A study of the Bookery's Library Assistants programme in Cape Town: a way forward for the staffing of school libraries in South Africa and other developing countries?

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Abstract

The paper reports on a qualitative case study of one high school library. It forms part of a broader study of the Bookery's School Library Project which has established 40 libraries in disadvantaged schools in Cape Town. The paper examines what difference the library is making to the school. The overarching aim is to find what might be learned from the Bookery's Library Assistant (LA) programme about the staffing of school libraries in the South African context, where fewer than 20% of schools have functional libraries. The case study over two weeks comprised observations, interviews, and a questionnaire survey of the teachers. The working relations between the Bookery library assistant and the "teacher-librarian", a full- time class teacher and the library's driving force, are found to be crucial to the library's sustainability. The library is clearly playing an important role in the students' school experience and in meeting the information needs of teachers in their classroom teaching. But, despite general beliefs that the library is "a good thing", only a minority of teachers integrate it into their teaching. It seems that teachers lack insight into the role of a library and information literacy in 21st century learning. Other key restrictions on the fulfilment of the library's potential are its limited collections and the lack of ICTs. In the words of one participant, the overall conclusion is that " It is helping but there are limitations".

Keywords: South Africa, library staffing, the Bookery , case study

Introduction

The paper reports on a case study of one library that forms part of a larger study of the Bookery's School Library Project in Cape Town. The findings that result from my observations and interviews over the two weeks in the school will I hope provide useful insights in themselves – and later will add richness to my broader survey of the other schools. The Bookery claims to be building a model that offers a feasible solution to the huge backlogs in school library provision in South Africa.

The Bookery came into being in 2010,– having evolved from the School Library campaign of the civic action group Equal Education. It has so far established 40 libraries in disadvantaged township schools. Seeing the waste in providing libraries that are locked up all day for lack of staff, the Bookery supports a team of library assistants (LAs). They are mostly unemployed school leavers who are paid a stipend. The Bookery is confident that they are making a real difference in their schools. My research aims to explore this claim – with a view to throwing light on the bigger questions over the possible value of the Bookery project in dealing with our huge backlogs.

Library advocacy in the South African context and probably that of other developing societies is especially challenging. Can one argue for libraries over proper sanitation for example? Nonetheless, a fundamental premise of my research is that advocacy for school libraries is advocacy for quality education and equal opportunity. As the LIS Transformation Charter (2014: 47) asserts: "If school libraries are deemed to be important for quality learning, then the principles of redress and equity enshrined in the South African Constitution and educational legislation mean that ways must be found to provide them".

Another premise of my research is that the provision of infrastructure is futile if it is not accompanied by the provision of staff. My lens in this paper is focused on how the Bookery library is staffed and how this impacts on its use. As I will argue below, the issue of human resources is arguably the most pressing question confronting advocates of school libraries in South Africa.

School LIS in South Africa

Since the mid-1990s I and other commentators have been documenting the dire, and indeed deteriorating, position of school libraries in South Africa. Our advocacy has argued for the contribution of libraries to quality schooling (for example Hart & Zinn 2007). Nicholas Spaull, a prominent researcher in education, estimates that 75% of our schools are dysfunctional. His study of our educational performance since 1994 highlights how our schooling is perpetuating historic inequalities:

Most black children continue to receive an education which condemns them to the underclass of South African society …. This substandard education does not develop their capabilities or expand their economic opportunities, but instead denies them dignified employment and undermines their own sense of self-worth. In short, poor school performance in South Africa reinforces social inequality and leads to a situation where children inherit the social station of their parents, irrespective of their motivation or ability (Spaull 2013: 60).

Sadly, one of the indicators of disadvantage across our schools is the non-existence of a library. Most commentators rely on the figures given in the Department of Basic Education's NEIMS report in 2011 which found that about 21% of schools had a library with 7% of those having "stock" (Table 7). The vast majority of our school librarians are to be found in the historically advantaged sector – their contracts paid from school fees levied by schools' governing bodies.

Nonetheless, the past three years have brought some positive developments. The *LIS Transformation Charter,* commissioned by our National Council for Library and Information

Services (NCLIS), was approved by government early in 2014; it asserts unequivocally that school libraries are important for quality learning. In November 2014 NCLIS hosted a gathering of the LIS sector at the National Library of South Africa which placed "national school library policy" as the second most pressing priority for action. At number four was the recommendation that courses in school librarianship and information literacy be embedded in our teacher-training programs (Library and Information Services Charter: an update. 2015). Secondly, thanks to the campaigning of Equal Education, we now have regulations for norms and standards for school infrastructure that state that every school must have a library space. (However, no mention is made of staff or stock). Thirdly, although lacking the teeth of policy, the release of the *National Guidelines for School LIS* by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in 2012 opens a door through which government might be held to account.

The chapter in the Guidelines on staffing is of particular interest. It begins with the assertion that a school library should be under the management of an appropriately qualified teacher-librarian or a "dedicated trained person". Smaller schools should appoint part-time librarians; and larger schools should have fulltime teacher-librarians as well as fulltime library assistants (p.19). Such statements look good on paper – but without a funded policy on school library staffing they are empty rhetoric. Central government dictates teacher-pupil ratios across all the provinces and any "extra" post has to be paid for from funds generated by schools.

Research problem and questions

The issue of school library posts is indeed a hot potato. There is consensus that teachers' salaries are taking up too much of our educational budgets at the expense of other needs (Spaull 2012). Even if school libraries received a huge injection of funds from Treasury as *public* libraries did (Department of Arts & Culture 2012), where would the staff come from? School library training has largely disappeared from our university library schools. Moreover, an alarmingly high proportion of our existing school librarians are at retirement age (Reynolds 2008: 15).

My interest in the Bookery project comes from its recognition that a library is not merely a room or collection of materials. Its distinguishing feature is its Library Assistant program, in which unemployed school leavers are employed to manage the Bookery libraries. My research explores what we might learn about the staffing of school libraries in the South African context by investigating the strengths and weaknesses of the Bookery's LA program. The Bookery is confident that their LAs are making a difference in their schools. Is this indeed so?

The research poses such questions as:
- What is the status of the LAs assistants in their schools?
- What are their functions and responsibilities?
- What involvement do the assistants have in the learning programs of their schools?
- How are they regarded by the teachers?
- What support do they have – inside and outside their schools?
- How do the assistants perceive their work and their futures?

The data gathering to throw light on these questions has two phases or components:

- Questionnaire surveys of and interviews with the LAs – conducted since late 2013. So far 48 respondents are included.
- A qualitative case study of the workings of one of the longest-established libraries. Here the lens widens to include interviews with the principal and key informants and a questionnaire survey of the teachers.

The focus of this paper is this second component.

Case study at NSS High School Khayelitsha (pseudonym)

I hope that the case study might provide insights which are applicable to the larger group of libraries; and, I hope as well that it might stand alone. There might be doubt about the value of a small-scale case study of one library in terms of its generalizability to the larger population of Bookery sites. Many qualitative researchers would dismiss such concerns. As Stake puts it in one of the standard texts on case study research:

The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does. There is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself (1995: 8).

In his article *Five misunderstandings about case study research*, Flyvbjerg shows how indeed a single case throws light on the larger group. He points out that knowledge is built from many cases:

Context-dependent knowledge and experience are at the very heart of expert activity. Such knowledge and expertise also lie at the center of the case study as a research and teaching method … (2006: 222).

To explore the above questions, I spent two weeks in the NSS library towards the end of the first quarter of 2015. I deemed this to be a good time since learners were busy completing assessment tasks as laid down by CAPS, South Africa's national curriculum; and I assumed the library would be in heavy use.

In Flyvbjerg's terms the school could be regarded as a "good" site (2006: 230) as it differs from most of the Bookery schools in that it has a qualified school librarian on its staff. She is however a full-time teacher and a Head of Department. Flyvberg claims that an atypical case often opens up the deeper causes behind a given problem (p. 229). Another reason for the choice is that it is one of the early Bookery libraries and so should be well embedded in the school. The school was built in the 1980s with a library room but, in common with most of the so-called "black" schools in the apartheid era, its library never functioned properly. Photos in 2010 show it to be in shambles. At the start of its School Library campaign in 2011 Equal Education revived it and provided a volunteer assistant. It was then taken over by the Bookery when Equal Education decided that it could no longer sustain its libraries.

NSS School is one of the 12 schools with Bookery libraries in Khayelitsha, a densely populated township established in 1983 by the apartheid government as a relocation point for African residents of the city (South African History Online n.d.). The area immediately surrounding the school is pleasant with two parks and solid brick houses. But I was told by a

key informant that the learners in NSS School are largely from the informal settlements further away.

The library is a stand-alone single storey building. I was to learn the significance of this fact on hearing how thieves broke in through the roof last year and stole four PCs . The library is often used as a meeting place - to the chagrin of the library staff whom I heard complain that the principal likes to use it as a "showpiece".   And indeed it was shut for a whole day in the first week of my stay for a meeting of the surrounding principals.

The library has a Bookery Library assistant (LA), Lindi Maropa (a pseudonym), who has been working in it since 2013 with a stipend from the Bookery. The driving force behind the library is Thandi Sibandla (pseudonym), who trained as a school librarian at the University of the Western Cape in 2010, one of 120 teachers whose training was funded by the provincial Western Cape Education Department (WCED) in the school improvement initiative QIDS-up. The fundamental failure of the QIDS-up project is that, despite the provincial funding, there were no librarian posts for the graduates (Hart 2012; Hart 2013). They are almost all still today full-time classroom teachers.

Data-gathering methodologies
- My data in the course of the two weeks came from a variety of sources:
- Field diary notes and photographs
- An interview with the principal - international research has highlighted the importance of school principals to the success of school libraries (for example Henri, Hay & Oberg 2002)
- Interviews with the computer studies teacher whom I assumed to be an important role-player and with Mr Isaacs (pseudonym), a senior teacher, who is described by the library staff as a key supporter
- A series of interviews with Lindi Maropa, the LA, and Thandi Sibandla, the teacher–librarian
- A questionnaire survey of the teachers.

Summary & analysis of findings
This section summarizes the data from each component – analyzing the data and triangulating the different sets of data where useful. All names are pseudonyms to protect participants' anonymity.

Observations: Day 1 – emerging themes
Space constraints make it impossible to describe all the days I spent in the school. The solution to the space restraints is to follow the advice of an expert on case study, Robert Stake, in making use of the device of vignettes. Vignettes are, according to Stake, "briefly described episodes to illustrate key aspects of the case" (1995: 128). The vignette of the first morning that follows depicts experiences on the first morning.

My first morning

9.00

I make my way to the library where I meet up with Lindi the LA. We sit together for an introductory conversation. She talks of studying to be a teacher. But she is the sole bread–winner in her family and, as she puts it, "My family needs me not to be a student". Her vision of a library is revealed when she compares NSS with her own high school library which she describes as "just a place to study, not functional". NSS is better she says as "It's more welcoming and the books are more relevant. It's a resource centre rather than a place to study".

She suddenly breaks off to say: "Things are messed up. Some teachers booked the library for Life Orientation and Arts & Culture but now the timetable is all wrong. Ms Sibandla will visit at break to let me know the changes".

9.30

Thandi comes in. She tells me that it is her one free period for the day. I ask her how she copes with so little time in the library.

Ncwdi:. I feel stifled. I want to grow.

GH: If you were in the library more – would that be *growing* for you?

Thandi: YES! I want to own it. I want to become part of the library. I feel an outsider.

9.50

A Maths teacher, new to the school, comes in. Thandi tells her about Lindi and the block loan services of EDULIS, WCED's teachers' library. She also tells her about "the trolley", a secure container on wheels box with TV and CD player that is kept in Thandi's classroom. She tells later me that she "keeps the trolley to herself" as it's a "way to rope in teachers". As the teacher leaves, Thandi tells her: "If I'm not in the library I'm in my classroom".

Another teacher comes in asking if she can bring her Life Orientation (LO) class in the next period to work on careers. Thandi laughs and says: "I love you to bits but you could have told us!" I wonder about the contradiction here – Lindi told me earlier that she had been expecting a LO class. Thandi and Lindi and the teacher go to the careers shelves. The teacher says "I don't know the topics". Thandi takes charge of the conversation - and they decide that the learners will be grouped according to their career interests. Lindi is quiet but is involved – then she moves away to the library shelves to gather books to put out on the tables. But I jot down a question in my field notes: "What if it had not been Thandi's free period and she had not been here?"

The teacher leaves and I continue the conversation with Thandi. I pick up her earlier statement that she is an "outsider". She talks of her allies in the staffroom, for example Mr Isaacs, who has the "attention" of the principal. She says: "I try to work hand in hand with him. If I take something to him the fact that he's a guy makes teachers learn from him. He is my Ace card - he's an HOD for CAT [Computer Applications Technology] and he feels guilty about the computers". She then describes how in the refurbishment of the computer lab last year she asked for at least four of the old PCs for the library. Apparently Mr Isaacs's "guilt" comes from his unfulfilled promise some months ago to set some of the old PCs up in the library.

My first morning
Another teacher comes in – to borrow the newspaper. He tells me that libraries are important to preserve culture. Thandi reminds him of the reading club proposed by a Xhosa specialist at EDULIS; she asks him why no one from the Xhosa department attended her presentation the week before. When he has left Thandi proclaims: ""He theoretically says all the right things but then he disappears - and never comes near the library". The siren goes for the 3rd period. Thandi hands her classroom keys to a passing pupil asking her to open the room.
10.06 The Grade 11 LO class comes in to gather information on possible careers. They have been provided in class with questions. Their teacher tells them "Lindi will help you find information". Lindi has already placed some materials on the tables but there are not enough for the large class. Lindi moves from group to group guiding them to answer the questions. Her comment afterwards is: "They all want to ask 'When can I earn R60, 000!'"

Already by 10.30 on the first day, themes were emerging to be followed up in interviews, such as:
- The working relationship of Lindi and Thandi
- Thandi's frustrations as a fulltime teacher
- Power issues: as shown in Thandi's comments on her reliance on Mr Isaacs.as "a guy"
- The vision of the library as, in Lindi's words, a "learning resources centre rather than a place to study"
- The lack of ICTs.

The questions around ICTs and Internet access in the library clearly had to be explored in the next few days. They made up a large part of my interview with the CAT (Computer Applications Technology) teacher. He runs the only functional computer lab in the school, which is restricted to learners taking CAT as a school subject. There are another two labs: one is used in the afternoons for the WCED's Telematics broadcasts to the Grade 12 learners; and the other is the old Khanya lab, now disused and with its PCs piled up in a storeroom. WCED's Khanya project, from 2002 until 2012, was tasked with installing ICT infrastructure in every school in the Western Cape. Given the pressing need to redress historical disparities, the empty Khanya lab throws doubt on the claims from its director in 2011 that it is "the most successful project of its kind in South Africa" (Marnewick 2011). It also throws into relief Thandi and Lindi's constant complaints over the lack of ICTs in the library.

The need for Internet access was highlighted in an incident in the first week of the case study, which uncovered the limitations of the library's collection and also Lindi's lack of power in the school's hierarchies. A Grade 9 Arts and Culture class was in the library with their teacher to work on their Visual Arts formal assessment task, in which they had to "research a South African artist". The textbook told learners to choose a South African artist who interested them. Lindi put out one book on each table from a boxed set of seven books, each on one artist. There was thus no possibility of browsing and choosing – and six children were extracting information from one book. Seeing this and that one table had no book, Lindi decided to go across to the administrative block which has Internet access to search for

material. However, she came back empty-handed – having not been allowed access by one of the secretaries. Some days later, I chanced upon one of the outcomes of the Visual Arts project – a poster. At first sight it looked rather impressive – but a closer look revealed that the pages provided in the pouch were merely photocopies from one of the library books with no acknowledgement of the source. The Visual Arts assignment gave rise to some questions, for example:

- **How do teachers assess this kind of work?**
- **How aware are they of the demands of this kind of assignment?**
- **What do they think the library is for?**

Much of the focus of the case study was on the teachers' use of the library and their beliefs about its role. I soon realized that the first morning, when three teachers had come into the library by 10.30, was misleading. In the first week of the study the library was booked by two teachers for two of their classes to work on assessment tasks and by one (the principal who is also a Xhosa teacher) for a reading session. As will be shown in a later section, the underuse of the library by the teachers is a strong thread in my interviews with Lindi and Thandi.

Questionnaire survey of teachers

The questionnaire was a convenient tool to explore the attitudes of teachers to the library. Only 16 of the school's 35 teachers chose to complete the questionnaire – 13 of them claiming to have supported the revival of the library in 2010. Bias in favor of the library in the analysis of the questionnaires is thus likely. Statistical analysis would be inappropriate in dealing with such small numbers – so the discussion below merely summarizes the responses.

The average time at the school is 15 years. On being asked why they supported the revival of the library in 2010, several refer to the need to improve the reading culture of the school and several talk of access to resources. The issue of resources is returned to frequently in answers to later questions. Three make the point that their learners have no other resources – with one saying "Most of our learners are from disadvantaged communities (informal settlements), our library is the best place for them to do their school work". The clear concern over low literacy is evident in the finding in the next question where almost unanimously all rate their learners' literacy abilities as "weak".

The figure below summarizes the responses to a series of generalized declarations on the value of school libraries. It reveals almost unanimous positive views.
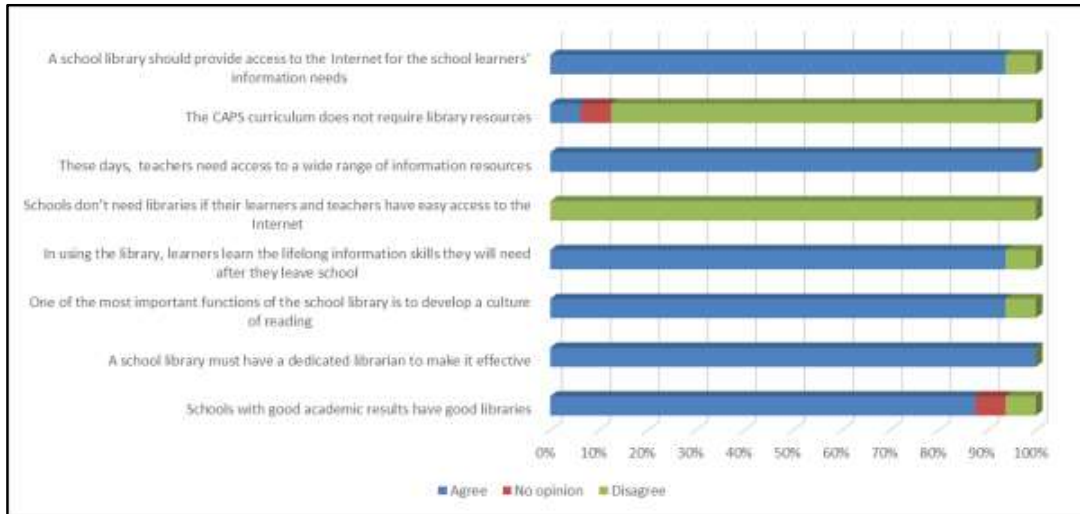
Figure 1: What are school libraries for?

Opinions are more divided when asked in the next question if the library in their school is fulfilling its full potential – with seven saying *yes* and nine *no.* Those who answer negatively give a range of suggestions on how it might improve as follows:

- More resources - one adding they should be more up to date
- Access to the Internet
- Two say a full-time qualified librarian is needed.

The comments from two respondents on the under-use of the library are significant. One asserts that if teachers used it more it would reach its potential; and the other reveals that Thandi Sibandla "keeps complaining to the teachers that they don't utilise the library".

Figure 2 summarises the responses to a series of statements about the NSS School library - probing their use of specifically this library.
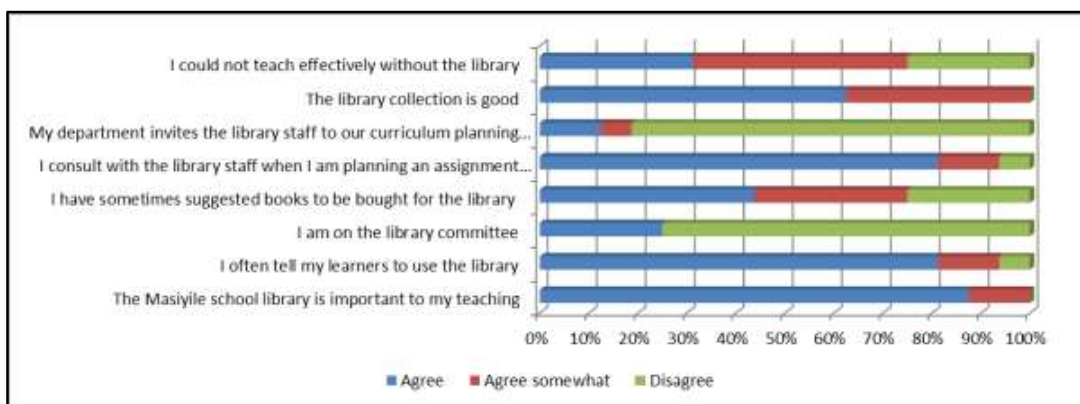

Figure 2: Use of NSS School library

Despite their claims of the value of the library to their teaching, Figure 3 confirms my observations on the low use in the teaching day.
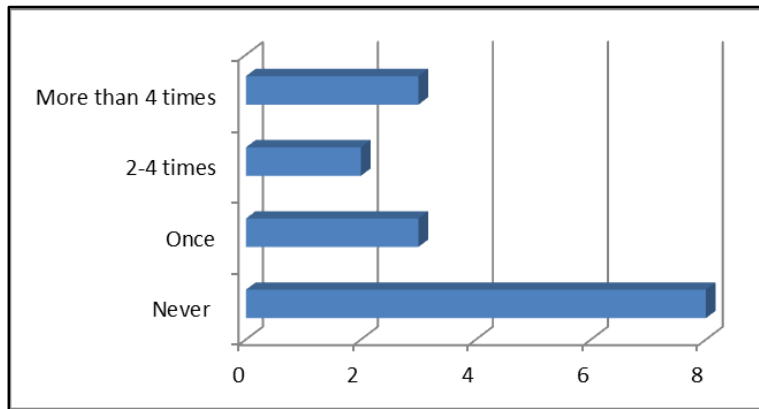
Figure 3: How many times have you brought a class to the library this year?

There are three categories of responses to the follow-up question on what students learn in the library as opposed to the classroom:

- The use of and behavior in a library
- Independence – in finding information and reading and studying
- Extending classroom knowledge for new insights.

The table that follows shows, perhaps surprisingly that, although the teachers might not be bringing their classes to the library, they themselves depend on it for their own information seeking.

Table 1: Respondents' sources for their professional information needs & teaching

Q12.8	World Wide Web (Internet) at public library	1
Q12.5	Public library	4
Q12.7	World Wide Web (Internet) at school	6
Q12.6	World Wide Web (Internet) at home	10
Q12.3	EDULIS (WCED's teachers' library)	11
Q12.2	Curriculum materials from the Education Department(s)	12
Q12.1	Textbooks	15
Q12.4	Mayisile school library	16

Interviews
This section extracts a few of the themes in the interviews with three central role-players: the LA, the teacher-librarian and the principal. The underuse of the library by teachers and the standing of the library in the school are two strong themes running through the interviews with the LA and teacher-librarian. Other themes are:
- The complex relationships inside the library

- The sustainability of the library
- The impact of the library on students' academic performance
- The ambiguities of the LA job.

In their separate interviews Thandi and Lindi agree that the underuse by teachers is their biggest challenge. Echoing the finding of the questionnaire survey (Figure 1), Thandi acknowledges that teachers do not consult enough with the library:
"I wish more teachers would include the library in their planning: If we can get some support from teachers …. Like working together, you know, the planning and so forth.   That for me would work. And not only that . I think.. Giving credit, not only to people … but acknowledging the library, and what it can do.".
Thandi refers to the prevailing teaching styles – in which the library is something "extra":
"Not everybody sees the value because they are too busy in the classroom. For them library is an extra thing. Whereas in reality you should be incorporating it into learning. I don't know, it's as if, … sometimes one gets the feeling that it's two schools in one. It's like the library does its own thing and then the school functions - whereas we should actually work together. For some reason there's something missing."

Linda provides another perspective in the extract below. To her the problem might lie in staffroom politics. Some teachers see Lindi and the library as belonging to Thandi and so keep away:
"Because I am always with her [Thandi], I work with her, then maybe some teachers don't like her. So they don't like the idea of the library because she takes ownership of it, she is very protective of the library. She is very territorial."
Thandi is certainly aware of staffroom politics. In her interview she talks of how she uses her allies in the staffroom as "leverage" "to go and influence the other guys".

Thandi and Lindi's working relationship surfaces in Thandi's interview when I ask for her opinion on whether the Bookery's LA programme offers a possible solution for the staffing of South African school libraries. She says it does as Lindi can "keep the library open during the day":

"I think it does in a way, Gen. … there are times, for instance in the morning, I should be in the library, and I'm thinking "If I'm not there, what happens?" Because she [Lindi] is there to ensure that the library is open during the day.   Whereas, if it was just me and the kids [the library monitors], obviously there will be days when I'm able to, and days when I'm unable to. So again, even if I'm not there, like yesterday afternoon for instance … I don't have to worry who manages the library, … so to me it does work to my advantage."

. And later on she expresses confidence in Lindi's capacity to teach:

"But in a way, I'm kind of glad that she's kind of thrown in the deep end because one thing she has shown me is that she is not sinking. Instead she is swimming …if there is a class in here - information skills or whatever it is."

However, later she seems dismayed at my comment that many Bookery LAs do not have a teacher-librarian to work with and suggests that Lindi can only "swim" because of her:

"If I wasn't there would she [Lindi]' be able to swim?
You mean that guys are on their own without anyone. Huh! That's torture."

Thinking of an incident earlier in the week when a male library monitor upset Lindi, I ask about delineation of responsibilities.

G Hart	Are there issues in terms of you working together in terms of who does what?
Thandi	No.
GH	Because there was that incident the other day with Unathi feeling that the monitors were not listening to her.
Thandi	No, I think kids in high school will always be… Some of them tend to be emotional
GH	Who do they report to? You or Lindi?
Thandi	Both of us are the bosses if you like
GH	Don't they play one off against the other?
Thandi	Not necessarily , well they try to but then fortunately it doesn't work like that. But for instance I think I just , the incident that you talk about, I wasn't there when it happened. But then I tried to get both sides of the story but she [Lindi] was very upset about the whole thing you know and then the kids were also upset but for me now, I've got to try and mend those fences.

My main interest in speaking with the principal was to find out how he values the library and sees its future, specifically with regard to its staffing. He praises Thandi Sibandla's "tireless work" in establishing the library but is quick to add "with our support of course". He adds: "I persuaded her to study because she is so passionate about library issues". Later on we return to Thandi's position as a fulltime teacher.

G Hart .	Your situation is different from the other Bookery schools, most of them, because you do have [Thandi Sibandla] and [Lindi Maropa], who is here on a stipend from the Bookery. Most of the other schools don't have a qualified librarian, but Ms Sibandla is, as you know, a full time English teacher, and an HOD. She's very involved in all sorts of things like the timetabling and the telematics in the afternoon. Do you think that's sustainable? Do you think that that situation can last forever? Because she is actually doing, what many people would say, is two full time jobs.
P	Ja, it is not completely sustainable. It is not completely sustainable, I'm concerned that she is going to leave us, for the personal growth. … So my main worry.. We need to have someone whom we should groom . But besides that someone can work with her because she's overloaded. She has got too much work. She works over weekends, she works afternoons and all that - but what is happy is that I am pleased with her. She's got a group of learners [library monitors] that she is working with. She has groomed those learners so even if she is not there they can fill the gap.

Despite this seeming recognition of Thandi's untenable position, he admits that he would be reluctant to let her drop her English teaching if librarian posts were created, " Because really she's doing very well in both."

Noting that he refers to the student monitors but not to the LA, I ask what he would do if the Bookery withdrew the stipend. (The Bookery schools are expected to take over responsibility for the LAs after three years). As the following extract shows, he is perplexed by my question but eventually suggests he would find a volunteer or rely on student monitors – again using the phrase "fill the gap":
"Well, well, well, well – I'll I'll I'll … persuade the governing body … sure the governing body has got a muscle of power to tell the parents in terms of saying can't we donate something for this particular person. Or or …whereas I know in the community round here there are unemployed. We once had a similar problem [when Equal Education withdrew its support] …but certain kids in the school they managed to fill the gap. It's part of empowerment when a child is involved."

In their separate interviews both Thando and Lindi agree on what they like best – seeing the library full of learners. Lindi describes a "good" day as one when she cannot get away at her usual time of 4.00:
"The library was very full. Lots of learners came and asked for books. There was a lot of issuing of fiction books like the English novels and the Xhosa novels. And I actually leave at five o'clock. So, that would be a good day. Like there was a lot of activities."
She says this might happen three times a week.
Lindi talks with pride of the reading intervention she conducted with 30 Grade 9s in 2014 at the end of which she says they were reading all the FundZa books. All three interviewees are confident that the library's programs have contributed to the improvement in recent years in matric results and in the DBE's Annual National Assessments for languages and maths. The principal was at pains to show me the congratulatory letter from the WCED.

Throughout the study Lindi was busy planning a program for Human Rights Day 21 March. She was excited to have found a veteran of the 1953 Langa pass law protests to speak. However, her excitement was dashed when the principal vetoed her invitation at the last minute. She sent me an SMS "It's very bad!" Having seen the hours that Lindi spends alone, it was no surprise to learn from her that the worst part of her job is its isolation. She told me: "It's quite lonely. It's almost like you're a bit of an outsider." The evident ambiguity around her position supports her feeling. She is about the only person apparently who is not expected to sign in every day. I have already mentioned the hurtful incident when a monitor told her she did not belong – she should "go away". Mr Isaacs, supposedly a library ally, was surprised to hear from me that she is not a volunteer. Both she and Thandi told me that the Bookery should be clearer on her status:
"I would like them [the Bookery] to be more visible first of all.
GH: Because?
"Like, actually, them having a relationship with the principal. Like if I know that I have the Bookery behind me, it would actually make things easier." (Lindi)

"I think the Bookery needs to explain, because you know how it is, people get they can make their own conclusion at the end of the day if nobody says anything. So I think the Bookery has to tell them [the school] "You know what? This person does A, B, C." Then everything is

clear. Because sometimes we don't know. I don't think they [the school] give her the credit she should be given at the end of the day because no one actually came up and said "Hey guys this is so and so"." (Thandi)

Conclusions

Earlier, I expressed the hope that, in uncovering the strengths and weaknesses of the NSS library, the case study might give insights into the potential of library assistant programmes to fill the gaps in school library provision in South Africa. This paper has just scratched the surface of the mounds of data I accumulated but I hope it has achieved this goal.
The shortcomings are evident, for example:

- The low use by teachers with their classes raises questions over how the school is developing the information skills required of today's school leavers
- The lack of ICTs hampers its mission to teach these information skills
- The teacher-librarian's position is untenable. She says that, if she could drop two of her classes, she would be able to establish better relations with teachers – with the assistance of the LA to manage the library
- The surprising vagueness over the status of the LA affects her morale and probably contributes to the low use of the library by teachers.

However, despite the problems, the overall finding has to be that the library is indeed making a difference in the lives of the learners and the school would suffer if there was no assistant to keep the library open throughout the school day and afterwards. Thus:

- It is crammed with learners every lunch time and afternoon
- It is a lively reading center and there is consensus that its reading programs have made a difference to reading skills
- The principal is convinced that the school's improved academic performance might be attributed to the revival of the library
- It is the teachers' number one resource for their professional information needs.

However, the study highlights the importance of the committed teacher-librarian to support the LA. The larger study might throw light on the significance of Thandi's librarian qualification. Lindi Maropa and Thandi Sibandla's shared vision and commitment are clear – despite the challenges from their rather inhospitable environment. The findings might be summed up in the judgement of one of the teachers:
"It is helping but it has a lot of limitations."

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Biographical note

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