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International Association of School Librarianship. Selected Papers from the ... Annual Conference; 2003;
Education Database
pg. 270

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Integrating a Community Library into the Teaching and Learning Programme of Local Schools: Experiences from Seshego Community Library, South Africa

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According to estimates by Statistics South Africa, only 33% of learners in the Limpopo Province (one of the nine Provinces in South Africa) have access to a functional school library or media centre. This has been regarded as one of the main factors which have contributed to the Province consistently producing one of the lowest pass rates in comparison to its counterparts. While there was enthusiasm amongst some teachers that the establishment of Seshego Community Library would bring some relief to educators starved of a functional library service in their schools, some teachers and learners were not as enthusiastic and receptive to the Community Library. This paper explores some of the barriers inherent in introducing a library to a community which was not previously exposed to, and accustomed to making use of its services, and making it an integral part of the teaching and learning programme. Issues of resistance to the community library's outreach programme, largely emanating from lack of motivation and a low morale amongst some teachers and principals alike, as well as an erosion in the culture of teaching and learning, are explored. There is a need to break down the existing barriers to encourage teachers and learners to make use of the Community Library's services and facilities to add value to their teaching and learning endeavours.

Introduction

This paper explores some of the challenges faced by Seshego Community Library in an attempt to integrate the Library into the teaching and learning programme of local schools. This effort was intended to reach out to local schools and encourage a culture of Library use amongst teachers and learners. Upon its inception in 1998, Seshego Community Library embarked on a massive outreach campaign to stimulate interest in its services and establish partnerships with the twenty-eight primary and high schools operating in the area. Part of this outreach programme entailed introducing teachers and learners to the Library and encouraging them to visit it and make use of its resources in their teaching and learning endeavours. It also entailed visits to local schools and regular telephone calls to teachers, to encourage them to use the Library. However, these intensive and time-consuming efforts were not met with the same enthusiasm from some teachers and principals alike. Some of the learners have also not taken active interest in the Library because of lack of encouragement by their teachers, who are not library users themselves.

With emphasis on resource-based learning, which does not encourage total dependence on the teacher as a source of knowledge, libraries have an increasingly important role to play in the teaching and learning process. Mortimore (Price, 1999,p.120) asserts that for effective learning to take place, learners should have access to information which is independent of teachers. This is the basis of outcomes-based education. While there may be quite a few hiccups in

forging partnerships between schools and community libraries in other places, Seshego Community Library is battling with problems of resistance to its outreach programme and negative perceptions about the role of a library in the teaching and learning process. Pitman & Roberts (2002, p.69) report on an entirely different experience they had in Wales, in an attempt to build a working relationship between the schools and the community library. Their efforts at teaching information skills were well received by the learners, who were very enthusiastic. There is however no mention of how the teachers responded to the outreach programme. In Seshego, the experience was totally different, with most teachers showing reluctance to participate in the project. This will be discussed in detail at a later stage in the paper.

Background

Seshego is a township situated 12 kilometres from Pietersburg or Polokwane as it is now known. An estimated 92 000 people live in this township. Like most other townships in South Africa, there are pockets of informal settlements falling within the Library's catchment area, resulting in a diverse user profile which the Library has to serve. The Library is funded by the Polokwane Municipality, and is one of the four libraries falling within the Greater Polokwane City Council. The others are Pietersburg, Westenburg and Nirvana.

Seshego Community Library, hereafter referred to as the Community Library, is housed in what was previously a community hall which was damaged by fire and remained unutilised for a period of five years. In 1997, the community hall was renovated and converted into a Community Library by the City Council, at a cost of R1 million. The Library started operating in 1998. So far, it has had a very generous budget, and is therefore well stocked, using state-of-the-art technology.

Like their counterparts in other parts of Limpopo Province, primary and high school learners in Seshego have a limited access to school libraries and media centres. There is a total of 28 pre-primary, primary and high schools in the area. Of the six high schools, only one has a functional library. Some of the primary schools have what approximates a library, with books still in boxes. This "library" often doubles-up as a staff room or a storeroom, and there is seldom a teacher-librarian or media specialist to oversee the collection, rendering it unutilised, under-utilised and obsolete, in many instances. One main factor which has led to the under-development of school libraries in South Africa, is the lack of a policy frame-work designed to underpin the provision of school libraries in the country. In its policy document, the African National Congress notes that this lack of policy has resulted in many learners being educated without access to resources, resulting in their inability to develop their information skills for life-long learning and their capacity to think critically (African National Congress, 1995, p.84).

The library's customer profile

The Library serves a diverse profile of customers, ranging from affluent professionals including civil servants to ordinary citizens from neighbouring informal settlements. These customers can be divided into the following categories:

Those who actively need library and information services by virtue of their activities or professions. These are students (especially those studying through distance education institutions like Unisa and Technikon SA); primary and high school learners, as well as teachers and other professionals in the civil service. Then there are those members of the community who have to be informed of the library and encouraged to use its services. These are the adult learners, the elderly and children. Such a diverse profile of customers presents a variety of challenges which the library has to grapple with, on a day-to-day basis. Students from tertiary institutions account for 80% of the library's customers. In order to accommodate this category of customers, the Community Library provides a study area capable of accommodating 300 students.

An agreement has been entered into, with some long distance education institutions to make basic study material available to their students through the Community Library, as it is cheaper this way (Lotz & Mhinga, 2001,p.2).

Statement of the problem

This paper emanates from observation of the response of teachers and learners to the Community Library's outreach efforts. The paper seeks to identify and explore reasons for resistance to the Community Library's outreach programme, and unwillingness by most of the teachers from neighbouring schools, to use the Library and make it an integral part of the teaching and learning programme. Barriers to effective utilization of the Community Library are also identified and explored.

Methodology

Questionnaires and interviews were used to elicit responses from teachers and learners, respectively. As a result of the sensitive nature of the topic, the researchers felt that they would not receive honest answers from teachers, if they were to interview them. There were also concerns about the anonymity of the teachers if interviews were used. Some teachers were unwilling to take part in the interviews for fear of intimidation by their principals. They were, however, willing to voice their opinions provided they could do so without having their comments and opinions directly attributed to them personally. It was therefore felt that the questionnaire would be the most appropriate research tool for the purposes of this study, as it guaranteed anonymity. Indeed, frank comments and opinions given by teachers on such sensitive issues contained in the research instruments attest to this, as will be seen later on in the paper.

For learners, interviews were used to ensure that all the questions were clarified by the interviewers and understood by the learners to elicit useful responses. The interviews also ensured that instant feedback was received by the researchers. A total of fifty teachers and fifty learners participated in the study.

Questions in the interview schedule and questionnaire sought to elicit responses on the following issues:

- extent of use (or non-use) of the Community Library and the reasons for non-use, where applicable.
- factors contributing towards non-use of the Community Library.
- the purposes for which the Community Library' services are used, where applicable.
- perceptions of the role and value of a library in the teaching and learning process.
- hindrances and barriers to library use by both teachers and learners.

Barriers to integration of the Community Library into the teaching and learning programme of local schools

It is common practice for community libraries to take on the role of school libraries by becoming an integral part of the teaching and learning programmes of local schools, in the absence of proper school libraries or media centres in neighbouring schools. This is because enormous capital expenditure is required to set up a school library, and most often, the Department of Education seldom has sufficient funds to set up a proper school library or media centre infrastructure. The enormous backlogs in the provision of school libraries and media centres are further exacerbated by past inequities created by Apartheid. It is thus more cost-effective and convenient for schools to piggyback on community or public libraries to meet their teaching and learning needs. Zaaiman (1988,p.171) alludes to this phenomenon and reflects on the changing user profile of the Johannesburg Public Library. Use patterns of this library have changed from White middle class patrons to 90% African learners and students, in the past few years. This trend depicts how much students and learners have come to rely on public or community libraries to play the role of a University, Technikon or School library.

In contrast to other countries abroad where community libraries have successfully been integrated into the teaching and learning programmes of local schools (notably the rural areas of Canada and Australia), there are several barriers which manifest themselves in an attempt to make Seshego Community Library an integral part of the teaching and learning process in local schools. Some of these barriers have far-reaching implications for information provision to the learners, both in the long- and short-term. These barriers are not isolated, they are largely pervasive and can be categorised as follows:

Lack of a teaching and learning culture and prevalence of a low morale amongst teachers

The lack of a teaching and learning culture and the problem of low morale amongst teachers, are endemic to most South African public schools. This has resulted in most teachers not being enthusiastic and innovative in their jobs. Teachers are generally unwilling to teach, while learners are unwilling to learn. Failure to do school work, arriving late at school and leaving early, are some of the symptoms of an erosion of a culture of learning and teaching. So rampant is the lack of morale amongst most teachers in schools that it prompted the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) to declare 1996 *"The year of teaching and learning"*, through which SADTU has reiterated its commitment to establishing a culture of learning, teaching and service (COLTS). The main precondition for this culture is a conducive learning environment, with relevant teaching and learning materials (including a functional library service). This intervention by SADTU was intended to restore a culture of teaching and learning, which has been eroded on a broader scale in both urban and rural schools. Several factors are responsible for this degeneration of a teaching and learning culture. Amongst others, the low salaries earned by teachers do not offer adequate incentives and motivation; lack of in-service training and staff development affect upward mobility, and there is inadequate leadership amongst some of the school principals (Cosatu Campaigns Report, 2000).

The state of affairs alluded to above is confirmed by an article in the City Press, a local Sunday newspaper. According to the article, the government laments the brain-drain which has plagued not only South African hospitals, but schools as well; as teachers emigrate to other countries in search of better salaries and working conditions. Education Minister, Kader Asmal has recently announced a plan to retain skilled teachers and encourage those who have left the country, to return. An amount of fifty million Rands (R50m) has been set aside to address this problem. This is intended to boost teacher morale by giving financial incentives to productive teachers. The proposed plan will also allow for the re-training of experienced teachers and give them performance-related salaries (Mboyane, 2003, p.4).

In a thought-provoking and frank letter to his fellow teachers, Manganyi (1998, p.5) reflects on the lack of a culture of teaching and learning, especially in township schools, and concedes that teachers, parents and the government are all to blame for the deterioration of a teaching and learning culture in the schools. He laments the poor state of laboratories and poorly equipped libraries as factors responsible for the deteriorating performance of teachers and learners, and calls for "serious changes in the leadership of schools".

As a result of the low morale also prevailing in schools in Seshego, most teachers get away with doing the bare minimum, and are not enthusiastic about their job. As a result, they are not keen on introducing their learners to the Community Library and making it an integral part of the teaching and learning process.

Unwillingness of teachers to encourage learners to use the Community Library

A consequence of the low morale amongst most teachers is reluctance to use the Community Library as a partner in the teaching and learning process. While a library is regarded by many learners and teachers in the developed world as an important resource centre in the teaching and learning process, some teachers in the developing communities do not view it as such. In spite of the fact that adequate provision of materials has been made for teachers and learners, in the form of curriculum-related non-fiction materials and subject-specific encyclopaedias, this collection is not fully utilised. Most teachers in the neighbouring schools did not react positively to the introduction and use of the Community Library as a central resource in the teaching and learning process. This is in spite of numerous costly and time-consuming outreach efforts by the Library to reach out to schools, and develop a partnership with local teachers and learners. The main reasons given by some teachers for not involving the Community Library in the teaching and learning process are as follows:

- They went through College and University without using a library and therefore do not see its value (this is often said with a sense of accomplishment and pride!)
- They do not have time to use the Library.
- The Library is too far from their schools and most of their learners are too young to travel to the Library on their own (The furthest school from the Library is 3 kilometres away).
- It will give them added responsibility which they are not willing to take.

The use of the Library will transform the teaching and learning process in schools, and inevitably lead to an increased work-load for the teachers, as it means they have to spend more time in the library themselves, make regular visits and do constant liaison with Library staff.

A study conducted by Bristow (1992, p.78) in selected schools in Limpopo Province, presents very disturbing findings. She found that only 31% of teachers often used the school library for preparation of their lessons, and only 18% of the teachers referred their learners to the school library, where it existed. More than ten years down the line, very little has changed since the study was conducted. Admittedly, such unwillingness to form a partnership with the Community Library may stem from various factors, including the teachers' previous unpleasant encounter with the library, at University and College level. Best (1989, p.15) makes the following valid observations regarding this issue:

> ...If students leave college with memories of the library as forbidding and stressful...they cannot be expected to promote positive attitudes to library use amongst their pupils. They will be unlikely to use the library themselves, and even less likely to give it prominence in the learning experiences they design for their pupils.

The reality is that most of the teachers were themselves not exposed to a library during their training at College or University. This was confirmed by some of the teachers who participated in this study, which investigated their perceptions and attitudes towards libraries. Mbambo (1990, p.11) refers to this phenomenon as a self-reinforcing cycle, in which teachers who have not been exposed to a library during their schooling, and have not been exposed to a library during their training at College or University, make the library remain peripheral to their teaching, just as it has been throughout their entire lives. Some teachers do not feel competent and are not keen to use the information sources in the Community Library, having not refined their information seeking skills themselves, during their training years. As a result, being non-users of the library themselves, they do little to develop their learners' information skills. Inevitably, learners will emulate their teachers' actions as they learn by observation. Emphasizing the importance of a library during their pre-service training, would have gone a long way in changing the teachers' perceptions of the role of a library in the teaching and learning process.

With this kind of role models, we are likely to have a generation of non-users of the library, since the learners are not exposed to positive role models who will instil a culture of library use in them.

Several complex questions to which there are no ready-made answers, need to be addressed by the Community Library's staff. These are:

- What strategies should the Library adopt to develop a partnership with teachers, over and above the current outreach programme already in place?
- How does one convince teachers and principals that the Community Library can add value to their teaching and learning experience, and that the results of library use are not always instant?
- Is it possible at all, to change some of the teachers' perceptions of the role of a library in the teaching and learning process?
- How does one change a deeply entrenched mind-set developed over a long period of time, which informs the teachers' negative perception of the role of the library?

While it was possible for teachers to go through their schooling without ever using a library, during their school days, today's learner is exposed to a diversity of information, in both print and electronic formats. The information environment is very dynamic, diverse and more challenging than it was in the past. The demands put on learners are even higher and will intensify when they go through to a tertiary environment. Failure to expose the learners to libraries before they go to tertiary institutions presents huge problems with regard to lack of library literacy and information literacy skills, as the learners fail to cope with a complex information environment they are confronted with at tertiary level.

Lack of co-operation between teachers and the Community Library staff

In some instances where some teachers do send their learners to the Library to search for information, there is a lack of co-operation between the teachers and Library staff. Some teachers fail to check availability of materials in the Library before they send learners out to search for information on certain topics. There is also a lack of feedback from those teachers who send their learners to the Library to get help with their homework and school projects.

The Library staff usually gain no information on how their services are received by the few schools who make use of them. This makes it difficult for them to know what further services are required by the teachers and learners, and what areas of dissatisfaction exist, in order to improve on service delivery. There is also very little communication between the teachers and the Library staff on current and future school projects which would enable the Library staff to plan and select relevant materials for such purposes, in advance (Chipana, 2003).

This outcry should not be seen as an attempt to criticise teachers unduly. Rather, it is an attempt to raise awareness of some of the problems encountered with most of the teachers in encouraging them to use the library as an information resource to enhance the quality of learning and teaching in their schools. The efforts made by a few teachers to integrate the library into their curriculum are acknowledged. However, these are an exception, rather than the norm. Needless to say that such cases are few and far between.

Lack of support for the Community Library's outreach programme by some of the school principals

It is virtually impossible to introduce the Community Library to teachers and learners without the support of the school principal. As leaders in their schools, principals are expected to spearhead efforts aimed at improving the teaching and learning process, and are expected to lead by example. However, some of the principals approached by the Community Library in its effort to reach out to neighbouring schools, showed no interest in encouraging the teachers to integrate the Library into their teaching and learning programme, even in the absence of libraries and media centres in their schools. This stemmed largely from their own lack of exposure to libraries during their schooling. Indeed, some principals pointed out that they went through College and University without using a library, and they did not therefore see its value in the teaching and learning process, just as some teachers did! This is very disturbing coming from people who are often perceived as role models. Such role models contribute very little to the cultivation of a reading culture amongst the learners, as perceptions like these are likely to filter through to the teachers and subsequently to the learners. In a frank assessment of principals' perceptions and attitudes towards school libraries, Hartzell (2002, p.92) contends that these have been shaped by several forces:

> The first is their own experiences in school libraries as children, in which they perceived the library as peripheral to the school. The second is the effect of their professional training, in which the library's role in curriculum instruction was conspicuously absent. The third is the nature of the teacher-librarian's work, which is to enable and empower others. The fourth is the low profile teacher-librarians and school libraries have in the professional literature read by teachers and administrators, which prevents them from updating their sense of what the library really is and can do...

In relation to the American experience related by Hartzell, most principals in Seshego also have a limited understanding of the value of a library in the teaching and learning process. This became clear from the data collected during this study. In a related study, Radebe (1997, p.222) found that 61% of the school principals were not supportive of the school library, and even discouraged the teacher-librarians' efforts to persuade their colleagues. The sad thing is that it is nearly impossible to change perceptions. As Hartzell (2002, p.105) has rightly observed, "neither time nor good work, are likely to alter an uninformed principal's perceptions of libraries and librarians". He further contends that "the only way to change the principals' perceptions is to assault them directly, repeatedly, and from a multiplicity of directions". It will take some time and effort before there is a change in attitude and perceptions from the principals, because people's preconceived notions usually determine how they select and interpret information already consistent with their beliefs and perceptions, which are extremely difficult to change.

Using learners to search for teachers' information needs

In a few instances where teachers refer the learners to the library, it is only so that the learners can search for information which the teachers intend to use for their private studies. This is rather unfair, considering the fact that the learners have not yet refined their information seeking skills. Some of the queries presented to library staff from grades as low as Grade 5 (standard 3), clearly indicate that some teachers who are not keen on using the library, use the learners to search for information on their behalf. Such information is then used for compiling assignments for the teachers' private studies.

While sending learners to the library to search for information on the teachers' behalf may be done in good faith, and may be a well-intentioned way of encouraging the learners to use the library, it presents a number of problems and may instead drive the learners away from the Community Library:

- It instils fear in the learners as they have to get the required information at all costs, to avoid being reprimanded by the teachers. It does not therefore arouse the learners' interest in exploring the given topic.
- It is very confusing to the learners as they are not sure of the information task they are expected to perform. It therefore has a potential of driving them away from the Library rather than encourage them to use it, since they usually cannot relate to the topic, which is usually very complex.

Sending learners who are in higher grades to search for information on the teachers' behalf might be a good way of introducing them to the library, and acclimatising them to complex information tasks they might have to handle at tertiary level. But, sending learners to do this at lower grades is not acceptable, no matter how well intentioned the practice might be. Grade12 (standard 10) learners, may not have severe difficulties comprehending the topics alluded to earlier, as opposed to their grade five counterparts, for instance.

The tendency by teachers to be pre-occupied with improving their own qualifications is referred to by SADTU, as a qualifications "paper chase", and usually results in teachers being more committed to their studies, than to the learners' needs (Cosatu Campaigns Report, 2000).

Sending learners to search for information which is beyond their comprehension

Another barrier to library use by the learners is the growing tendency to send them to look for information which is way beyond their comprehension. The following examples of topics given to learners to search in the library indicate that they are expected to search for information which clearly is above their level of comprehension and has nothing to do with their curricula:
- Grade 3 (Standard 1) learners sent to find information on *communicable diseases.*
- Grade 5 (Standard 3) learners sent to find information on *how apartheid influenced the South African society, politically, socially and economically.*

It would be presumptuous to expect that a learner who has had only three years of schooling, would know what a communicable disease is, especially if English is not the learner's first language. In both instances mentioned earlier, the learners were not given any guidance, by way of explaining and simplifying the terminology to make it understandable to them before they were sent to the Library. Needless to say that queries and information tasks should be formulated at a level commensurate with the learners' ability and comprehension skills, to enable them to handle such queries.

Ill-defined and ambiguous queries presented by learners sent by teachers to seek information

Some of the queries which teachers send the learners to find information on, are not clearly defined, and are a source of confusion for both the learners and the Library staff alike. The following is an example of a query received by the Library, and is indicative of this growing tendency:
- Grade 6 (Standard 4) learners sent to the library to find information on *how the Arrive Alive campaign relates to science.*

While the above might probably be clear in the mind of the teacher who sent the learners to the Library, it is fairly incomprehensible and presents problems to the learners and the Library staff who are expected to help them. The Arrive Alive campaign is a road safety campaign run by the Department of Transport, and has more to do with road safety and very little to do with science, *per se*. Ill-defined and ambiguous queries may affect the learners' confidence level and discourage them from using the library because they do not understand the information task they are expected to complete. As a result, they are pre-occupied with getting answers to avoid being punished by the teacher. One only needs to look at the fear written on their faces when they come to the library, to ascertain the insecurity and discomfort they feel presenting such ambiguous queries.

Unwillingness of some parents to pay their children's Library membership fees

Some of the parents who have not been exposed to a library before, are reluctant to pay membership fees for their children to allow them full access to the Community Library's resources. This can be attributed to their own lack of exposure to a library, which has shaped their lack of understanding of the value of a library. They thus cannot see the benefits of giving their children full access to the Library's resources. The Library charges a membership fee of only R10.00 per annum, which works out to less than R1.00 per month. This is indeed a negligible amount of money, considering how much it costs to buy the Library's resources. Be that as it may, some parents cannot genuinely afford to pay this amount to register their children with the Library, because of high levels of unemployment and poverty. Like in most community libraries, everybody has access to Seshego Community Library's resources, but loan services are only extended to registered members.

The parents' failure to pay for their children's membership fees has resulted in an odd tendency by children to copy story books from cover to cover, because they are not allowed to borrow them as they are not registered members. On any given afternoon, scores of young children flock to the Library to engage in this time-consuming, tedious and cumbersome practice. The children have an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. Copying the storybooks symbolizes their desire to read the story over-and-over again, to nurture their reading skills. However, much as the children are enthusiastic to use the Library, some of their parents either do not share their enthusiasm, or are unable or reluctant to pay for their membership fees. This makes it impossible for the children to have full use of the Library's services.

Learners' perceptions of the value of the Community Library in the learning process

Contrary to views held by most of their teachers regarding the role of the Community Library, the learners interviewed were more optimistic about its role in the teaching and learning process, and had nothing but praise for the Library. Some learners did indicate that their teachers do not at all encourage them to use the Community Library, and that they had come to the Library out of their own free will. Parents are also not playing their part in encouraging their children to come to the Library, evident in the learners' responses. Learners find the Library a quiet study area, with ample study space, where they can do their homework, with access to relevant information sources. They further indicated that the Library is also far from their noisy and often cramped homes, where they are usually required to help with household chores when they should be doing their school-work. Of the fifty learners interviewed, only one remarked that the Community Library was unimportant, as it was not helpful. This could perhaps be attributed to the learner's unpleasant experience in the Library, the nature of which was unfortunately not disclosed. Learners need to be constantly encouraged by teachers and their parents, to make effective use of the Library. Abdication of this responsibility by teachers and parents will only prevent the learners from taking advantage of resources which will make them critical thinkers and lifelong-learners.

Implications of non-exposure of learners to a library environment

The lack of exposure of learners to a library environment has far-reaching implications. Learners who are not exposed to a library during their early years of schooling are known to struggle when they get to tertiary environments, which are characterised by exposure to high volumes of information in various formats. Lacking information literacy skills, these learners will no doubt find it difficult to handle huge amounts of information associated with tertiary environments. This will also affect their ability and confidence in using libraries in the future. This is in fact a disservice to the learners who look upon their teachers as mentors who should shape their destiny and prepare them for challenges

which lie ahead. They will undoubtedly find it difficult to cope with the demands of a society characterised by rapid information explosion. This situation will inevitably create a generation of non-users who will not be able to function effectively in an Information Society.

Conclusion

It is clear from the assortment of barriers alluded to previously, that the Seshego Community Library has a lot to grapple with, in its attempt to create a culture of library use in a community which has very little experience with regard to exposure to, and use of libraries. This resistance to the Library's outreach programme is indeed a barrier which needs to be removed, to make the Community Library an integral part of the teaching and learning process in the local schools, especially in the absence of a proper school library infrastructure in Seshego and other parts of the Province. Some of the barriers have a lot to do with people's mind-sets and perceptions, which are developed over many years and are very difficult to change.

It is worth noting that this resistance to Library use, should be seen against the back-drop of library use amongst African people in general. The fact that Africans are generally not keen users of library and information services, has been documented in the literature on African librarianship, by amongst others, Mchombu (1982). As a result, any effort to integrate a library into the daily lives of African people, should take into cognisance, issues of orality and the   lack of a reading culture commonly found in African communities. However, experiences with African children in some libraries in South Africa, have proved that if children are introduced to a library at an early age, they gradually develop a reading habit, which shapes them into regular users of libraries. Unfortunately, most of the children in Seshego, are missing out on this opportunity. Some intervention from the Provincial Department of Education would go a long way to resolve some of the problems resulting from lack of interest in using the Community Library, by the teachers. There only needs to be a will from those in positions of authority, to intervene and make a difference in the lives of the learners. A formal and open endorsement of the Community Library's outreach programme by the Department of Education might help in changing the teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the Library. At the moment, the Library is regarded by most teachers as an add-on, and is thus perceived as being peripheral, and not at the core of the teachers' endeavours.

Failure to intervene will diminish the effectiveness of the new curricula which are being introduced in schools. These do not require the teacher to be the sole source of knowledge, but require the learners to independently explore various fields of knowledge. The Community Library will therefore be an important resource, without which meaningful learning will not take place, especially in schools which do not have access to a school library or media centre. The challenge therefore, is to break down barriers to library use, in school libraries where they exist, and other types of libraries which are at the learners' disposal; in the absence of libraries in their own schools. In this way, we will be able to develop a generation of library users who will be able to think critically and become life-long learners.

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Biographical Notes

Eddy Maepa holds a PhD in Information Science from the Rand Afrikaans University in Johannesburg. He started his career at the University of the North working in the Library as a subject reference specialist for Economic and Management Sciences. He was later transferred to the Department of Information Science where he taught for thirteen years and acted as Head of Department, before joining the Department of Information Science at the University of South Africa (Unisa). His research interests include rural information needs, rural information provision and impact of ICT's on rural communities. Apart from teaching, he is also involved in Consultancy work and commissioned research; and has worked as a research and training consultant for the Universal Service Agency, the International Centre for Agriculture and Bio-science (CABI), as well as the National Department of Education. His association with Seshego Community Library was based on an experiential training programme initiated while he was still at the University of the North. Email: maepame@unisa.ac.za

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