Bantabethu teacher who participated in book club activities reported in the Term Report of 2 December 2008:

Book club is one of the strategies that are used to help learners with reading skills and to source out useful information from books. ... Learners are motivated and confident.... I am happy to have had the opportunity to be part of the book club family... I am also motivated to read storybooks.

Change however, is a long term project and in a recent e-mail the project co-ordinator commented on the book club learners “What is such a shame, though, is the very low levels of reading and knowledge about the world around them (Currin 2009).

Book clubs and activities such as book buddies do not “just happen” This is tied up with perceptions of what is and is not important and the continued success of these activities again relies on teacher participation.

5.4.6 Family Literacy Events

Family literacy events are a way to reinforce literacy practices in the schools and extend them to the home context.

Regular family literacy workshops were organised on an ongoing basis for the School Governing Bodies, parents and other caregivers to make them aware of the importance of reading and literacy at school and at home. The family literacy workshops were offered once a term on Sunday mornings in the middle of the month when it was most convenient for parents. Parental attendance figures averaged 50, but we had more than 200 attendees on various occasions and on one occasion more than 300 parents. We arranged a joint family literacy event at the beginning of each year and separate workshops for Grades 1 - 3 (Foundation Phase) and Grades 4 - 7 (Intersen Phase) in the second and third terms. Teachers and school librarians attended the family literacy events as well.



Photo 8: Family literacy meeting at Bantabeth

Initially research team members organised and presented these workshops, but gradually the principals and teachers took over the responsibility and we only attended as observers but continued to give suggestions that might be helpful. Bantabethu teachers took ownership and

started to run family literacy events independently. They arranged a very successful workshop at the end of 2008 without the help of the project team and it was extremely gratifying to see the growth of the teachers and the quality of the workshop offered. Teachers who enrolled for the Parent Involvement Certificate Course at UNISA used the family literacy events to apply theory in practice. Family literacy events gave teachers the opportunity to showcase their new knowledge and the many positive activities they and the learners did at school.



Photo 9: Teachers discussing literacy issues with parents at Bantabethu

Activities and topics covered in the workshops included the following:

- discussions and practical exercises on how to read to young children,
- encouraging pleasure reading,
- explaining reading and literacy activities in the classrooms
- potential reading problems amongst learners
- introduction to the new library facilities at the schools
- reading and discussing storybooks in groups



Photo 10 and Photo 11: Group discussions and parents reading to parents during a Bantabethu family literacy event

The concepts of ‘reading for fun’ as opposed to ‘reading for information’ were explained and discussed. Notes on reading to children were prepared and given to the parents. These notes were also translated in Sepedi by the Department of African languages at UNISA and distributed to the parents. If the technology was available and in working order, parents were usually also shown a video on literacy activities that focused on storybook reading. The video was developed by the Children’s Literacy Research Unit at UNISA.

Other broader and relevant issues were also discussed at these meetings such as the importance for parents to show interest in the school and in their children’s school activities, monitoring of homework, the influence of TV, remedial teaching, the importance of healthy food and the problems of abuse at home. Feedback from teachers indicated that parents who attended family literacy events regularly participated more in their children’s learning, especially the reading activities, and showed more interest in the schools in general.

The public librarian of the nearby public and community library attended some of the family literacy meetings as well and invited parents and teachers to join the library to supplement the availability of reading material to support literacy activities. In this way awareness of the importance of school and public library usage was raised in the broader school community. I was

pleased to hear that seven teachers and apparently several parents subsequently joined their public library.



Photo 12: The public librarian invites Phuthumani parents to join the public library

The family literacy workshops have additional value in that they open communication lines between parents and teachers. Teachers reported that in many cases it was their first meeting with many parents. Talking to each other brought home to both teachers and parents the need to establish working school, teacher and parent relationships. It might also play a role in overcoming the lack of respect that teachers often show towards parents and distrust of teachers by parents. Many parents may find school an intimidating place due to their own past experiences. At every family literacy meeting, parents were again invited to visit the schools on a regular basis to discuss literacy activities and any other issues of concern.



Photo 13: Parents and teachers socialise after a family literacy meeting at Phuthumani

Discussions with parents during these family literacy events showed clearly that they have educational aspirations for their children, but lack the skills and resources to support their children’s academic performance. They believe that they are not qualified to become actively involved in their children’s schooling. They appreciated the discussions on the importance of reading books to their children. The school libraries were introduced as a resource to parents at both schools and they were invited to encourage their children to take out and read library books.

Some comments from school management after family literacy workshops at both schools were:

Respondent	Source	Text
Bantabethu vice-principal	Bantabethu Term Report 28 March 2006	Parents are now starting to be part of their learners’ education.
Phuthumani principal	Phuthumani Term Report 23 March 2007	The parents showed a lot of interest and eager to learn and participation was very good.

5.4.7 Feedback Practices

Feedback on Literacy Project activities occurred on an *ad hoc* basis at meetings with various stakeholders and participants to ensure that everyone shared the same vision and “to make the project transparent and putting it clearly in the public domain of the school” (Pretorius & Currin 2006a:11).

5.4.7.1 Feedback at the schools

At the end of each term a report back meeting was organised and written reports from principals, teachers, school librarians and the research team were discussed. These sessions provided all participants with an opportunity to review and reflect on the literacy activities of the term, the results of the literacy assessment pre-tests and post-tests and to share good literacy practices. It also afforded many of the teachers and the school librarians with a chance to practise report writing.

Information flow was essential for new knowledge and skills to permeate throughout the school and the comment in the Banthabethu term report of 29 November 2005 stated that:

Constant positive feedback, and support from the project co-ordinator and other team members builds on the teacher’s confidence.

5.4.7.2 Feedback to other role players

Informal meetings by the project team and sometimes the principals of the schools took place at the Gauteng Department of Education South District Office to report on the Literacy Project to relevant officials. These meetings were complemented by written reports. Scheduled meetings often did not take place due to regular cancellations by the Department for various reasons.

The project leader reported back to the various donors in writing, and face-to-face where possible. Some of the donors also visited the schools personally.

The project team met once a term with the principal of Waverley Primary School. The project team and the principal and school librarian from Bantabethu also met on an *ad hoc* basis with the the principal of Waverley to discuss the progress of the Literacy Project.

5.5 INTRODUCTION OF LITERACY PERIODS

Recognising the importance of actually reading in order to learn to read, and being at the same time cajoled by the research team on the subject, both schools introduced a daily thirty minute literacy or reading period in order to improve the culture of reading. It also coincided with and supported the call from the then Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor that thirty minutes a day should be spend on reading activities and that schools must pay more attention to the basic reading skills of learners (Rademeyer 2008:9).



Photo 14: Learners reading during a Literacy Period

During the literacy period time should be allocated to practising reading skills and literacy activities such as listening to a story read by the teacher, paired reading, silent reading or a visit to the school library. Everyone in the schools is supposed to sit down and read; learners, teachers, administrative and ground staff. It took a long time before these periods were built into the time table but eventually Bantabethu spent the first half hour and Phuthumani the last half hour of each day on reading activities.

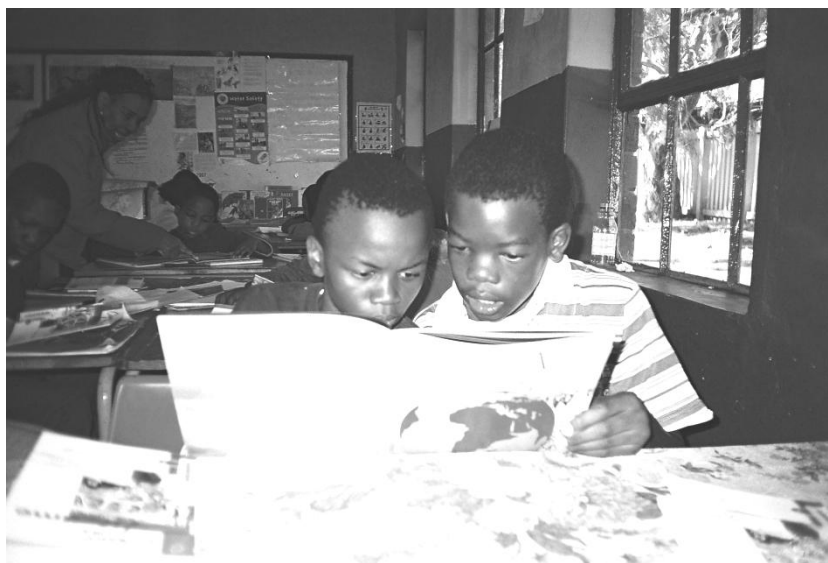


Photo 15: Paired reading for fun

The teachers requested ideas to manage the daily literacy period so as to achieve their objectives and a workshop was arranged. Teachers were also reminded that they could also use information and knowledge from previous workshops such as the workshops on storybook reading, vocabulary strategies using storybooks and teaching grammar and literacy using storybooks. (Here the poor housekeeping of many of the teachers came to light and it was evident that they did not keep and update their Literacy Files.)

The Literacy Project provided exercise books for learners and teachers to use for book report purposes. It was felt that writing basic book reports and providing the title, author and a short report with symbols such as a smiling face, an unhappy face and an angry face to indicate if a book is liked could give structure and purpose to the reading periods. Other suggested activities with learners were the keeping of book journals, word books and more reading homework which could be reinforced during the reading period.

An Intersen Phase teacher summed it up as follows in the Bantabethu Term Report of 22 November 2007:

Most learners improved their reading levels. The allocation of reading period in the time table helped a lot, because I used it effectively to make sure that I

give my learners attention in their reading. The system of learners borrowing books from the library plays an important role.

5.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I reflected on almost five years of research and community involvement in a Literacy Project in two schools in Atteridgeville. I discussed the patchwork of activities and strategies used using a synthesis of input received from various project team members. In order to better understand the school environment, I had been out in the field on a regular basis building relationships with the school community, attending workshops and meetings on reading and literacy issues and assessing the potential of setting up physical libraries. The importance of reading and related issues was abundantly dealt with in the schools.

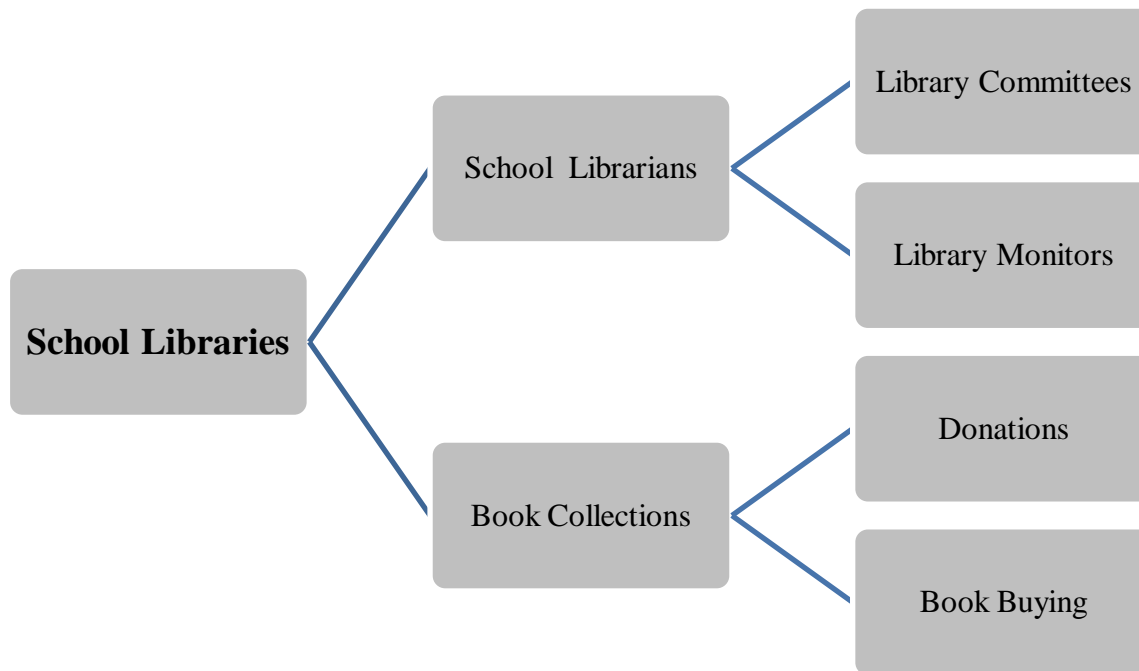
In Chapter 6 I narrate how the above was translated into a form of library facility and library practice at each school.

CHAPTER 6: RESURRECTION AND INNOVATION IN THE SCHOOL LIBRARIES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I continue the empirical story and relate the resource building component of the Literacy Project. Resources were necessary to support the capacity building component of the Literacy Project. These included physical resources such as a library facility and book collections and human resources such as a school librarian, library monitors and library committees as set out in Figure 6.1. Easy access to reading material for teachers and learners is essential to ensure the success of any reading and literacy endeavour.

Figure 6.1: Resource building



According to the IFLA/UNESCO school library guidelines sustained funding is necessary for trained library staff, materials, technologies and facilities and that the material budget should be at least 5% of the per student expenditure (IFLA 2002). In reality Bantabethu and Phuthumani had no budget for a school library and no posts for a teacher librarian. A small amount of money

was available for books but teachers preferred to buy Graded Readers to storybooks. Five percent of the Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM) budget is allocated towards book buying. This does not amount to much but at least shows a nod from the Department of Education towards book buying efforts. The very limited availability of funding for books is a real obstacle to effective teaching and learning. The schools only started to spend this money on books after joining the Literacy Project.

Krashen (as cited by Loertscher 1998:20) warns that “Literacy *is* a problem to throw money at, but we have to aim carefully by pouring money into library books and then making sure they get read.” This was a constant reminder in setting up and developing the library infrastructure and services for the two school communities. It also continues to be a problem as far as sustainability is concerned: where is money going to come from and who will ensure that the books get read?

6.2 RESURRECTION OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

As discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.6, South African schools have to use their own initiative to develop and run some form of school library. Different models exist for school libraries such as classroom libraries, school community libraries, cluster libraries, mobile libraries, provincial/regional/district libraries and a central library (South Africa. Department of Education 2005c:39-42). The draft *National School Library Policy* advocates the central school library model “which provides a wide variety of learning and teaching resources in various formats, i.e. print, three dimensional models, analog and digital, including the use of ICTs” (South Africa. Department of Education 2005c:26-28). This model requires a qualified teacher-librarian and a library assistant to manage library activities. The reality though in our print-poor schools is no or dysfunctional school libraries, no funding for teacher-librarians or school librarians and too few resources such as storybooks and reference works.

We decided to follow an incremental approach and use the various models in a much more modest format in each school in setting up the school libraries. The classrooms were devoid of text; no reading books were available and there was little or no text displayed on the walls. We opted to set up a basic central library and book corners in each classroom in both schools and to

actively promote the local Community Library run by the City of Tshwane Municipality, amongst the school communities. In addition the Literacy Project arranged that a mobile library from Gauteng Province Libraries visited Phuthumani on a reasonably regular fortnightly basis depending on availability until the school library was officially opened.



Photo 16: Mobile Library visits Phuthumani

Apart from creating a physical space that would be as pleasant and stimulating as was possible with very little funds, my targets included:

- starting and expanding a book collection,
- training of school librarians and
- introducing teachers to information literacy activities with the learners in the library

The latter proved to be especially difficult and complicated.

6.2.1 Finding Physical Spaces

In established schools without space to spare the project team had little choice about the actual space for a library and we had to make the best use of what was available. Given the limitations of space and budget, careful planning was necessary. Team members walked around with many a checklist and to-do list before undertaking any physical preparations. An example of one of my to-do lists is:

- Ask school about security for library rooms
- Get catalogues to order books
- Finalise computer and printer order
- Organise librarian visit to Flavius and Isabel at Cramer
- Encyclopaedia info and CD-ROM
- Jolly tables at Game?

6.2.1.1 Bantabethu school library

Bantabethu at least had a suitable and spacious room available, which was purpose-built as a computer centre. It was under-utilised as explained in section 5.3.1, but according to Department of Education policy the school was unfortunately not allowed to combine it with a library, as is the practice internationally, so we could not make use of this room. The school also had a small office available with a security gate and burglar proofed windows and dilapidated bookshelves. It was situated next to the kitchen where the food is prepared for the feeding scheme by parents and served as a storeroom for old text books, broken down furniture, some storybooks in boxes, odd collections of encyclopaedias and torn and tattered posters. Nothing was really accessible or organised. This room was eventually chosen as the designated library as there was nothing else available.

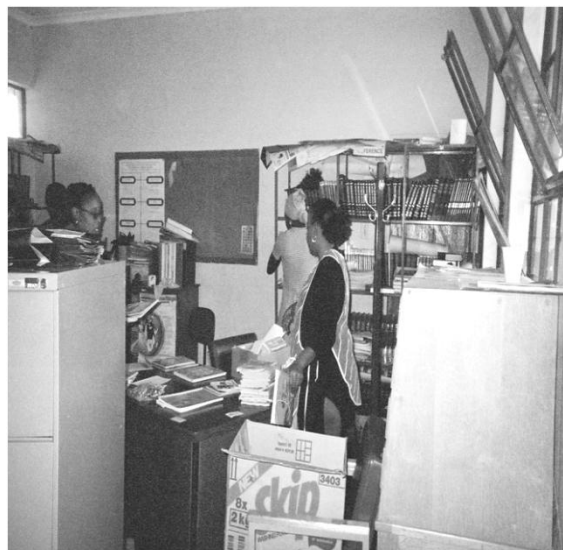


Photo 17: Chaos in the designated Bantabethu library

The involvement of the school community was and still is a high priority for long term sustainability and because experience has shown us that without this buy-in the project has little chance of success. The teachers and learners participated in cleaning up and preparing the room to serve as a library. I gave a short workshop on the weeding of books (refer to section 6.3.1) and the school literarily “jumped in”. The teachers evaluated the books and distributed text books that could still be used to the appropriate classes. The older boys removed unwanted furniture, the older girls started to clean the room and the younger children carried unwanted books to the Mondi container on the school grounds for recycling. Three boxes of books were sold to a second hand bookshop and we bought a few new books with the proceeds. The science teacher turned out to be a handyman as well and he and the Grade 7 boys fixed the shelves.

The first librarian had joined the school at this stage and painted the shelves a bright blue. The schools’ factotum killed the rats. (I have to confess here that the rats have been a continuous problem since then, for example, they chewed the computer mouse and feasted on the books.) The project team added a carpet, blinds for the windows, two jolly tables and chairs for the learners and the principal provided furniture for the librarian. (Jolly tables and chairs are brightly coloured stackable plastic items of furniture.) A local handyman parent made a protective metal “cage” of his own design for the computer to safeguard it against theft. This cage was fixed permanently to the library floor which made using the computer a bit cumbersome. The learners made posters and we also bought a few colourful ones. The few useful books that survived the weeding sessions were arranged on the shelves and the scene was set.



Photo 18: Preparing the Bantabethu library



Photo 19: Computer cage at Bantabethu

The library was officially opened on 27 October 2005 and the occasion was attended by various dignitaries from the Department of Education, representatives from the private school Waverley that supports Bantabethu, the Project team and interested academics from UNISA and the community.



Photo 20: Official Bantabethu library opening



Photo 21: Grade 0's join the festivities

The whole programme was planned and coordinated by the principal and the team of teachers and was a joyous occasion for all. The event was even reported in the local newspaper, *Tshwane Sun* (Shirinda 2005:11). (Refer to Appendix D.) The parents, who in general struggle financially, raised over R5000 to sponsor the library opening ceremony, which is an indication of the support the Literacy Project received from the school community. The programme directors made up an anagram for LIBRARY (see below) and related it to some literacy activities.

- L Learn
- I Investigate
- B Brainstorm
- R Read
- A Acquired
- R Relate
- Y Yearn/Yield

It is significant that the B was not used for books which seemed an obvious choice.

The Principal commented in her end of the year Bantabethu Term Report of 29 November 2005:

The spectacular opening of the school library has taken this project beyond its initial objective. We envisage to engage beyond improvement of reading skills to improvement of literacy and communication skills.



Photo 22: The new Bantabethu library

In 2007 the Gauteng Department of Education named the Bantabethu School Library as the best library in the category for ‘Primary Schools with Learners mostly from Informal settlements’ (refer to Appendix E). The school’s vice principal summed it up well in a 2008 meeting:

small library, small room, lot of worth

Encouraged by the project team, the principal made a proposal to the Japanese Embassy to sponsor a purpose-built school library for Bantabethu. There is sufficient space for a library at the school and the Embassy made an exploratory visit to the school. In February 2010 we heard

that the loan has been approved and we are pleased to leave this legacy to the school. The principal is driving the *Build a Library Building* project.

6.2.1.2 Phuthumani school library

At Phuthumani the Literacy Project originally envisaged the establishment of only classroom libraries starting with the Foundation Phase since the school had no rudimentary library infrastructure and no known space for a library. Teachers were reluctant to take responsibility for classroom libraries and it soon became clear that a dedicated school library was needed to support the reading activities and to ensure adequate exposure to reading resources.

Phuthumani had a large classroom with a smaller adjoining room and shelves available. The rooms were also used as storing place for broken furniture, garden implements and even an old roneo machine. However, the principal was hesitant to allow the use of these rooms for a library since he was waiting for the Gauteng Department of Education to install a computer centre. He eventually gave the project team permission to use the space as a library and we decided to use the smaller room as the actual library and the large room as a reading *cum* general library literacy activity room.



Photo 23: Phuthumani library preparation



Photo 24: Phuthumani library transformation

The spaciousness of the Phuthumani library was an advantage and we bought twenty large jolly chairs, book trolleys and display shelving for popular magazines. The room lent itself well to class visits and group activities such as storytelling and library skills lessons.



Photo 25: Phuthumani learners enjoying the new library

We followed a similar process as at Bantabethu, but waited much longer before installing computer hardware and software and before actually using the library due to the lack of security measurements such as burglar bars, security doors and a security device for the computer. The Literacy Project paid for the improvements, but the onus rested on the school to employ a person from the community to do the actual work. Although the project coordinator took the handyman to look at similar devices that worked, he eventually made a tiny contraption of steel that was fixed to the wall in the smaller library room. The poor librarian now has to carry the computer to and fro in order to either use it or lock it away. The burglar bars are askew and the safety doors are difficult to open, but it is working.

The library was eventually officially opened on 14 March 2008, almost two years after the start of the project. It was a serious occasion for the school community and well attended by officials, parents and other interested parties.

The Library Committee reported in the Phuthumani Library committee Report of May 2008:

In Afrikaans hulle se: ‘Ook die agter os kom in die kraal.’ Finally, at last we did it! Our library was officially opened on the 14th March 2008. It was nearly a disastrous day because the state of our library was not up to the standard they expected. Nevertheless the occasion was salvaged.



Photo 26: Phuthumani learners at library opening

6.2.2 Appointment and Training of “School Librarians”

As mentioned previously the two schools did not have the expertise to set up school libraries and no funds to pay for a trained teacher librarian. Teachers have a heavy teaching load and cannot take on additional duties such as running a library.

In consultation with the principals we originally made a decision to appoint part-time “school librarians” from the school community who were paid from project funding. We saw the appointment of members of the community as an empowering social engagement and transformation opportunity for potential candidates. I have to clarify that none of the so-called school librarians who have participated in the Literacy Project so far were trained librarians and should perhaps be called library assistants, but for the purpose of this dissertation I refer to them as *school librarians*.

The project team drew up a profile and job specifications for suitable school librarians in consultation with the principals and interested teachers. We decided that successful candidates should at least have a matriculation certificate, some computer literacy skills and show an interest in reading and in young children. Duties would be diverse and included the housekeeping of the school library, computerised classification and cataloguing and working with the project team as well as with the school community.

The school librarians were given a crash course in librarianship and on the job training. They had to be familiarised with various aspects of running a library, such as library procedures, systems for loans and returns of stock, and cataloguing and classification. Library housekeeping was another activity that we had to teach the librarians. I showed them how to process stock which included accessioning, stamp of ownership and spine labeling and how to arrange the books on the shelves according to classification number in the case of non-fiction and alphabetically in the case of fiction. A core aspect of the training was to ensure that the school librarians understood that the school library service existed for its users; the teachers and the learners. They were also required to attend the workshops and meetings with the teachers (refer to Chapter 5) to understand the aims and objectives of the Literacy Project, the various literacy issues and to ensure continuous involvement.

Predictably, the roles and responsibilities of these school librarians cannot necessarily be measured in the same way as trained librarians, but their contribution will be measured in regard to the Literacy Project.

6.2.2.1 Bantabethu

Bantabethu has had three school librarians so far.

- ***First librarian***

The first time round three candidates from the community were interviewed by a selection committee consisting of two teachers, the project manager and myself. A basic computer literacy

test was drawn up and supervised by the vice principal. Only one candidate showed sufficient computer skills and an awareness of library usage to be considered and he was offered a two year contract as school librarian. He had attended Bantabethu himself as a learner and found it very gratifying to be part of the improvement in the school's facilities. Apart from occasional hiccups it was a very happy alliance for all concerned. However, the library training was extensive and quite difficult for him, especially the professional activities which was understandable, him not being a trained librarian. Although he was enrolled for courses at a college, his literacy skills were inadequate especially for some of the more professional aspects of the job such as classification. He also found it difficult to understand the computer manual and he did not know how a diary works. Training was done by me and by the company who supplied the library management package (training which I also attended). He was also continuously supported by the other project team members.

The school librarian attended developmental sessions and was included in all workshops and meetings with the teachers, visited the neighbouring high school with a school library and the two involved private schools. I made regular visits to ensure the smooth running of library activities, to identify and deal with any problem and to oversee library housekeeping activities. We realised that it was necessary to draw up a code of conduct, for example no loud music in the library. The Code of Conduct was drawn up with the help of the Library Committee and the project team. As part of his training the librarian was asked to read the books in the library and to write short summaries with the storyline, theme, and some details for example whether a book was aimed at girls or boys, the intended age group, the main topic, and other criteria. He struggled to do this and very little materialised. He was able to get teachers' buy-in to bring the learners to the library and could offer the teachers some superficial help in finding information.

He wrote in his first Bantabethu Library Report of 21 June 2005:

I am very excited about the project, and I am willing to work effectively with educators and learners. I also wish to learn more about Library, reading & books.

With the help of the school library committee he appointed library monitors and cascaded some of his new knowledge such as shelf arrangement to the monitors. When he left after two years he had improved his report writing skills, passed his Information Literacy Course at a tertiary college and was selected for a permanent post on the strength of his experience gained and references from the Literacy Project. He had catalogued and classified a substantial number of the books (around 3000 at that stage) we had collected for Bantabethu. He had also set up the lending system and trained the first library monitors.

- *Second Librarian*

A private school, Waverley, has been involved with Bantabethu for the past fifteen years. They donated items such as food, clothes and books, but wanted to contribute in a more substantial and sustainable way to the school and regarded the Literacy Project as the ideal link. Waverley undertook to employ a teacher who would act as both school librarian and literacy champion at Bantabethu and be involved for a period of five years to specifically improve language and reading skills at the school. They also involved another interested school in England who agreed to support the project financially.

Candidates were interviewed by the principals of Waverley and Bantabethu and project team members. The successful candidate was appointed with the understanding that she would be responsible for the library as well as literacy activities. Her brief was to build relationships with the teaching staff, help with literacy periods, build up book corners and do remedial work with learners. The main objective of these activities was to support the Literacy Project.

She was a professional and trained teacher, but without library training. Although she was good at the motivational aspects of literacy such as handing out certificates, organising some funding for books and ran the library reasonably efficiently, there was friction between the different players as far as the literacy and remedial work were concerned. This eventually led to a mutual agreement to end the relationship.

- ***Third Librarian***

The third librarian was appointed by Waverley as a Sepedi teacher at the partnering school for two days a week. At the same time she would have the dual responsibility of acting as literacy teacher and librarian at Bantabethu for three days a week. Her roles and responsibilities included that of school librarian, general literacy facilitator and remedial teacher. She had experience as a teacher and postgraduate training, but also no library training.

The current incumbent finds this duality very difficult and does little in the township school. She had a library assistant on an informal learnership who worked in the school to gain practical experience for a period of three months to assist with library activities such as the cataloguing and classification of books, but still did not cope with the workload. The future of this relationship is uncertain and precarious at this stage, and as the project team has come to realise, par for the course.

6.2.2.2 Phuthumani

- ***First Librarian***

The first school librarian at Phuthumani was appointed on much the same principle as the first school librarian at Bantabethu. She was from the community and had a young child in the school and thus a vested interest in school activities. She had no post matriculation training, but proved to be a willing and capable person who classified and catalogued the few books in the school, as well as books subsequently donated and bought. The librarian had to work in the staff room for the best part of a year, because the library venue was still not ready. Although far from the ideal situation she used it as an opportunity to build up relationships with the teachers. She experienced a difficult time during the teachers' strike and there were long periods when the school had no electricity and water due to unpaid bills because the school did not receive money from the Department of Education. The school furthermore dragged its feet about the library and the librarian felt underemployed and without a role. Irrespective of these problems she showed interest in library issues, asked relevant questions and came up with suggestions and ideas. The

librarian started a manual lending system for the teachers and oversaw the Mobile Library visits to the school.

In her first Phuthumani library report of March 2007 she wrote:

I am looking forward to having the library to be developed and so that a proper implementation should take place and also to start shelving the books and the library to be functional.

It was a real loss when she left after less than a year to take up a permanent administrative position at another primary school, something the Literacy Project could not offer her.

▪ *Second Librarian*

The second school librarian also hails from the community. She was trained by a project member to work in the school library of another school and knew the library software and school library procedures. The two schools reached an agreement and she now alternates successfully between the two libraries on a part-time basis. She has a degree in another field, but has struggled to find a job. The librarian is dedicated, organised and pro-active; fetching the learners in their classrooms if the teachers do not bring them and informing teachers of new books. She wrote in the Phuthumani Library Report of June 2008:

I found it essential that we have library orientation so that all the learners can be well-informed about the library, interact well with me and amongst themselves.

This routine means that every learner visits the school library regularly every fortnight.



Photo 27: Library period at Phuthumani

She was also instrumental in establishing classroom libraries in the Foundation Phase, but could not do it for all the grades, due to the relatively small size of the school’s book collection.

One outstanding characteristic of this librarian is the respect she shows towards the learners and the positive way they react to that. She built up excellent relationships with her monitors and motivated them constantly. Two of them said in essays on the library:

Respondent	Source	Text
Tshomolofelo 2008	Monitor essay	When you enter our beautiful and attractive library, you find our librarian who is very kind and understandable, and who understands you in turn.
Karabi 2008	Monitor essay	I want to tell you about our Librarian. She is very good and teacher. She don’t like to shout but you make wrong things she start to be little angry

6.2.3 School Library Routines

The computerised library management system introduced the school librarians as well as the teachers and learners to online lending systems and subject retrieval. The project team also

derived useful statistics from the systems on an ongoing basis. However, the systems also brought their own set of problems amongst others the following:

- At Phuthumani the library was only linked to electricity long after opening the library and the school librarian had to continue to catalogue and classify in the staff room.
- At Bantabethu the dedicated school library computer was often the only one in working order or easily accessible and many of the teachers would use it both for their personal and school typing. This led to a virus infection and the computer could not be used for more than a month.
- Each new school librarian had to be trained in the use of the system.
- The school librarians tended to forget to make backups.

An informal decision was made at both schools that each learner should visit the school library at least once a fortnight to return books and to take out new ones. After the loan and circulation system at both libraries became functional and each learner and teacher had been issued with a library card, it was the responsibility of individual teachers to take the learners to the library and to work with the school librarian. According to the school librarians these visits were sometimes irregular and disregarded as other activities such as athletics, choir practices and visitors took precedence. Block issues were made to teachers with reading corners for a year and the stock had to be retrieved at the end of each year. Formal stocktaking has not been done at either library so far.

The school libraries are supposed to stay open until 15:00 on the days the librarians are at the schools, but this is not always the case.

6.3 BOOK COLLECTIONS

“The school library will stand or fall on its stock” (Library Association 2000:7). According to IFLA/UNESCO guidelines school libraries should comprise ten books per learner and at least 60% of the stock should consist of non-fiction resources that relate to the curriculum (IFLA 2002). The British Library Association recommends an even higher number and mentions 13

items per learner and that 10% of stock should be replaced per annum (Library Association 2000:6). The collections for the schools were hard to build up because money was limited and books in South Africa are expensive and furthermore heavily taxed.

I deal with Bantabethu and Phuthumani together because the book collection patterns and examples are similar. The first librarians and I went on a treasure hunt when they joined each school and found books in all shapes and sizes scattered in the principals' offices, storerooms, staff rooms and classrooms. We collected a sizable number of books (excluding boxes full of old and unused text books) at both schools, but most of them turned out to be too old, torn and inappropriate for use. For example we found old encyclopaedias from the thirties and forties which still mentioned the Union of South Africa and used derogatory language about black people.

6.3.1 Weeding

Before we started to clear unwanted reading materials from the future library rooms at both schools, I gave a workshop to the teachers and discussed a list of criteria to consider when weeding the books to ensure that the materials we kept were usable, current and of relevance to the teachers and learners. Criteria included were:

- Books must support the goals of the reading and literacy project, i.e. provide enough storybooks for leisure reading
- Books must be relevant to the curriculum and reading needs of the school
- Books with obsolete information, specifically non-fiction, should be discarded
- Reading levels and interests of the learners must be considered
- Worn and frayed books that cannot be mended must be disposed of
- Books should not contain stereotyping (especially racial and cultural stereotyping)

The librarians, teachers and I worked together to evaluate the books and redistributed text books that could still be used to the appropriate classes. In retrospect I realised that this was an excellent team building exercise. At the same time I reinforced concepts previously discussed in

workshops such as fiction, non-fiction and reference works and the parts of a book such as the author(s), title page, spine, contents page, illustrations and index. New concepts were introduced such as copyright and obsolete information.

Books that were too difficult for primary school learners to read were donated to a neighbouring high school. Material that could not be used at all was recycled. I suggested that we weeded books in languages not used in the schools such as Afrikaans, but the teachers wanted to keep a small collection of other indigenous languages. We also decided to keep classics and award winners, even if the reading level is too difficult for many learners. Here I refer to the definition of classics by Kroll (2005:23) as “books that have remained favourites – popular for more than one generation”. These include books such as *Winnie the Pooh*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Heidi*, *Polyanna*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Anne of Green Gables*, *Black Beauty*, the Famous Five and many more.

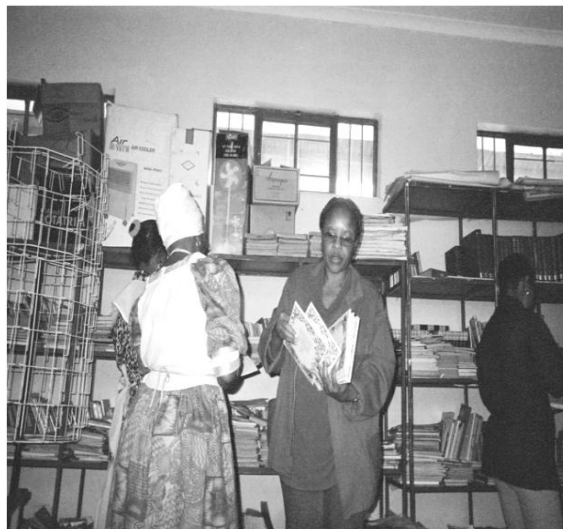


Photo 28: Weeding session at Bantabethu

6.3.2 Collecting

Since it was necessary to extensively weed the existing books, we had to purchase or supplicate new books to enhance the basic collections. A follow-up session on the book weeding workshop was held on its counterpart, book selection. Many of the same criteria for book weeding apply with some additions and changes in emphasis. I explained that the size of the collections was not

paramount, but that appropriateness should be the key issue. The focus of the *Reading is FUNDamental* project suggested that we concentrate on books, not other media. (Our funds did not stretch as far as multi-media in any case.) This also meant that we bought more storybooks and less non-fiction books. We used the following criteria as guidelines to buy books:

- Books in African languages offered by the schools (in this case Sepedi)
- Age appropriate collections
- Reading levels of learners
- Books at different levels of reading competency
- Reading preferences of learners
- Books with universal themes and appeal

Teacher involvement and endorsement in book-buying activities were important. The teachers tended to equate resources with text books. We discussed OBE and its principle of resource-based learning. We encouraged teachers to get to know the collection in the libraries by reading the books themselves. Consultants from book suppliers visited the schools and the teachers were invited to give their input in the choice of books. We also arranged visits to bookshops where library committee members browsed and chose book titles. Committee members tended to choose non-fiction books to support “learning” and had to be reminded constantly to choose storybooks for “fun” reading as well. All teachers were asked repeatedly to indicate which books they needed to complement the curriculum and their teaching and which they would enjoy reading to the learners. However, these requests elicited little response apart from generalisations, for example “more non-fiction” or “Sepedi books” or “Graded Readers”.



Photo 29: Phuthumani book sorting

Graded Readers were not really the school libraries' focus, but we gradually realised that more Readers would support the Literacy Project. For example when we started at Bantabethu the school had only one Reader with 368 words for Grade 1 for the whole year. Research indicates that learners who read well read 1200 words per week on Grade 1 level as opposed to weak ones who read 16 words per week (Anderson, Wilson & Fielding 1988:286). We used some money earmarked for storybooks to buy Graded Readers for the classes. The librarians captured the Graded Readers in the library system to ensure control. It was clear that the teachers' knowledge of children's literature was deficient and they were not familiar with genres such as science fiction, fantasy and mystery.

The project team supported reading in the mother-tongue and tried to build up adequate stock in the vernacular of the area. Language diversity is a complex issue and teachers and learners in the school speak a mixture of languages called Pretoria Sotho which includes Sepedi, Tswana, Zulu, English and even Afrikaans (Wessels & Knoetze 2008:296) which often differs from written text. Both schools now own most fiction and non-fiction books published in Sepedi for primary school learners. These books have the further advantage that they are culturally accessible.

The schools received book donations and many of them were in mint condition and suitable for the school libraries. We received welcome boxes of books from Biblionef SA who generously

presented the schools with new English and a large proportion of their Sepedi picture storybooks. I found book trunks previously donated by Biblionef SA safely stored away at both schools. This tendency by schools and libraries in deprived communities to hoard books in their original packaging as a kind of trophy and not use them, is a phenomenon experienced before by team members (Machet & Pretorius 2004:45; Wessels & Knoetze 2008:299). The donor schools Waverley and Cramer organised book drives which produced first rate sources. I am sad to say that the opposite also occurred and that although donations were well-intended they were often not thought through and one sometimes got the negative impression that the township schools were used as a dumping ground for old books. Many of the books were useless and were thrown out because they were outdated, in poor condition, at the wrong level or in the wrong language such as boxes full of Afrikaans books and even German and Dutch books.

I also tried to source books from the Gauteng Department of Education that keeps a collection of second-hand books for redistribution to schools, but found few that were usable in a primary school environment.

The statistics generated by the computerised library management system and observation in the library indicated that the learners preferred books that reflected their own experiences, daily happenings and familiar themes. They could relate to and enjoyed:

- TV and movie “spin-offs” (books which are based on popular television programmes and movies shown on television) such as Hannah Montana
- TV “tie-ins” (books on which television programmes are based) such as abridged Walt Disney books
- Easy-to-read books
- Realistic picture books
- All the Sepedi books
- Non-fiction books with photos

Because of learners’ low reading levels, slow reading speed and lack of world knowledge a whole range of reading materials are inaccessible to them such as many of the classics mentioned

above and classics in the making such as the Harry Potter series, the Inkspell series and books by Eva Ibbotson or Roald Dahl. They would, for example, have difficulty with Dahl due to the subversive nature of the stories. However, one of the project team members read *Charlie and the chocolate factory* to her book club learners and some of them enjoyed it with the help of the intervention. Even many Grade 7 learners preferred picture books to books without pictures. Learners do not ask for book titles because they do not have the knowledge to do so, but they ask for magazines and comics in general. We bought the Asterix collection for the Phuthumani school library and it is well-read. Magazine reading is growing in popularity in South Africa (Hofmeyr 2005) and the school libraries make an effort to tap into that trend. A donor sponsored a periodical subscription for Bantabethu and we ordered *Spider* and *Ladybug*. These are favourite reading material for the learners. They also enjoy reading back copies of any old magazines such as *National Geographic*, *You Magazine* and *Get Away*.

Research has shown that learners who have not acquired a love for storybooks by the end of their primary school years will probably never acquire a reading habit and as such a learning habit (Lemmer 1988:272; Meek 1991:158). The Literacy Project aims to create a common culture of reading and therefore supplies books that the learners will and can read and avoids turning the collection into a highbrow, but unread one. We cater more for slow and reluctant readers and to some extent for reluctant teachers. Our principle was to start from where the learners are.

Teachers showed the same reluctance and inability to use standard school library sources. For example, the Bantabethu school library received a brand new set of *World Book Encyclopedias* as a gift. It cost a substantial amount of money and is regarded as an excellent up-to-date encyclopaedia for school children to use in school projects. Its lay-out is user-friendly with many illustration and pictures and use of colour. The *World Book Encyclopedia* set is designed to meet the needs of senior primary school children up to adult level and is written in clear text. Teachers do not use the set because they indicated that they find the concepts and language too difficult to understand. They pay lip service to using the library but due to their own childhood experiences, schooling and teacher training do not relate easily to libraries and literature. The teachers have little knowledge of children's literature and are ignorant of the fact that children's books "play a significant role in children's academic, social, and literacy success" (Hoewisch 2000). This lack

of knowledge can be attributed to their own childhood without stories being read to them and little attention is paid to children's books and literature in teacher training in South Africa (Olën 1993:123).

Table 6.1: Library statistics for Bantabethu and Phuthumani December 2009

Schools	Current Library venue format	Aim (10 books per learner)	Breakdown of the book collection		Number of books issued since library opened			
			<i>Sepedi books</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>English books</i>	<i>Sepedi books</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Circulation start date</i>
Bantabethu	Upgraded office and classroom collections	6000	296 (109 titles)	4967	6969	1084	8053	January 2006
Phutu-Mani	Library and book corners	6000	252 (121 titles)	3700	3567	326	3893	May 2008

The above table of library statistics shows that the book collections have grown satisfactorily, but the use of the collection is still low. Bantabethu started to circulate books in January 2006 and only 8053 titles have been circulated by the end of 2009. The third librarian has indicated that many learners read in the library itself and do not take out books. It also seems as if issuing to the teachers for classroom use happen manually and when asked the librarian confessed that she did not issue many of the books via the computer system. This lack of control also explains the high attrition of books. Phuthumani only started to issue books in May 2008. The Phuthumani librarian also indicated a tendency by younger learners to read in the library and not to take out books. Phuthumani has issued 3893 books over a twenty month period.

Sepedi books are popular and all the titles have been issued at both schools. This is an indication of the real need for, and enjoyment of mother-tongue reading material.

Although the Literacy Project is on track to attain a figure of ten books per learner, the appropriateness and usefulness of the collections are debatable. Due to financial constraints we have not been able to buy multi-media and more expensive books. Other constraints are the lack

of books published in Sepedi and books in English with high interest, low level reading requirements. The balance between non-fiction and fiction must also be attended to.

Building a suitable collection remains a constant challenge and what I would like to see are more suggestions and requests from the whole school community including the teachers, school librarians, learners and even parents.

6.4 CLASSROOM LIBRARIES AND READING CORNERS

Classroom libraries are complementary to school libraries and ensure continuous access to books. Books should be visible, available and used. The success of classroom libraries depends partly on the stock issued and here the school librarian plays a role, but the main ingredient for success is mediation by a dedicated teacher. The schools do not own enough books to establish extensive classroom libraries, but rather book or reading corners.

Books form part of the central library collection but a small selection is issued to the teachers on a temporary basis. The book stock in the classrooms consists mainly of fiction and dictionaries. The Reading Project bought a variety of dictionaries for classroom use including ordinary English-Sepedi dictionaries and multilingual primary dictionaries with English explanations and pictures and translations in Afrikaans, Sepedi, Sesotho and Setswana. Attrition of books is problematic and a big concern. Some of the books returned at the end of each year were in a really bad condition due to negligence from learners and teachers. The second librarian at Phuthumani wrote in the Library Report of 28 May 2009:

Unfortunately, our educators like with some of the learners have failed to take care of the books and I am afraid we will end up with an empty library.

Classroom libraries are problematic without lack of sufficient supervision for example learners clean classes after school and some classrooms are used by the community for church activities. However, these book corners or classroom libraries can be very effective if teachers continue to be prepared to take on the extra work load.

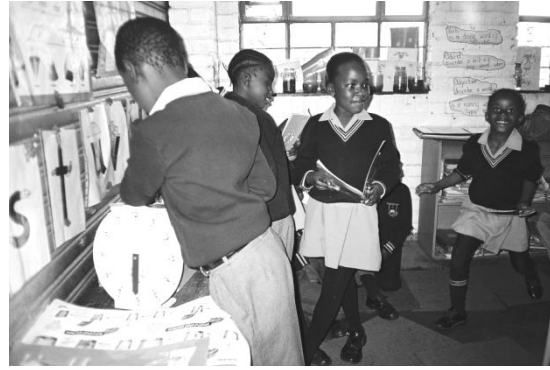


Photo 30 and Photo 31: Classroom book corners

6.4.1 Bantabethu

Before we issued books to reading corners I did a door-to-door investigation of books in classrooms at Bantabethu. It was interesting to note that where classrooms had almost no books at the start of the project all the teachers had made an effort to have some material available.

The most successful reading corners were those in the Grade 1 classrooms at Bantabethu where learners were encouraged to read books in the classrooms and to take books out to read at home. Bookcases and little armchairs had been purchased for the Grade 1 classes and used to set up inviting book corners with Sunshine Books in Sepedi and English. Sunshine Books cover stories that challenge developing readers and are graded in a developmental sequence (Sunshine Books 2009). The two teachers read to the learners from day one and dramatised stories. Unfortunately one of the truly enthusiastic and dedicated teachers had to leave since she did not have a permanent post. The other Grade 1 teacher who started with the Literacy Project is still at the school and she has developed extremely well. This teacher has now completed various courses at UNISA such as the Parent Involvement Certificate, has turned into an avid reader and is one of the Literacy Project's success stories.

6.4.2 Phuthumani

Phuthumani classrooms were almost devoid of books and other text such as posters, learners' work or pictures. We bought book trolleys (or wheelie wagons) for the Foundation Phase classrooms but they were not used for a long time for reasons not quite clear. A teacher used one of the trolleys as a chair to stand on with the result that it was broken before ever being used. One of the strangest sights I have seen in these schools (and I have seen quite a few) were the book trolleys stored in the teachers' bathroom until we asked the school to move them to the library.

Phuthumani Primary School is used by some churches on weekends and experiences problems of theft of books and vandalism of any material not locked away. The classrooms have either cupboards that cannot lock or no cupboards. Why should teachers clear their classrooms every Friday in any case? The principal at Bantabethu experienced similar problems with one of the church groups and asked them to leave. At Phuthumani the reaction is more conservative and the problems continue. There is fortunately also positive feedback:

Respondent	Source	Text
Phuthumani school librarian	Phuthumani Library Report March 2009	I visited the classrooms that have classroom library books and asked learners if they are reading those books, only to find that they are not using them and there is one class that used them once. It is important that we have books in the classroom that learners can access any time because the library is not open every day, educators need to understand that and try to find a way of looking after those books rather than keeping them in the cupboards.
Phuthumani school librarian	Phuthumani Library Report 8 December 2009	We managed to have boxes of library books in the intersen phase classrooms and it was possible because of our dedicated library

		monitors. I often sneaked into the classrooms during the reading period to see if the books were being used and I would find learners reading them.
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6.5 LIBRARY COMMITTEES

According to the draft *National School Library Policy* the library committee “oversees the operations of the school library within a school community, ensuring that sufficient budget is prioritised for the optimal functioning of the library and that all role players are committed to providing their full support” (South Africa. Department of Education 2005c:27). The reality in the two schools is that the school libraries will be run by untrained school librarians for the foreseeable future. Concern for sustainability and longevity of the libraries are a constant problem and enthusiastic library committees may alleviate this. As previously indicated teachers’ knowledge of library practices and information literacy are low (refer to Chapter 5). Transfer of library and information literacy knowledge and skills between the various parties may benefit all. We try to invest this knowledge in the committees and in the process build up collective support for the library. Staff involvement is essential to monitor and support the school librarian and for the general promotion of the library in the school. This requires a different approach in the professional development of both school librarians and teachers.



Photo 32: Bantabethu library committee

The roles and responsibilities of the library committees include:

- Co-responsibility for the continuation of the reading activities
- Supporting the school library and its librarian
- Continuing with activities that developed around the Literacy Project such as the book clubs and family literacy events
- Teach library monitors to become library ambassadors
- Funding for books for example fundraising and spending of LTSM funds
- Working in collaboration with the teachers to use available funds for books to the best advantage

The Bantabethu library committee developed a library policy (refer to Appendix F) and Phuthumani piggy-backed on this policy after its committee was formed. The following was said in a Phuthumani library committee report of October 2007:

As a school that believes in reading and also with the involvement in a reading Project the library committee and the project leaders are working together to finally meet the project goal and demands, the school in the process of having a Library.

The library committees observed literacy events and days that they either heard about from the literacy team, GDE circulars or the public librarian informed them about. These included World Book Day, Literacy Day, Library Book Week, International School Library Day and South African Library Week. These events were either mentioned at assembly or in the reading periods. The schools also participated in reading competitions and readathons. Phuthumani was invited to attend and participate in the launch of the International Library Week on 17 March 2007 at the local community library. As the principal wrote in the Phuthumani term report of 23 March 2007:

The learners did every one proud...

The two schools also started an inter-school reading festival and reading at assemblies off their own bat without suggestions from the Project Team.



Photo 33: Learners reading at Bantabethu assembly

The second librarian at Phuthumani wrote in the Library Report of 8 December 2009:

I would like to complement those educators who worked hard during these two terms and made sure that reading at the assembly on Fridays was a success. Learners had to be prepared in the classrooms by their class teachers prior to reading at the assembly, and some educators were able to do that, you could tell by the performance of their learners on the stage. Most of the books that learners read were books they borrowed from the library and because we sometimes wonder if they really read these books, I believe we've got the answer now.

6.6 LIBRARY MONITORS

The library monitor system supports the Literacy Project's philosophy of empowering learners and creates opportunities for learners to engage in the delivery of reading material and library activities. Library monitors in Grade 6 and Grade 7 are appointed at both schools with input from the school librarians and the library committees. It is a sought-after position, an alternative form of leadership and learners are eager to achieve this. The project team felt that learners should at least be fairly competent readers and enthusiastic users of the school library in order to be considered as library monitors. Reading assessment test results are used for this.



Photo 34: Library monitor workshop

New monitors are introduced to the Library Code of Conduct which includes issues such as no eating in the library, washing of hands, caring for books, leaving school bags outside and maintenance of a relaxed, but reasonably quiet atmosphere. They are taught that the school library can be used for various purposes such as pleasure reading and to find information for research purposes and doing school projects. Monitors learn how the library is organised and the types of resource it has.

Learners at both schools help to clean the school buildings and the library monitors have specific responsibilities to clean the libraries. (Unfortunately I observed that there is a definite case of sexism here and the girls do most of the cleaning.) Monitors must help the school librarian to maintain the school library physically, return books to the shelves and help learners use the library. Above all, library monitors are expected to be ambassadors and champions of the school library. They are supposed to read books and write book reports regularly. We had hoped that exposure to books would help to improve their book reports. However, they still had difficulty with this task and the quality of their book reports proved to be no better than those of the other learners. The school librarians themselves experience difficulties in helping the monitors to analyse the content of books read and to write basic book reports. After the appointment of the first library monitors at Bantabethu one of the participating teachers commented in the Bantabethu Term Report of 28 March 2006:

Library monitors were workshopped. Their role were clearly explain to them and their benefits as library monitors. On the 24th of February they were given batches. Generally they are very useful.

We witnessed a development of a sense of self-esteem under the library monitors.

Respondent	Source	Text
Katlegong Grade 7	Phuthumani library essay	I was chosen as the library monitor. Actually we are five in number as library monitors. ... we must pack our books according to their numbers and alphabets we start at A and end with Z. We even pack the books in fiction, non-fiction, encyclopedia.... We clean the library so that its nice and clean. Now our library is always spotless clean because we don't want people to come and when they leave they will gossip and say "Phuthumani's learners and teachers are careless. Our library is always having visitors from Unisa.
Thambo Grade 6	Bantabethu library notes	We place books and prepair book for other leaners. I am a book buddy, incourage other children to read

The library monitors were taken on various literacy oriented outings including visits to neighbouring schools with libraries, partnership schools, the Cultural History Museum and its library and archives and library week activities at the nearby community library.



Photo 35: Library monitors visit Waverley school library



Photo 36: Library monitors reading to Waverley learners

6.7 CONCLUSION

Prevailing conditions in the two schools required creative thinking and practical approaches to library development. Creating library spaces, collections and activities in high-poverty Bantabethu and Phuthumani meant circumnavigating different conditions than those found in the more affluent South African schools and certainly from those in Western models described and discussed and referred to in the literature. Instead of focusing on improving the outlay of the library building, enhancing the library collection, adapting the services to new technologies and media and constant training of professional school librarians, we had to start from zero to set up library spaces, build up basic library collections, develop services and find school librarians. In an environment where reading and books do not seem to be a priority, creative application of existing skills and materials in the schools as well as available funds from the Literacy Project is a must.

The two school libraries at Bantabethu and Phuthumani provide learners (and teachers) not only with opportunities to extend their reading experiences, but also to discover and use information and learn information literacy skills. The libraries are essential to long-term strategies for literacy.

In Chapter 7 I reflect on my research questions, the Literacy Project and my role in the process. I evaluate the impact and efficacy of the school libraries. I discuss lessons learned, look at the way forward and offer proposals for further research.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter I revisit my research questions and reflect on the research reported in my dissertation. I look specifically at two processes, namely:

- The process of setting up two school libraries in disadvantaged primary schools as part of a reading and literacy project and ask the question if they play a role in and contribute to the teaching and learning in the two primary schools.
- The process of empowering teachers by means of workshops and meetings that formed part of their professional development which focused on literacy.

To reflect on the progress in the Literacy Project means to think critically about all the processes and actions including my own in the establishment of the libraries and their actual use in the schools. Are the school libraries enablers or disablers? Did they bring any renewal in the schools? To what extent does the professional development of the teachers contribute to the sustainability of the established school libraries?

The chapter presents evidence that educational changes in these schools are slow and are congruent to the low and different usage of the school libraries. It underlines the different approach to school libraries in an environment where school libraries and school librarians are almost non-existent, from an environment where school libraries have always played a role. A school is a microcosm of the community at large and as such poor literacy practices of the community is extrapolated in the school.

An intervention programme has a destabilising effect on a school in the sense that the *status quo* is changed and if successful means a rethink of procedures and the use of resources including teachers. This has happened to some extent as shown in Chapter 5 and 6 and below.

7.2 ANSWERS TO AND REFLECTIONS ON MY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Interpretation of data drawn from the various data collection methods reveals that after a five year intervention in Bantabethu and a three and a half year intervention in Phuthumani positive changes have taken place in the literacy practices of some teachers, learners and parents, although not as dramatic or as fast as we had originally hoped. Old teaching and learning practices tend to be pervasive. This is substantiated by research projects such as the Book Sack Project that found that the teaching methods adopted by teachers are sometimes so firmly internalised that they tend to lapse back when support is withdrawn (Place 2004).

7.2.1 The Original Research Question and Sub-questions

In Chapter 1 I explained that the overarching question that I wanted to investigate was:

Can a school library play a pivotal role in a literacy intervention programme in a disadvantaged primary school and contribute to literacy practices?

I also asked the following sub-questions:

- Will setting up a school library with its print-rich environment provide an opportunity for teachers to instil good reading practices in the learners?
- Will setting up a school library provide an opportunity for teachers to instil information literacy practices in the learners?
- Will the teachers adapt their methods of teaching reading and information literacy?
- How will the learners benefit from the intervention programme?
- Will the new school library contribute to the development of a reading culture in the school community?
- Will the school community take ownership of the Literacy Project and strive to sustain the library?

I have not always found clear-cut answers and hard proof to these questions, but reflection on these questions shows some gains in all areas of literacy and library practices at the schools.

7.2.1.1 Evaluation of the school libraries

This study infers a linkage between school libraries and literacy. The role of the school library as foreseen by the project team and as set out by draft policies (i. e. the *National School Library Policy*) has not always been realised in the way I expected. (I reflect more on my own experiences in section 7.3.)

Schools cannot change the socio-economic status of the school community, but can create a stimulating environment for learners to flourish in. The school libraries helped to do just that and raised the profile of the Literacy Project in the school community. They are “visible entities of literacy” for funders, teachers, learners and parents and successful literacy marketing tools. Reading must not just be taught, it must also happen. Literacy is an ongoing process and literacy skills need maintenance and practice which is the rationale behind setting up the school libraries. Concepts such as *reading* and *literacy* and the *use of the school library* have become part of the discourse of Bantabethu and Phuthumani, something that was lacking before.

When evaluating the school libraries in terms of the role of the librarian, media programme, collections (range, selection procedures) and facilities, it must be kept in mind that the schools had nothing except a few unused books to start with. The following aspects are noteworthy in terms of the evidence of changes made as stipulated:

Achievements are:

- A school library infrastructure has been set up
- Libraries are fully functional
- An accessible and relevant book collection has been built up in each school
- Learners and teachers now have access to books constantly
- The library can provide OBE support

- Learners regularly visit the school library and are confident users of the library
- School library committees and library monitor systems have been established
- Storybook reading occurs regularly
- Temporary school librarians have been appointed and trained

Library related changes at the schools are:

- Introduction of daily literacy periods
- Establishment of reading or book corners in some classrooms
- School library activities take place e.g. library visits and borrowing of library books
- Basic lower order library skills teaching programme has been introduced
- Use of the Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM) budget for book buying
- Classrooms are more print-rich with the introduction of book corners as well as with print on the walls such as charts, posters and pictures made by teachers and learners
- The school community is aware of the school and public library services



Photo 37: A print-rich classroom

Some of the concerns that remain are:

- Sustaining continuous funding for the school libraries
- Sustainability of the literacy and reading programme once the project team withdraw

- Whether there has been in-depth impact on teaching and learning and improvement of practice
- Continuous self-motivation and independent learning by the teachers
- Lack of library and information literacy skills and knowledge of teachers
- Will the library remain an integral part of teaching, learning and school life once the project team withdraw?

7.2.1.2 The school libraries, literacy and reading

When visiting the schools there are often some positive and heart-warming scenarios. Classroom observation indicated that more focus is given to reading activities. Teachers do not plan extension activities for good learners, but the library and book corners provide these learners with some opportunities. Classroom observation in both schools also showed that storybook reading is happening by teachers and learners. The reading of storybooks plays a more important role in the teaching and learning in the two schools than in the past and supports literacy objectives.

Learners are seen with books under their arms, groups are reading during breaks and teachers report that learners are eager to read to them. I have seen queues of learners standing at the libraries to exchange books and learners like to sit in the libraries reading and browsing through the books during breaks and after school. This is encouraging and as the project leader stated “Reading is a skill that needs to be specifically nurtured and developed – only *reading* improves reading. The more learners read, the better they become at it” (Pretorius 2006:2). The school libraries at least provide access to books and other print material to enable learners to practise and improve their reading skills.

A teacher from Bantabethu wrote in the Intersen Report of December 2006:

Library has brought a lot of improvement and encouragement to learners and educators. Learners cant wait to go to the library although we still encounter problems in writing and reading.



Photo 38: Learners in the Bantabethu school library during break

‘Good literacy practices need to be reinforced.’ ‘Literacy can be a lifeline out of poverty for developing communities.’ Statements like these are found throughout the literature and in government documents and similar discussions took place throughout the intervention with the teachers. Teachers themselves reiterated these sentiments during meetings and in their reports.

However, reading in the two schools has not yet become a self-perpetuating habit. As shown in Table 6.1 statistics for borrowed books are relatively low and did not reach the levels I anticipated. Teachers constantly need to be reminded to read to the learners, to give them opportunities to read by themselves, to take them to the school library and to use the literacy period for reading activities for learners as well as teachers. For example, when silent or independent reading is done teachers should be reading too so that learners can model that behaviour. Constant monitoring is necessary to see if decisions are followed in regard to the use of the library and during reading periods and that books bought are made accessible. For some reason some teachers have a tendency to store the books and not use them (refer to section 6.3.2) thus hampering the goal of developing a reading culture. The oral culture is still deeply ingrained in some teachers. One of the good Foundation Phase teachers told me that she reads the stories herself and then tells them to the learners. She feels they should only read the stories themselves when they are older, i.e. in Grade 3. I feel that children should start handling books and “reading” from the moment they can hold a book. However, the teacher’s way is a satisfactory

blend of an oral and a reading culture and improves my understanding of different ways to meet the goal of reading.

7.2.1.3 Teachers and the school library

NEEDU (2009:23-24) mentions four performance standards applicable to classroom teaching for all educators (1-4) and eight other professional and school development activity standards (5-8).

These performance standards are:

1. The creation of a positive learning environment
2. Knowledge of curriculum and learning programmes
3. Lesson planning, preparation and presentation
4. Learner assessment
5. Professional development in field of work
6. Human relations and contribution to school development
7. Extra curricular and co-curricular participation
8. Administration of resources and records
9. Personnel
10. Decision making and accountability
11. Leadership, communication and servicing the governing body
12. Strategic planning, financial planning and education management development

The Literacy Project afforded teachers the opportunity to improve their teaching and performance on the first eight standards, Heads of Departments up to standard eleven and the principals on all twelve standards. Focusing only on the library and book aspects of the Literacy Project, storybook reading and classroom libraries could make a difference on standard 1, incorporating library resources into OBE and working with the school librarian can support standards 2 and 3, writing of book reports and statistics on reading habits provide opportunities for learners' assessments and library committee members can play a role in standard 6 and 8. This is a superficial look, but underlines the opportunities created by the Literacy Project and the establishment of a functional library and library infrastructure. According to standard 5, teachers must continue to learn. However, they must not just learn, they must learn to think and also teach children to do so. For this the library and its stock are central and fundamental. The Literacy Project offered a framework for teaching literacy and teachers acknowledged that they feel they have a broader support base. The Literacy Project also initiated a structure of accountability and

reflection for teachers with the system of classroom observations, family literacy events, report writing and feedback sessions. The onus now rests on the teachers to use their newly acquired knowledge.

The results of the school library observation and statistics showed that although teachers motivate learners to take out books and visit the libraries they generally are poor library users themselves and do not use the school libraries and the available resources effectively. The Phuthumani librarian stated in the Library Report of September 2008:

I am a bit disappointed with the number of educators who visit the library to familiarize themselves with the resources that we have in the library, as they are expected to recommend non-fiction books to the learners for their assignments and homeworks.

In my opinion this is mainly due to the inadequacy of the teachers' training and own lack of library experience as learners, but unfortunately also due to a lack of interest. This might be attributed to various reasons such as the effect of the negative image of teachers which can lead to demotivation and a lack of confidence. During informal discussions many of the teachers also indicated to me that they need in-depth in-service training on teaching according to OBE principles where resources play an important role. Although invited to collaborate with the school librarians to plan learning opportunities and incorporate the school library in the curriculum and other academic activities, few teachers used this route, even though they have been familiarised with the potential of school libraries via workshops, visits to other schools and school library conferences. Classroom observation also indicated that regular planning of learning opportunities and preparation are lacking which might also be a reason why the library was not utilised as much as I hoped for.

Many teachers do not have the training, experience or will to use the library in their preparation or teaching. Both schools have been provided with a core collection of storybooks, non-fiction books, reference works, classroom collections and teaching tools such as *Wordwise* and *First Words in Print*, but teachers are slow to use these resources and tend to fall back on teaching methods which they are familiar with, which is not sufficient. Some of the teachers have

difficulty in grasping how to incorporate the library in their teaching on a day to day basis and to integrate resources in their teaching. It became clear that literacy resources including the library are not used to full capacity. These resources can have an impact on the education of learners, but even the best resources and infrastructure will be of no use without well trained and motivated teachers. This finding correlates with the NEEDU report which remarks that teachers from poor schools often do not make appropriate use of existing textbooks and materials (NEEDU 2009:25). The teachers who do use the school libraries regularly are those who had prior library experience or who enjoy reading themselves.

7.2.1.4 Language assessment tests of learners

The Gauteng Department of Education undertook a baseline study to assess Grade 3 and Grade 6 learners across the board in literacy and numeracy in February 2009 throughout Gauteng. Unfortunately Grade 3 learners in both Phuthumani and Bantabethu performed below the district and the provincial average score for literacy. Grade 6 learners fared better with a “Partially Achieved” category at Bantabethu, and Phuthumani proudly achieved the “Achieved” category for literacy. This is encouraging in the light of the Literacy Project (Gauteng Department of Education 2009a; Gauteng Department of Education 2009b). The Literacy Project tested the Phuthumani Grade 3 learners in May and November 2009 and there was a marked improvement in the last tests as Table 7.1 shows, an indication that the literacy intervention made a significant impact (Pretorius 2009).

Table 7.1: Phuthumani Grade 3 reading assessment results November 2009

	Grade 3A		Grade 3B		All Grade 3s	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Alphabetic knowledge	84	81.3	88	95	86	88.8
Letter sequence	67.3	80.6	74	91	70.9	86.3
Alphabetic sequence (in words)	34	45	60	70	46	59.5
Plural formation	32.8	62.7	39.6	52.2	36.4	57
Word recognition: silent e	63.4	68	70.3	72	67.1	70.1
Word recognition: digraphs	42.3	50.5	57.6	59.4	50.5	55.3
Word recognition: final consonants	42.9	38.5	56.4	58.6	50	49.5
Dictation	16.6	48.8	34.6	59.6	26.1	54.7
Test total	54.1	64.4	63.1	72.1	59.9	68.6

Literacy Project team members assessed mostly Grade 1 and Grade 7 learners at both schools with a pre-test at the beginning of each year and a post-test at the end of the year in English and Sepedi. The assessment consisted of a dictation test to measure language proficiency and a reading test to measure reading comprehension. Other grades were tested on an ad hoc basis. At a time where learners are expected to learn much more than basic reading skills, and think creatively and critically, many Grade 7 learners in Bantabethu and Phuthumani are still struggling with basic reading skills, despite the long term intervention. There are also some learners who should be in a special needs school as they really require serious remedial teaching which implies that the bell-curve of tests might improve accordingly.

The tests indicate that reading levels have improved over time although not as consistently and significantly as hoped for. Decoding skills have improved, but comprehension needs more attention. Teachers need to understand that decoding has no intrinsic value, its value lies in comprehension of the written word. There is too much emphasis on teaching decoding aspects rather than making meaning.

The school libraries influence learners and teachers to take reading more seriously, contribute to the attainment of basic library skills and support the literacy activities that take place. These schools can fulfill their educational responsibility to provide learners with literacy stimuli and that includes books and libraries and a focus on reading. The opportunities for learners to use the library have increased and I speculate that the opportunities are more significant than the reading assessment statistics suggest. For many in the school community, teachers, learners and parents, these libraries are the only experience they have with books and learning resources.

7.2.1.5 Learners and the school library

The reading assessment statistics are in this case somewhat depressing and require context and interpretation. Stories about the libraries bring the school libraries to life. The most effective stories are from the users who can tell how and if the library has made a difference in their lives.

Learners were asked to write about the library and some of the responses were:

Respondent	Source	Text
Rosy Grade 6	Phuthumani library essay	I love library because the books that is in the library gives me more information that I never heard in my life. I love the story book that I found in the library”
Rebecca Grade 6	Bathokwa library notes	Reading is cool
Paballo Grade 6	Bathokwa library notes	When we read we learn some things from stories
Precious Grade 6	Bathokwa library notes	The library helps us to read
Thabo Grade 7	Phuthumani library essay	We have the information near us. We help each other how to read and how to pronouns some other words. And we trust ourselves when it comes to reading”
Koki Grade 7	Phuthumani library essay	Our library is a very big place and its full of fun and interesting books. When there is no teacher in my class I usually go there. I really love the library because it has really made a difference in my life and to other learners as well, but not all of them, there are two grade 7 boys who doesn't take books...
Unknown Grade 7	Phuthumani library essay	Now that we have a library in our school, we can go there at breaks, after school or maybe during reading periods. The books are fun and interesting
Gontse Grade 7	Phuthumani library essay	My life really change I have become a reader when I didn't expect to be. Reading help me to know my English better than before
Salmon Grade 7	Bathokwa library essay	“I,ve read 17 books. I,ve ritten 4 book reports. I wish our library must be grown and must have all ofical language books
Philemon Grade 7	Bathokwa library notes	Education is your life and the library can help you
Tsepo Grade 7	Bathokwa library notes	I love the library because we can take out books

The learners are now more familiar with books and the concept of reading for pleasure. The school library builds on skills and knowledge acquired in the classroom, for example the learners must know the alphabet to use a dictionary or to find information on the shelf. As noted above learners are eager to visit and use the school libraries and some of them have started to build up skills in order to become independent readers. Observation has shown that some learners are able to:

- locate books on the shelves
- differentiate between fiction and non-fiction
- select books that they enjoy
- evaluate the level and theme of books

Only a few learners are able to evaluate the level and theme of books.

7.2.1.6 The school librarians

The quality and usefulness of a school library service is not just a reflection of the resources that are available, but the school librarian represents the library service and acts as the key to its potential. It is generally accepted that a school library needs a functional and motivated librarian to ensure lasting success. As pointed out in section 6.2.2 the Literacy Project could not appoint trained school librarians due to financial constraints. Notably and perhaps debatable, my findings contest assumptions that only trained librarians will meet the requirements. More research is needed to determine the extent to which the school librarian's training or personal attributes play a role in the success of the library in the Literacy Project but I found that commitment, dedication and enthusiasm were determining factors in the level of the librarians' success in the school libraries.

Both the first school librarians at the two schools proved to be valuable members of the Literacy Project and ensured a successful start to setting up the libraries and library services. Job experience and on the job training as school librarians helped both of them to apply for and obtain other jobs.

The model of a combined literacy teacher and school librarian was not very successful at Bantabethu in practice. The second and third librarians at Bantabethu (the latter is at the time of completing this dissertation still at the school) are both trained teachers but found it difficult to become an integral part of the school and the Literacy Project. One of the reasons might be that since they lived and worked in privileged areas for many years, they have become disconnected from the community they have to teach in.

The second librarian at Phuthumani proved to be a real success story. She has a degree in another field, lives in the community and is young enough not to carry too much emotional and political baggage. She has a clear goal of providing a service in a focused way and an ability to share her own perceptions on the Literacy Project. In a Phuthumani Library Report 28 of May 2009 she says:

I attend literacy workshops with educators and we learn so much from them, but we are failing as a school to put whatever we learn from the workshops into practice and benefit our learners. We all agree that reading is a problem here at school and the library is the tool to help us deal with the problem, but educators can't give themselves time to visit the library and get some resources.

This librarian initiated extended literacy activities. She, for example, asked all the older learners to share their library experiences in writing in essay form, fetched the young learners for visits to the library and storytelling sessions and actively taught basic library skills. She is a role model for teachers and learners as far as library and reading are concerned. She is starting to do higher order library activities such as theme displays and analysis of the gaps in the collection. She can help the teachers who ask for help in finding information, and should in time and with experience be able to help the teachers to use the library as a teaching tool. She has established collaboration between the library service and the teachers. Perhaps having a degree is a benefit. Although the Literacy Project will be able to pay the school librarian until the first school term of 2010, her future at the school is regrettably uncertain after that. At the time of completing this dissertation project team members were advocating for more funds to continue this post.

7.2.1.7 Information literacy and the school libraries

Learners from especially deprived township schools go through school without information literacy training and are then expected to be well-versed with these skills when they reach higher education. If learners have mastered information literacy skills at school the move from school to higher education should be less problematic. The Literacy Project and school libraries at Bantabethu and Phuthumani helped to develop an information climate at the schools. This also includes communication, collaboration and sharing of information among teachers which was an aspect promulgated especially in the workshops.

What was attainable with the learners were basic library skills (rather than information literacy skills) such as a working knowledge of the layout of the library, the range of resources and how to find them. These were skills I expected that the teachers would be familiar with, but it became increasingly clear that many of them were out of their depth and not versed in basic library skills themselves. The teachers' prior knowledge of information and libraries were not conducive to teaching higher order information literacy skills. It is very difficult to develop information literacy skills if one does not understand the concept and value of information and knowledge. I had envisaged introducing them to a fuller scope of information literacy skills required for success in our information-rich world, but this was not possible without a solid foundation of library skills. I therefore focused on these skills.

7.2.2 Looking at the Broader and Simplistic Research Question

As indicated in Chapter 1 after spending some time in the schools I realised that my research question(s) was perhaps too complicated and evolved and that the question that begs to be answered is:

What sort of “school library” will work in an education system with huge disparities in resources, teacher training and facilities? What type of school library makes sense in an environment where there are no books, parents have low literacy levels, teachers struggle

to teach basic reading and literacy skills and learners perform poorly in reading and numeracy tests and assessments?

The findings and experience gained from setting up the school libraries indicate that existing school library models, standards and specifications have to be modified to ensure a practical and feasible approach. One cannot simply transpose Western models or even models used in the past as is; schools and interested parties (such as ALRU) have to be innovative and creative to ensure that some form of library exists and more importantly, that the libraries are accessible, appropriate and used.

I have found the following:

- A combined model of a central school library and some form of classroom library ensures constant access to books, acts as a reminder of literacy activities and supports the reading culture. The school libraries in these two schools act as a physical embodiment and presence of reading and literacy activities and the classroom collections provide continuous reading opportunities.
- A purpose built school library is ideal, but a modest (albeit attractive) venue such as a small converted office or storeroom can make a substantial difference. It is important that the school community realises that this does not mean the school is “settling for less”, but rather that it displays innovation and creativity.
- A small, easy-to-read book collection that is being used has more value than a large collection of the latest children’s best sellers. Collection guidelines should be pragmatic and be based on the real and not perceived needs of learners and teachers.
- Books in the indigenous languages are of high importance and help to preserve, acknowledge and pass on the cultural and language heritage of the school community. It is also important to source books written by indigenous authors in their own language, and not only translations of Western stories. This helps to ensure that all cultural

viewpoints and different experiences are covered. Unfortunately original children's stories written by Sepedi speaking authors are scarce.

- Some form of library training for all teachers is necessary, in schools with or without school libraries. The teachers are the most important role players in the success of the school libraries. This has implications not only for teacher training but also for in-service training. The focus should not just be on training specialist school librarians. For the school library to work each and every teacher should have a working knowledge of how a library works and a basic knowledge of children's books.
- Although eventual access to the Internet and WWW would be ideal, it is not essential in supplying a quality school library service.
- A properly trained teacher-librarian is still the ideal and will be an asset, but if a school does not have the financial resources, using a person from the community with drive can make a difference. The selection of a "school librarian" is a bit like pot luck. It seems as if a younger person from the community with some post matriculation qualification and with qualities such as an interest in reading and literacy issues, who cares about the development of his/her community and has a positive attitude can be successful.
- Training the "school librarian" in the basics of librarianship is time consuming but essential. It is important that the library is functional and that a computerised library system is installed to facilitate records and loans.
- A school library committee and library monitors help to ensure school community involvement and buy-in to some extent and empower the individual participants.
- The school library will have little effect if not combined with creating a culture of reading at the schools. Reading activities should happen preferably on a daily basis and not just *ad hoc* and should include reading for pleasure.

- The possible role of the public library is indicated in Chapter 5. It would be advantageous if more teachers and learners as well as parents could be encouraged to use the local public library on a regular basis. A relationship between the public library and the school, teachers and parents has been established at the family literacy workshops.
- At present the policy is that the schools buy their own library books. My experience with the schools indicates that the library committee and governing body would not be able to do this effectively and it would be better in the long term if recommended book lists were provided by the Department of Education to help teachers and librarians to select books for pleasure reading and books that complement the curriculum.
- Partnerships with private schools can be advantageous as we experienced at Bantabethu and Phuthumani.

7.2.3 A Strategic Question: The Influence of Bureaucratic and School Politics

Perhaps in my ignorance I also put a strategic aim on the table in Chapter 1 and that was to:

- Demonstrate to policy makers the strategic importance of school libraries

A superficial analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) of the school environment alerted me to question the efficiency of the Department of Education on national and district level. Is the Department to some extent a negative factor in delivering quality teaching and library services at the schools? Can the Department be considered both an internal weakness and an external threat?

- A good policy on School Libraries was already drawn up in 2005. The policy supports school libraries for promotion of literacy and reading, to develop “information literacy skills to meet the challenges of globalization and the information explosion” (South Africa. Department of Education. 2005c:6, 23). It indicates that the Department of Education is fully aware of the importance of school libraries. However, the policy is not

yet past the draft stage and has still not been adopted as official policy. It is as such of no assistance to schools.

- Many important and highly regarded reports on South African education in schools indicate the lack of school libraries as problematic (e.g. NEEDU 2009; *PIRLS 2006* 2007; SAHRC 2006: South Africa 2005b), but nothing seems to happen at grass roots level. Instead, one of the latest reports from the Department of Education indicates that stand-alone libraries for schools are “unattainable” (SAPA 2009:5).
- The Department of Education’s annual budget is in the region of R139 billion. It is perhaps time to put some of this money into something concrete like school libraries. According to the Equal Education Research Organisation after an initial 10 year outlay of 1.5 percent of this budget to roll out school libraries and to provide infrastructure, materials and training, the cost to run and maintain school libraries would only be in the order of 0,9 percent of the annual budget (SAPA 2009:5).
- Throughout the five year life cycle of the Literacy Project the Department of Education came up with small scale literacy reading “happenings”. I mention two of these as examples. In 2006 the Department of Education sent an open letter to all primary school principals that request them to “Let’s teach our children to read” (An open letter to all primary school principals 2006:14). It was also published in the press. It is unclear what value such an open letter has. In the same letter the Department also committed itself to provide selected schools with 100 books. This is actually a non-issue. Firstly, 100 books will make almost no difference to the resources in a school and will only be sufficient as a book box in one or two classrooms for perhaps a year due to high attrition. More importantly, just to put books in a classroom with no intervention, monitoring and training will have no positive results as experience and research have shown. Interestingly, the previous year the Department said they are going to put 100 books in every classroom! (Anderson 2005).

- It is ironic that many politicians and ministers refer to developing South Africa as a “Nation of Readers” but Government still tax books by 14% (Bell 2009:8).
- The Gauteng Department of Education initiated the Gauteng Online project which turned out to be a R3 billion flop (Serrao 2009:1). Phuthumani has been promised a computer centre for years, but this has not been realised yet. Bantabethu has a computer centre but no funds to sustain it. Schools and teachers especially in townships are not sufficiently prepared to use information technology before basic literacy and numeracy abilities have been improved. I have to make it clear that I am not a Luddite and that I am pro-technology. I also believe that the Internet can be a channel to promote the reading habit, but that the school library is the starting point for basic reading and literacy experiences. Learners and teachers cannot benefit from technology before they have become good readers and library users. So even though information technology is implicated and has had a massive impact on information literacy and higher order information literacy skills worldwide, the school communities are not ready for it at this stage. It is also important to point out that information literacy is not about computers and technology; it is about finding and using information effectively in an era of information overload.

I have personally experienced the following impact of departmental policies and actions at the schools:

- Late payment of funds to the schools which led to a cut in electricity and water.
- Meetings initiated by the Gauteng Department of Education at my teaching department at UNISA to discuss the training of teacher-librarians with funding made available for this purpose have so far come to nothing.
- During my involvement in the Literacy Project no library co-ordinator from the Gauteng Department of Education visited either of the two schools to actively help or give input into setting up the school libraries. The Department wants schools to have libraries, but provide very little hands-on or visible support.

- Decisions at the Gauteng Department of Education appear to me to be taken for logistical reasons and not for pedagogical reasons. I got the impression that the Department does not look at the needs of the schools as a whole. For example in 2006 Bantabethu had only one Grade 7 teacher with 60 learners in her classroom. On the other hand the number of learners in the Foundation Phase dropped and a very promising young teacher who brought into the Literacy Project and made a difference in the school was deployed at another school with very little advance notice. I am still not sure why she could not stay at the school as a Foundation Phase teacher with some internal restructuring.
- Demands from the Gauteng Department of Education on teachers to attend meetings at the Department and to complete reports or write portfolios (often during the school day) take their focus off the core job of teaching. Teachers are saturated by curriculum reforms and administrative changes and spend far too much time on non-teaching activities such as the above.

During my literature review I found that there are a breadth of literacy projects and campaigns in existence, in South Africa and internationally. (Refer to section 2.3.) In South Africa various organisations apart from formal educational institutions are involved in literacy issues. Baatjes (2003) analysed three national literacy campaigns, Ithuteng, SANLI and Masifunde Sonke and argues that they achieved very little. I posit that too many and various literacy programmes and initiatives have led to fragmentation of effort. On the other hand, any small contribution and change can be of value and play a role in the reinforcement of good literacy practices. Is a concerted effort possible? Two reasons for failure might be the lack of knowledge on literacy issues at grass roots level and the lack of resources such as libraries to support any newly acquired literacy knowledge. Unfortunately, unless the Department of Education comes on board no-one has the financial resources to make a coordinated effort.

This is also true for setting up school libraries. The Literacy Project did what the Department of Education advocates namely setting up school libraries. However, long term success without intervention cannot be guaranteed. To ensure sustainability the Department must provide resources in the form of books, school librarians, library and information literacy programmes

and the training of teachers in the use of school libraries and also sustained scripted support. Scripted support refers to providing teachers with structured planning and lessons for teaching specific skills such as reading and literacy effectively.

The schools' management also sometimes acts as their own worst enemy and proves to be an impediment in the development of the schools and the use of the school libraries. I mention a few examples:

- There is a lack of structural leadership at the schools. Neither of the principals has set boundaries for the use of the school library and neither of them has taken the initiative to use the libraries themselves.
- In many ways the loyalty shown towards employing workmen from the community for work at the school is commendable, but it often leads to stonewalling and shoddy workmanship. The Literacy Project experienced this with the building of both protective cages for the school library computers and with the preparation of the library venues (refer to section 6.2).
- Despite many promises Phuthumani and the churches that use the school buildings on Sundays never reached an agreement regarding classroom usage and those classrooms remain in poor condition due to the continued vandalism by churchgoers.
- At one stage a fire broke out in the Phuthumani Grade 2 classrooms. It took months before it was renovated which is demotivating for learners and teachers.
- The library at Phuthumani was without a working electricity socket for months and the library computer could not be used in the library. The librarian still experiences problems with this wall socket.

To a large extent future success and sustainability of the two school libraries at Bantabethu and Phuthumani hinge on the school management, especially the principals, if the libraries are to continue to deliver a useful service.

7.3 PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCHER: GRAPPLING WITH THE STARRY EYED SYNDROME AND UNDERSTANDING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Reflection does not come easily to most people, and I am no exception. Reflection on my personal development can be seen as a form of meta-action research and concerns the nature of action research in relation to:

- My own learning
- My students
- Challenges to my own theories and models
- Knowledge of practical realities

Being involved in the Literacy Project created an active and creative learning process for my construction of new knowledge of not only literacy issues, but also for knowledge about the environment and school education context most of my students come from. My role as a library consultant can best be described as that of a facilitator and team worker. We all contributed and learned from one another in a reciprocal way.

In retrospect my ignorance strikes me as naïve and ill-informed to some extent. How do my experiences at the schools shape understanding, self-understanding and research and teaching practices?

The disparity of the two economies and as such the two school system in South Africa (SAHRC 2006:18) became abruptly clear to me. We worked in an environment where the school surroundings differ significantly from the primary school my own children attended. I discovered these other, poor township schools which are real for millions of our country's children,

including for many of my students. South Africa has a large budget to spend on Education annually, but it is not always clear where the money goes. The high expenditure did not affect nor was it visible in the two schools we worked in. Poverty creates its own priorities and we had to ascertain how the schools' resources could be best marshalled to meet the literacy needs in the school community. One can know about poverty theoretically, but in the schools I actually experienced it first hand.

Despite experiences it is difficult to accept that the Literacy Project and for me especially the school library part is not a string of success stories. As McNiff (2006:2) says research is political and done for reasons and purposes. To some extent I believed the Literacy Project would turn the schools around. I assumed that the school libraries would be used extensively by teachers and learners, but this is not what happened. Although I read about the poor training of teachers and a lack of literacy and library knowledge, I did not really believe that teachers would have to be taught how to utilise books and library material in the classroom and in the library. I contend that the training and existing teaching practices of teachers are so ingrained that to them different approaches seem irrelevant and unnecessary or at least very difficult to accept. Meek (1990) stated that teachers tend to relapse into the teaching methods they experienced unless they understand why change is necessary. (This is true for all teachers and I include myself here as well.) At the same time parents do not insist on high quality teaching and are also not aware of what is lacking in teaching practices at the schools. Literacy achievement has as much to do with parenting as teaching. I suggest that there are two attitudes at play here.

- Changing one's behaviour in terms of literacy can be compared in some ways to an addict trying to deal with his or her addiction to drugs or alcohol. An addict must first understand and accept that he/she has a problem and must have a genuine wish to change the situation around. He/she must see the possibility of change in behaviour and the benefits the change will bring to his/her life. This wish or will to change also includes an understanding of the difficulties it will entail as well as the positive effects change will bring. In the same way teachers and parents must understand the problem of literacy, be able to perceive the positive results of change and genuinely want to change in order to effect change. One has to learn new ways of thinking and doing, new skills and must

possibly change certain beliefs to ensure success. Literacy is an issue pertinent to the whole school community and all stakeholders must take responsibility to promote and work towards literacy empowerment. Many parents and teachers do not appear to be able to make this giant leap. Although they pay lip service to the importance of reading, this has not been internalised or acted on.

- The other attitude that comes to the fore is what I would call the *victim syndrome* which I suspect has its foundations in the old apartheid regime with its severe form of negative paternalism. Many teachers find it difficult to move out of their comfort zone and correspondingly find it easier to opt out or revert to old ways using the excuses of, for example, no resources or lack of knowledge. Although it was true and still is true for many teachers and schools, the Literacy Project has given Bantabethu and Phuthumani the opportunity to become literacy-promoting schools. However, it seems as if some of the teachers still do not have a feeling that they can take charge of and be responsible for their own future teaching and learning.

The above has shown me that though I have *information* about the school community I worked with, I lack *knowledge* about the break-up of families and communities, poverty and inferior mass education brought about by the previous dispensation and how it influenced literacy understanding and achievements.

Visits to the two primary schools sometimes elicited negative feelings and emotional responses from the project team. My dream of the school libraries (and I) helping learners to perform dramatically better in the reading tests was not realised. The real challenge here was perhaps to develop school library services that ensure that as many school community members as possible have access to books. It was important not to become disheartened by unproductive visits for various reasons such as cancelled meetings, teachers not there, strikes, electricity and water being cut off, computer problems, disappearance of computer backups, sick librarians, a rat infestation in the one school library and many more. The project leader encapsulated our feelings well in an e-mail saying “2007 was not an easy year and at various times during the past 12 months we all went through a gamut of emotions, vacillating between steadfastness, hope and

despair. But that I guess is all par for the course” (Currin 2008). I had to be careful not to become cynical and not to detract from successes achieved. I had to accept that the real value does not lie in the outcomes, but in the learning process.

Although I had worked previously in townships at Rustenburg, in Alexandra and in Soweto I usually had a black colleague with me. I was apprehensive visiting Atteridgeville, not so much from the safety aspect, but more for the sensitivity to cultural contexts and perhaps the elusive nature of literacy and the difficulty of conveying its importance. Initiatives such as the Literacy Project can easily be doomed due to socio-cultural issues and influences. Respect from various parties for each other was crucial. The main role players from the ALRU team were three middle-aged white women and we had to avoid sounding like clerics giving a sermon or an ideological tract, but at the same time convey knowledge of best practices. I ask myself if the workshops I presented led to new, effective and creative ways of teaching and learning for the teachers according to OBE principles such as whole brain learning and the underlying theory of constructivism. In section 5.4.1 and section 6.3.1 I observed that the teachers learned more from concrete experiences. This forms part of the experiential learning model created by Kolb (Du Toit 2006: 43; Smith 2001a). Workshops by nature focus on interaction and not delivery. The Literacy Project intended to enrich the literacy curriculum and experiences for all the stakeholders, but perhaps I did not consider the different learning styles of the teachers to the extent I should have.

The beginning (or the end) of my actions was not always where I thought it would be and it sometimes felt as if the research process became a series of *backward* spirals with all the “re-“ activities such as re-explaining, re-doing, re-tracing, re-constructing, re-focusing. I actually experienced constructivist action research as a “living theory” as described by McNiff (2006) where the researcher generates his/her own learning while enquiring about the learning of others. The project team regularly experienced problems in terms of planning and implementing, took steps to address problems and then questioned the solutions. I experienced very much a “sense of my own limitations” which Greenwood and Levin (2007:99) fortuitously say is one of the key features of an action researcher. It is a well-known aphorism that people learn best when they do it themselves and a few teachers did acknowledge that the repetition helped them and in this

respect they became to some extent action researchers themselves. Working with the teachers and the learners made me realise that I had to evaluate and re-evaluate my assumptions about the level of their world knowledge and experiences mastered. I also had to question my own lack of knowledge of a culture different to mine.

I have tried to write up my part in the research as clearly and economically as possible, but I am obviously influenced by my own background, preferences, skills and experiences. My personal views and assumptions about school libraries and reading and literacy and my observations in the schools are reflected in the construction of the social knowledge in this dissertation and may be subjective. The research by especially Pretorius and Machet and to some extent Zinn and Hart is echoed in this dissertation and I acknowledge my intellectual debts to them (refer to Bibliography).

Action research allowed me to use my experiences to construct new meaning and contextualised “living theory”. I have experienced a dichotomy between my literature study and practical experience and sometimes felt frustration reading South African Government reports and academic articles about the importance of school libraries. However, there is no indication that any will be set up! I also attended and spoke at an *ELITS & e-Education conference* in 2005 as well as a school library conference for private schools organised by ISASA in 2006 which underlined my feelings of being challenged and overwhelmed by the fact that most schools in South Africa do not have school libraries with even the most basic resources. I definitely do not want to stop progress where schools have libraries, but I feel it is important that all librarians and teachers should understand the actual school library situation in schools where the majority of our teachers and learners are coming from.

Before we started with the Literacy Project I felt that it is unnecessary and superfluous to argue a case for the importance of school libraries in South Africa and that the need for it is self-explanatory. The extent of ignorance of the role school libraries should play in education is now clear to me and I realise that strong campaigning for school libraries is necessary.

A key component of action research is to share what one has learned. Apart from providing me with research material for this dissertation, the Literacy Project afforded me various opportunities to talk at conferences and co-author articles. As far as reflection on my own professional work context is concerned, I am in the process of adapting the general information literacy course offered to first year students at UNISA based on evidence gathered in this grass roots research. I have also realised the importance of critical self-reflection and built in more such opportunities in the portfolio work of my final year students. I have more empathy with and understanding of my students and their backgrounds. Being involved in the Literacy Project became an organic process and a way of thinking. I am much more aware of current education issues and debates.

The self-critical reflection question I have to ask myself is: So what did I learn here? Through a process of balanced learning (as represented in Herrmann's work on whole brain learning (refer to Figure 4.2), I am confident in claiming the following:

- The aspects of *A quadrant* learning is evident, for example in the literature study I did; writing this report as an academic discourse; obtaining, analysing and reporting of data; constructing new knowledge and contributing to the existing body of knowledge. This represents learning in terms of my 'intellectual self'.
- *B quadrant* learning is evident, for example, in my planning and executing of the Literacy Project; focusing on detail; structuring this report; and allowing me to learn from experience. This represents my learning in terms of my 'safekeeping self'.
- Since a study of this nature is *inter alia* focused on intra-personal and professional development, the *C quadrant* that represents the 'emotional self' is also applicable. In addition to my intra-personal gain, I was able to establish partnerships; develop and build inter-personal relationships; and focus on the school community as a whole.
- The *D quadrant* is about the 'experimental self'. Evidence, for example, of learning applicable to this quadrant is to be seen in my holistic approach to this study; my use of visuals such as photographic evidence and diagrams; and experimenting with ideas, such

as using action research for the first time. In itself this way of reflecting is an example of innovative thinking which fits into this quadrant.

I learned about the diversity in training, expectations and life, but that at the same time one should be honest where one is coming from in terms of previous work and research even if it leads to a paradigm shift or even clash. As a researcher I cannot isolate myself from the research process and my research goals. I learned to broaden my perspectives and to learn from my research team members, the principals, the school librarians, the teachers, the learners and the parents.

7.4 MAIN LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE LITERACY PROJECT WITH SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

I ask myself, how does my research differ from previous and other post-graduate research on school libraries? I believe this research offers a unique picture of the use of school libraries and resources in disadvantaged urban communities. This dissertation has brought to the fore issues that need to be dealt with or considered in setting up a school library in a disadvantaged (or any) school and constitute some of the important lessons I have learned. Only a comprehensive and coherent approach will have a long term impact. It will definitely not be possible to put a school library in a school in isolation.

- Effective change takes place within a social context that involves people from a community. The whole school community (school management, teachers, learners and parents) must understand the importance of literacy if they value development. Even more important is that the community must accept and share the responsibility to create a culture of reading and a sustainable literate environment. Everyone must work towards the recognition of the critical importance and central role of literacy to ensure success.
- The existence of a physical school library and a book collection does not necessarily translate into the effective use of these resources. It became clear that a broader support base including resources is important, but the lack of it is not the main problem in the

schools. Many teachers lack resource-based learning processes and the extent to which they promote the school library is low.

- Many teachers do not read themselves and are the products of an education system which undervalued books. These teachers do not understand that good reading skills are crucial to the education process and that literacy is a key learning tool of primary school education and beyond. If they are not enabled to navigate the complex information environment, then they cannot help learners to achieve this.
- Teachers are the crux of it all and it is imperative that they change. Many teachers pay lip-service to the value of literacy, but show only limited real effort in this direction and do not recognise the central role of literacy in teaching. This is a manifestation of their own schooling and teacher training with limited exposure to literacy and libraries.
- The Foundation Phase teachers (regardless of age) at both schools bought into the Literacy Project to a large extent and made corresponding changes in their teaching and the use of storybooks in the classroom. The Intersen Phase teachers are less unified and functional. It might be that they perceived the knowledge imparted of less importance and relevance to their teaching. I also believe that they experience more difficulties in applying OBE principles to their own teaching. Changing education cannot just be achieved by changing the paradigm or curriculum. The teachers must be active agents in the process, not just passive subjects in intervention.
- Even a long-term intervention with a supportive environment and affirmation of work well done as provided by the Literacy Project is insufficient. Many of the teachers I worked with show a lack of content knowledge and struggle, for example, to integrate reading into lesson planning and to integrate resources into the curriculum. They need continuous scripted support in order to effect real change and their motivation has to be revisited constantly. Some need more supervision than others. Variations in the quality and motivation of teachers necessitate modifications in the professional development of

teachers. Political will is needed to succeed and the Department of Education is the only role player who can supply scripted support to teachers on a large scale.

- The success and long-term impact of an intervention programme take much longer than anticipated. An initial time frame of two years was inadequate. The Literacy Project seems to have only scratched the surface of literacy issues and problems. However, project fatigue sets in after a period of involvement and it cannot continue *ad infinitum* for logistical and financial reasons. As the project leader said at the last meeting at Bantabethu:

Thus leaving a significant legacy will remain elusive for the short to medium term.

- Bloch (2008:12) indicates that change is a long-term task and it will take at least thirty years to fix South African schools. Teachers have low work motivation and low expectations from learners. This will not disappear in the blink of an eye and there are no guarantees any project will make a marked difference. Changing people's attitudes and behaviour takes time and effort and cannot be achieved overnight. There is no magic wand and small steps forward may not be revolutionary, but can eventually make a difference.
- The training of future teachers should move past the rhetoric of OBE and explicitly focus on expanding the number, range and kind of opportunities teachers and learners experience. Their training must include library skills and information literacy as well as knowledge about children's literature. School libraries are important regardless of the education paradigm and can make a significant difference in successful education. The new generation of teachers must be primed to understand the role of school libraries in the information and knowledge age.
- If more "school librarians" can be appointed and trained on the job (as the Literacy Project has done at the two schools), one year in-service courses can be developed by library schools in consultation with schools of education. Students can be trained on a larger scale and receive a qualification as well while earning a salary. Due to the cutting

of teacher-librarian/school librarian posts a number of Library Departments at tertiary institutions have closed down or discontinued teacher-librarian training. Current teacher training often includes nothing about school libraries, teaching information literacy and library skills, or anything about children's literature. In my department at UNISA the diploma course *Information Services and Youth* is in the process of being phased out. A course on children's literature offered by the Department of Afrikaans has also been cancelled. Only a few institutions in South Africa still offers school library training and none in Gauteng:

- The University of the Western Cape (Advanced Certificate in Education: School Librarianship)
- University of KwaZulu-Natal (Advanced Certificate in Education: School Library Development and Management)
- University of Zululand (Diploma in Specialised Education: School Library Science)

Regardless of limiting issues and some problems experienced I regard my involvement and research in the Literacy Project as an investment that warranted the effort it took. I came to various insights and regard this as an essential intervention.

7.5 LIMITATIONS

To affect literacy change one needs skills on many levels, including technical and political skills, realism and pragmatism, and an understanding of what the school communities (teachers, learners and parents) can do and achieve in their particular environment and circumstances.

As a word of caution to other scholars in the same field the above is not easy to achieve and it can be a handicap to work cross-culturally. Cultures have an impact on the way the researcher sees and understands issues and can as such have an impact on the interpretation and validity of the research. Cross-cultural research influences culture, language, and developmental issues and includes historical and political issues. Looking from the outside a researcher cannot always

understand the underlying motivations and assumptions people have. Despite some experience I still only have a limited understanding of the background the school community comes from. Research is conducted in my second language and for some participants even in their third language. The teachers' level of courtesy is high and instead of arguing or saying what they really think or experience, they perhaps tend to agree to points of discussion. This might also be an indication of a lack of confidence. Working in a team is advantageous because one member can intercept a problem and support the lack of skills in another team member.

In Chapter 4 I blithely state that "Action research can be an empowering tool to teachers in becoming reflective and scholarly educators in their own school environment." Although part of the action research most of the teachers at the schools were not capable of critical self-reflection and I cannot see at this stage that they would be able to run an action research project on their own. Due to the nature of my research involvement as a project within a project, the focus was not on extensive training with the teachers on research methodologies. I did not, for example, ask them specifically to keep their own diaries on the project, but this was to some extent implied in the weekly and end of term feedback sessions.

Ellsworth (2001) states that [educational] researchers must "strive to guide all our change efforts with a systemic understanding of the context in which we undertake them". I did not realise how limited I was by being outside the context within which the teachers worked and how limited the teachers were in terms of understanding my research context.

7.6 THE WAY FORWARD AND FURTHER RESEARCH

An undertaking such as the Literacy Project is expensive and time consuming. Justifying the money spent to donors is easier with a good exit strategy and a plan for sustainability. However, this is a difficult task and not always practical.

We attempted to put a sustainable element in by helping the teachers to work as a team and to make certain that they are committed towards literacy improvements. We also endeavoured to ensure the interest of all the stakeholders in the schools. The ideal is for the teachers to take

ownership of the knowledge gained during the Literacy Project's life cycle and build onto that. We also tried to make them aware of all the positive changes which can be fostered further.

Bantabethu is fortunate in having a partner school such as Waverley. This school is committed to support Bantabethu's literacy activities for the foreseeable future. Steps are also in place to build a bigger library and I am cautiously optimistic that although the building will not alleviate problems, the library service will continue. Phuthumani does not have such financial aid and the fortunes of the school library rests squarely on the shoulders of the school community.

I am still mapping the path to revisit the schools in a post-project phase to monitor and review the school libraries. Questions to be asked will be:

- What has happened since no monitoring has been done?
- Are the school libraries still functional?
- Are the school libraries being used? By whom?
- Are the school libraries being managed? By whom?
- Are the school libraries still contributing to teaching and learning outcomes?
- Are the LTSM funds used to add to the book collection?

Drawing on work and experiences with the Literacy Project ALRU has started a new project in 2010 at one primary school in Atteridgeville where a well qualified and experienced teacher was appointed as a 'literacy coach' to work specifically with the Grade 4 language teachers. The coach will plan, administer and facilitate Grade 4 language and literacy development. She is a teacher-leader who occupies a fully paid formal position within the school, spending four days a week at the school, acting as mentor, guide, coach and advisor to the Grade 4 teachers. A school library will also be set up at the school (Pretorius & Currin 2009).

As far as future research is concerned issues to investigate are:

- How the teachers in a disadvantaged community can be better prepared to participate in an action research project

- The possibility of a joint venture between the public library and the two school libraries to ensure continued engagement in pleasure reading
- The development of an in-training programme to increase teachers' library and information literacy skills
- The on the job training of "school librarians" in schools in collaboration with the Department of Education and library schools
- Traditional educational research has limited usefulness for classroom teachers. To develop professionally, a programme based on action research can be developed for teachers to evaluate and critically reflect upon their teaching practices.
- The development of an instrument to measure the quality of learners' library reading

7.7 CONCLUSION

The Literacy Project has put the literacy problem on the table in Bantabethu and Phuthumani. It has taken actions directed at change, provided solutions to the problems, and taken actions to implement the solutions. One of the solutions to counteract some of the problems teachers experience in literacy teaching was to set up a school library in each of the participating schools. The teachers had opportunities to develop professionally and personally with specific reference to literacy aspects. The teachers proceeded through group workshops, sharing literacy data, perspectives, discoveries and criticism.

This dissertation articulates the core belief that effective school libraries can make a significant contribution to teaching and learning in a disadvantaged school. If education is the ladder out of poverty, it is my opinion that school libraries can be one of the supportive rungs. Although the research has shown that teachers are not fully able to harness the school libraries to support their teaching and own learning, they now have a greater understanding of literacy challenges and the role school libraries can play in alleviating literacy problems. Structures and practices have been

established and they must run with it. It is their choice to teach well and improve whenever they can.

The chosen research methodologies with action research as the umbrella approach has generated rich layers of qualitative and some quantitative data. The research process and the Literacy Project have contributed to my own personal and professional growth as a researcher, team player and educator, but also challenge me to continue with reflective teaching and life-long learning.

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APPENDIX A: GENERAL TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

1 Name.....

2 Age 20-29 30-39 40-49 50 or older

3 Sex Female Male

4 Please state your qualifications
.....
.....

5 For how many years have you been teaching?
.....

6 For how many years have you taught at the following levels:
a) Preschool?.....
b) Primary school?.....
c) High school?.....

7 Where did you do your teacher training?
.....
.....

8 Have you had any further in-service training or formal/informal training since you started teaching? Please indicate.
.....
.....
.....

9 What were you taught about reading and literacy development during your teacher training?
.....
.....
.....

10 In which areas or what aspects of teaching would you like to know more about?
.....
.....
.....

Thank you for your co-operation!
ALRU

APPENDIX B: LITERACY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

Teacher's name:.....

Post description:.....

Date:.....

1. How often do you read?

- Once a day
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Other

2. What do you read?

- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Books
- Bible
- Other.....

3 How many books do you have at home?.....

4 Do you have any of the following at home?

- Telephone
- Cell phone
- Radio
- TV
 - Satellite
 - MNet
- Computer

5 Which TV programmes do you enjoy watching?

.....

6 Are you a member of a library?

- Yes
- No

When preparing lessons do you consider the use of any information resources?

.....

Name some of the resources.....

.....

7 Where do you currently look for information and information resources?

.....

8 Do you believe a school library can make a difference to your teaching?

Yes

No

How?.....

9 What do you think should be the role of the school library at Bathokwa?

.....

10 Which kind of sources would you find

useful?.....

11 What do think will be the effect of the library on the learners learning?

.....

12 What do you understand under literacy skills?

.....

13 What do you understand under information literacy skills?

.....

14 Do you use e-mail?

Yes

No

15 Do you use the Internet?

Yes

No

16 Have you heard about the information society or globalisation?

Yes

No

17 What do you expect from the school library?

.....

Monitored by:

APPENDIX C: LIST OF WORKSHOPS AND VISITS

The following list of workshops, talks, visits and conferences were arranged for teachers. The list is as far as possible in chronological order. Workshops were mostly conducted by project team members. However, other reading and literacy experts have also presented talks and workshops. Some of the workshops were repeated.

- The reading process – component skills and knowledge
- Weeding books in the library
- Storybook reading
- Reading assessment
- Phonics/teaching reading
- Family literacy
- Do libraries still matter?
- Visit to a private school: library observation
- Information skills
- Visits to two other Atteridgeville schools
- Use of Dolsch lists
- Collection layout and use of the school library
- Visit to UNISA library
- Assessment tools revisited
- Information literacy
- Parent involvement
- Assessing reading in the Foundation Phase
- Reading to your book buddy
- Using book clubs as a reading tool
- Making use of the literacy period
- Incorporating reading into themes
- Visits to Waverley and PEPPS
- Using the WordWise reading programme

- Vocabulary strategies using storybooks
- Paired reading strategies
- Teaching grammar and language using storybooks
- Reading problems: Foundation Phase
- Reading assessment standards
- Visits to Moteong
- Lesson planning
- Time management
- Project planning
- Integrating stories into a model lesson
- Methods for teaching reading
- SAALED Conferences 2006, 2007, 2008
- SAALED: “Detecting molehills before they become mountains”
- Activities for the reading period
- Getting the most out of classroom observation
- Identifying the main ideas in a passage
- Physical reading problems such as dyslexia
- RASA conference 2008, 2009
- School library seminar 2009
- Literacy learning outcomes for the Foundation Phase
- The use of the Umfundi Brain Power phonic work book

Official Opening of library in Bathokwa Primary

by Rodwell Shirinda

Bathokwa Primary School celebrated the long awaited day of the official opening of the school's library.

Dr Lilly Pretorius from the academic Literacy Unit graced the event with her attendance. She addressed learners about the importance of reading. Pretorius said that reading empowers

learners to learn and improve their performance at school.

She added that that learners who have few, if any, books of their own achieved well below their educational and social potential.

Doran Herringger from Waterkloof House Primary School said having access to books and someone to share them with, are two of

the most important factors in the development of a child's literacy.

He asked, "If the literacy needs of children are not met, how could we hope to see their achievements improve?"

"Literacy is not, however, as simple a thing as this overriding consensus would suggest. If literacy is best understood as being fully

operational in the society in which we are found, then our notion of what literacy is, is likely to change along with that society.

When the only requirement was to read the odd signpost, just sounding out was probably fine. However, when we are expected to digest the full flow of written and pictorial information that the

Internet provides, we need to be equipped with a significantly higher order of skills.

Our notion of what it is to be fully prepared for life has grown to encompass skills other than "just reading". Then literacy is therefore paramount in the education of the young", added Herringger.

Crystal Nkwana, pri-

mary school principal encouraged parents to help educate their children. She said there are family literacy workshops organized for parents to improve their reading skills.

Maphoko Mampuru, a senior lecture of African Language from the University of South Africa said in the past years teachers used to punish learners when

they did not write their homework.

"That was wrong because that learner would in the end not listen to what you are going to teach. If you allow learners to hear you and give them a chance to read after you or write what you were busy teaching them then those learners' literacy skills will immensely improve."



Crystal Nkwana the principal of Bathokwa Primary on the official opening of a library at her school.



Dr Lilly Pretorius encouraging the learners to read.



Learners and their educators inside the new library.



Doran Herringger from Waterkloof House Primary School addressing learners and parents.



Official opening of the library.



Learners entertaining the crowd.



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APPENDIX E: LIBRARY CATEGORY WINNER



APPENDIX F:

LIBRARY POLICY

BATHOKWA PRIMARY POLICY SCHOOL LIBRARY

(improved version as
on 28/3/06)

- 1 The library will serve the learners and educators.
- 2 The library will cater for research for students in groups.
- 3 No school bags, suitcases or files may be brought into the library.
- 4 When a student comes into the library, he/she should come with a purpose and not to make noise or perturb other students.
- 5 The material to be kept in the library:
 - fiction and non fiction books
 - reference works
 - periodicals and magazines
 - charts
- 6 Material in the languages taught at the school will be kept in the school library.
- 7 Books will be acquired through purchasing and donations.
- 8 Decisions on purchasing will be taken by:
 - subject teachers
 - S.G.B members
 - The library committee
- 9 Stock taking will be done once during third term or when required by the G.D.E.
- 10 Material will be discarded from the library, when damaged beyond repair; when outdated; unsuitable or never read.
- 11 Weeding of books will be done once per year.
- 12 Persons responsible for the functioning of the library will be:
 - The library teacher
 - The foundation phase (H.O.D'S)
 - Intersen (H.O.D'S)
- 13 The library monitors will serve for two years (starting from 2006).
- 14 The library will be operating from:
 - The beginning of term one, to the end of October
 - During short breaks: Monday to Friday
 - Monday to Thursday afternoons from: 13h00 to 15h00
- 15 Library duties will be shared amongst the library committee and the library monitors.
- 16 Only the library teacher and an additional educator elected or appointed by the staff will be allowed to use the computer and issue books.
- 17 A maximum of one book shall be taken by a learner.
- 18 The lending periods will be not more than 7 days.
- 19 A book may be renewed for another 7 days, if it is not booked by other learners.
- 20 An amount will be charged to the child's parent, if and when a learner has either damaged the book beyond repair or lost it.
- 21 The library teacher will print out a list of overdue books every two weeks to remind learners.
- 22 An amount shall be charged to both educators and parents for loss of library

- material.
- 23 Periodicals and magazines may not be borrowed
 - 24 Each Friday the library teacher may collect the list of topics, themes, subjects to be covered by the teacher the following week before he or she leaves the school
 - 25 To inspire and support reading and the utilization of the library, the library teacher, the committee and the subject teachers will arrange activities throughout the year. This will comprise of:
 - Teachers giving research projects.
 - Getting the story teller to school.
 - Inviting authors to the school.
 - And other innovations which may emerge
 - 26 Educators will ensure they monitor and assess learners whether they read books they take from the library.
 - 27 A fifty cents will be charged to a child who returns a book late.
 - 28 Books shall not be taken out more than seven days.
 - 29 Teachers will be required to retain learners' library cards and issue them to learners when they want to borrow books.
 - 30 Not more than one book will be permitted to be taken by a learner.
 - 31 No books shall be given to a learner or educator if he/she does not have a library card.
 - 32 Educators shall both correlate and link their lessons with material at the media centre to invigorate learners to use library for research and other activities.
 - 33 Library periods should be arranged between the teacher librarian and subject teachers. Library and information literacy skills should be taught to learners as part of life skills.