School Libraries in Bhutan: Birth of a Reading Culture

Felicity Shaw

Honorary Research Fellow, Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, China

Modernization of Bhutan began in 1961, with the launching of the country’s first five-year development plan. In 1963, the government invited a Canadian Jesuit educationist, Father William Mackey, to come to Bhutan to help establish a secular school system. This article briefly sketches the development of a modern education system and early attempts at library provision, and then studies in detail the ongoing School Library Development Project that is being implemented with funding support from donor agencies and through World Bank-funded (but education sector-inspired) development projects. Significant achievements in library development and reading promotion activities are being brought about through the vision and commitment of career education officers working closely with sympathetic donor agency counterparts toward the realization of longstanding goals.

Introduction

In an earlier article (Shaw, 1991), I discussed problems specific to the stocking, maintenance, and administration of Bhutan’s school libraries, which had mostly been established only within the preceding six years. The article concluded with a tentative judgment on achievements to date: Bhutan’s sixth five-year development plan (1987-1992) had accorded renewed emphasis to strengthening the education sector, and future prospects for the libraries seemed bright.

I begin this article with a summary of these early attempts at library provision in the context of educational development in the country as a whole. I then review in greater detail implementation of the ongoing School Library Development Project, an education sector-inspired initiative launched in 1995 to develop school library collections and to provide appropriately trained staff to maintain them. This article has been developed from material first presented in summary form at the 18th conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia, Taipei, held December 6-10, 2004.

The research is based on data gathered during numerous visits to schools and educational institutes across Bhutan from 1984 to 2005. During these visits I saw many libraries and held wide-ranging informal discussions with teachers, especially the teacher-librarians. I gathered information through a standard procedure, asking the same set of questions at each school or institute (see Appendix). A comprehensive report was prepared afterward, and on further visits the initial data were reviewed and
updated as appropriate. Using this standard procedure has enabled me to follow the fortunes of individual libraries through the years and has also made possible more meaningful comparison between individual libraries visited in the same time frame.

I also held informal discussions with career education officers and officers of donor agencies involved in education-sector activities. I took comprehensive notes, carefully cross-checked statements presented as fact, and sought a wide range of opinion on individual issues in order to achieve deeper understanding of events and policies in the local context. A review of notes taken of these visits and meetings has enabled evaluation of library development in the broader context of development of education policy, as documented in Bhutan’s own five-year development plans and in the supporting programmes mounted under the auspices of donor organizations assisting Bhutan in the development process.

**Bhutan: An Overview**

The Kingdom of Bhutan is a small, mountainous country about the size of Switzerland located in the eastern Himalayas, bounded on the north by Tibet and on the south by India. The history of Bhutan dates back to the 8th century when the great teacher Padmasambhava arrived from Tibet (according to legend, flying in on the back of a tiger) and began propagation of the tantric form of Mahayana Buddhism. For many centuries beset by power struggles among regional chiefs, the nation finally became united in 1907 when a hereditary monarchy was unanimously established by the principal chiefs and religious leaders of the day. The accession to the throne in 1952 of Bhutan’s third king, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, marks the beginning of the modern era for Bhutan.

Bhutan’s first five-year development plan was launched in 1961, with generous support from India. The country joined the Colombo Plan in 1963 and, sponsored by India, was admitted as a full member of the United Nations in 1971. India still remains Bhutan’s principal donor, but nowadays development aid also comes from various United Nations (UN) agencies and a number of country-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Modern Bhutan is a multiethnic, multilingual society, with a system of government best described as a modified and evolving form of constitutional monarchy with popular representation. Most Bhutanese follow Mahayana Buddhism, but in the south most people are Hindus. The population of approximately 750,000 is mainly engaged in subsistence farming, but today there is a drift toward the towns. English is the principal medium of instruction in the schools, but all students are expected to attain fluency in the national language, Dzongkha, derived from the Tibetan dialect spoken by the forebears of the people of western Bhutan. Adult literacy is rising steadily and now exceeds 54%.
Development of Modern Education

A few primary schools had been established in the 1950s, but only monastic education was widely available before modernization began. Education has always been one of the most important aims of Bhutan's development strategy, and in the first five-year plan emphasis was given to expansion of existing education facilities.

In 1963, the government invited Canadian Jesuit educationist Father William Mackey (who had been working in the hill stations of West Bengal since 1947) to come to Bhutan to help establish a secular school system. Jesuit educationists played a major role in the development of the educational infrastructure of modern Bhutan until the end of 1988 when Bhutan's contract with them lapsed in conformity with the country's new localization policy.

For Father Mackey, the government's invitation marked the beginning of a lifetime involvement with education in Bhutan. After 19 years of running schools mainly in the eastern region of the country, Father Mackey moved in 1983 to Education Headquarters in Thimphu. He was awarded Bhutanese citizenship in 1985 and in the same year was appointed Chief Inspector of Schools.

Now I am doing something I really like. I am Chief Inspector of Schools. At the age of 75, I visit regularly 9 High Schools, 21 Junior High Schools the odd Primary schools in all corners of the country, climbing, riding ponies, and travelling in the Toyota Land Cruiser that rattles as much as I do, when I huff and puff up thousands of feet on steep Himalayan slopes. (Mackey, 1989).

When Father Mackey stepped down from that post in 1992 at the age of 77, he was appointed Honorary Adviser to Education for life. His contribution to the field of education was recognized in Canada in 1994 when the University of New Brunswick conferred upon him an honorary degree. Father Mackey had a great appreciation of the culture and traditions of Bhutan and was widely known and much loved throughout his adopted homeland. When he died in Thimphu in 1995 after a short illness, he was deeply mourned across the country. Father Mackey's colorful life has been commemorated in a biography (Solverson, 1995), which is also a history of the development of the educational infrastructure in place today.

In the absence of a domestic trained teacher cadre, schools were for some years run and staffed largely by contract teachers recruited from India. In-country teacher training began in 1968 when the first teacher training college was established. A second teacher training college was established in 1974, and these two colleges now comprise the National Institutes of Education, offering a range of Bachelor of Education degree and postgraduate programmes for aspiring and inservice teachers.

In 1981, total school enrollment was 36,705. In 1990, 70,354 students (approximately 38% female) were enrolled at 233 schools and nine institutes, two of which offered degree-level studies. Teaching staff numbered 2,625, of whom about 38% were Bhutanese nationals (Bhutan, 1991). By
contrast, at the start of the 2005 school year, 145,817 students (over 47% female) were enrolled in 458 schools and 18 institutes, nine of which are tertiary institutes under the Royal University of Bhutan. Teaching staff numbered 5,170, of whom nearly 86% were Bhutanese nationals. In addition, 16,642 students (over 71% female) were enrolled in 623 nonformal education centers, mainly attached to schools. All 583 nonformal education teachers (these are employed as part-time instructors) were Bhutanese nationals (Bhutan, 2005).

Education in Bhutan is free, but not compulsory. The formal education structure consists of seven years of primary education (one year pre-primary, then classes I to VI) followed by six years of secondary education, comprising two years of lower secondary (classes VII-VIII), two years of middle secondary (classes IX-X), and two years of higher secondary (classes XI-XII). In remote, sparsely populated areas, small community primary schools offering multi-grade teaching are established, and as student numbers grow, these are usually upgraded to full primary schools. Primary schools are generally day schools, but secondary schools outside the capital are generally boarding schools, with only a few day scholars from the local community. Government policy is to keep students in their home districts when allocating secondary school places.

The government is committed to providing free basic education to all eligible students from the age of 6 up to and including class X. Admission to the higher secondary classes XI and XII is competitive, as is admission to degree and postsecondary diploma programmes offered by the Royal University of Bhutan in its member colleges and institutes.

For a comprehensive overview of Bhutan’s education system, see the Ministry of Education’s Web site, which also includes selected documents on education policy and planning (http://www.education.gov.bt/). Education development in the context of development as a whole can be traced through reference to five-year plan documents posted on the Web site of the Department of Planning, Ministry of Finance (http://www.dop.gov.bt/fyp/).

School Libraries in the Early Years

Official recognition of the importance of libraries in schools came in 1974, with the publication of a document outlining the government’s national education policy for the next 10 years. In the final section dealing with schools administration, a paragraph is devoted to the library: “The most important room in every school should be the library. Each class should have graded library books which should be read by each student in turn during school year” (Bhutan, n.d., p. 15). The importance of school libraries had been formally recognized, but it was to be many years before funding could be spared for library purposes, as demand for education was now growing rapidly and priority had to be given to building and equipping schools and to recruiting and training teachers.
Assembling Collections
School budgets made no provision for library development, but in a few of the earlier schools established and then initially run with a measure of donor support, generally some funding was earmarked for the library from time to time throughout the period of donor involvement. In most schools, basic collections were assembled mainly from books donated to Bhutan through various government-to-government aid and clearinghouse schemes. For example, the Canadian Organization for Development in Education sent shipments of books to Bhutan for many years. Sorting and distribution were handled centrally by staff whose main responsibility was the distribution of textbooks and other supplies to the growing number of schools. The material largely comprised books withdrawn from other libraries and multiple copies of remaindered school textbooks. However, many schools also received reasonably up-to-date encyclopaedia sets and other reference works through such sources, and in the context of the times, virtually any book was a welcome addition to the shelves. The book collection would generally be kept in locked cupboards in a classroom, in the staff office, or on open shelves in the school storeroom, which was kept locked.

Setting up the Libraries
Nearly all the libraries were set up and run by teachers (mainly teachers of English recruited on contract from India), who looked after the library and book collection in addition to their regular duties. Most had no experience of library work, so there was little uniformity of practice, but these teacher-librarians were generally enthusiastic, and all took care to safeguard their collections.

Library management became less of a problem in the early 1980s when Bhutan began to receive volunteer teachers (mainly teachers of English) recruited through the United Nations Volunteer Programme (UNV) and country-based NGOs. School principals would usually put their volunteers in charge of the library, assuming they had experience in this area. Libraries set up and run by volunteers provided good models, with easily understood stock recording and management systems. Eager to encourage an interest in reading for pleasure, the volunteers generally gave students much freer access to the books. However, sometimes their enthusiasm backfired, and where insufficient attention had been paid to library security, stock loss was higher than when the collection was under more conservative management.

Introduction of Library Periods
In the early 1980s, work began on restructuring the school syllabus to make it more appropriate to Bhutan's needs. Library periods were made a compulsory feature of the new school syllabus in 1984, with each class scheduled for one library period per week. When library periods were first introduced, few schools had a special library room, so students would
select their reading matter from batches of books brought to the classroom by the teacher. Some library education might be given, but the main emphasis was on encouraging an interest in reading.

Library Development Underway
Renewed focus on strengthening the education sector dates from Bhutan's Sixth Plan (July 1987-June 1992), and with this renewed emphasis on the education sector, as reflected in funding from then onward, school libraries could at last move forward.

Libraries were already benefiting under a school building renovation programme begun in the mid-1980s, where work in individual schools sometimes included construction of a purpose-built science-cum-library block. Increased scope for school library development came with the 1988 launching of the Primary Education Project (PEP) to support the government's development plan for primary education. Each new school constructed under the project was provided with a fully equipped and stocked school library. Books and/or library furnishings were provided to many other schools under PEP, which came to a close at the end of the Seventh Plan period (July 1992-June 1997). By this time, school building and renovation plans routinely included library accommodation.

The first move toward establishing a formal programme for library administration and development came in 1992, when the Department of Education brought out a new publication, Running the School Library: A Teacher-Librarian's Guide (Shaw, 1992). This provided schools with basic information and practical advice on how to set up and run their libraries. Until then, teacher-librarians had learned on the job, generally fitting library duties in around a full teaching load. Few had any library experience, and with no instruction manual, each library was set up and run in a different way. The library guide was written primarily to address this problem, to introduce some uniformity of practice.

Development Project Launched
In November 1995, the Department of Education announced the launching of the School Library Development Project (SLDP), under which funding would be secured to supply schools with a core collection of graded readers, novels, and reference materials, as well as basic library furniture. Schools were asked to earmark a room for possible future use as library. Library training was also to be funded under the new project, and secondary school principals were invited to nominate a teacher to attend a library induction workshop be held in the forthcoming winter vacation.

Library Training
The first library induction workshop was held in January 1996. Workshops have been held annually since then, with around 40 participants in each two- to three-week programme. The librarians of the two National
Institutes of Education run the programmes with the assistance of several experienced secondary school librarians. Course content is based on Running the school library (Shaw, 1992) and kept practical.

When the workshops were first introduced, the intention was to build up a cadre of trained teacher-librarians who would have fewer teaching duties and spend more time in their libraries: Teacher librarians are going to play an increasingly important role in the future. Once trained we would like these teachers to continue to work as teacher librarians. Teacher librarians are definitely not clerks or store keepers. They are educators who should be able to help others to learn. We would like to congratulate all those who get selected for this important role. (CAPSS Newsletter, 5, November 1995, p. 7)

However, due to rising enrollments and a growing teacher shortage, most teacher-librarians continued with a full teaching load. Strategy was changed in 1999 because of this, and now most libraries are run by recent secondary school graduates recruited as library assistants (LAs).

Generally speaking, workshop training is now reserved for the LAs, but schools without an LA may nominate an interested teacher. Results are somewhat uneven at present, but the LA scheme is proving a success in schools where the library is closely supervised by a teacher or trained teacher-librarian who acts as mentor and provides advice and support as required to keep things running smoothly.

**Building up the Book Collections**

For the first few years, the principal emphasis was on compilation of book lists and ordering and distributing library materials so as to build up school book collections quickly. Initially, there were problems in identifying suitable books and then in obtaining them. Thimphu’s retail book trade had only recently been established, and shops carried a limited range of books as income was generated mainly through sales of magazines, newspapers, and stationery. Few publishers’ catalogues or other reference sources were available, and items back-ordered from India often proved out of print or otherwise unobtainable.

The book trade has developed significantly in the last 10 years, and these days any problems in acquiring books are usually related to the tender system, which involves calling for quotations and then re-tendering later for titles that could not be supplied in the initial exercise. There would be greater flexibility if orders could be placed directly with booksellers in Bhutan or India, but the tender system is used to support the local book trade, which needs regular government business in order to stay afloat.

When the SLDP was launched, the goal was to have 3,000–4,000 volumes in community school libraries, 5,000–6,000 in primary school libraries, 7,000–8,000 in the libraries of lower secondary schools (pre-primary through to class VIII), and 10,000–12,000 in the libraries of middle and higher secondary schools (class IX up). Although the number of schools has almost doubled since 1996 (most of the new schools being community/pri-
primary schools), collection targets are being met, and today more emphasis is being placed on library and reading promotion activities.

**Reading Promotion**

Bhutan is not traditionally a reading society, and it is well recognized that once the school library is established, the challenge remains to create interest in reading. For this reason, library-related projects from 2000 onward usually include a reading promotion component. Initiatives to promote reading are discussed below.

**Project Support**

Donor support for the development of primary school libraries comes principally from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and secondary school library development is funded mainly through consecutive World Bank education development projects. Ties first established with Canada through Father Mackey have remained strong. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), which since 1985 has focused on support for institutional strengthening and development of human resources in the education sector, also assists both primary and secondary school libraries through separate small-scale projects administered by the Canadian Cooperation Office (CCO) in Thimphu.

UNICEF, CCO, and the United Nations Population Fund also contribute by donating multiple copies of Bhutan-related works (published at home or abroad) to all schools and other educational institutions. Both UNICEF and CCO have published colorful easy readers on Bhutanese themes and donated multiple copies of these to the schools.

**UNICEF**

UNICEF aid activities focus mainly on the education sector, and especially on assisting the government to improve education. The UNICEF Bhutan Web site provides a general overview of UNICEF’s activities in Bhutan, with descriptions of some specific programmes accompanied by accounts of their effects at the local level (http://www.unicef.org.bhutan/). Ongoing programmes support improvement of basic education, early childhood education, education for the disabled and disadvantaged, nonformal education, and distance education for teachers (Bhutan & UNICEF, 2002). In addition, UNICEF has since 1998 sponsored National Reading Week, an annual event held to encourage students, parents, and teachers to read.

UNICEF has been providing supplementary readers to schools for the past 10 years as part of projects designed to enhance the quality of basic education delivered to students from pre-primary to the first two years of secondary schooling. UNICEF provides a library kit of 400-700 volumes to 35 schools per year. The kit comprises easy readers for juniors, fiction for older students, and reference materials for both students and teachers. Consideration is now being given to an adjustment in strategy during the
current plan period so that in addition to supplying the library kits, UNICEF will also mount complementary activities to stimulate interest in reading, for example, organizing storytelling and using drama in library activities to introduce new books.

World Bank
Bhutan became a member of the World Bank in 1981 and has secured loans for three education development projects to date. The World Bank Web site (http://www.worldbank.org/) includes the full text of documents and reports about these projects, the salient points of which on library development are outlined below.

Primary Education Project
Under the Primary Education Project (PEP, 1988-1997), which supported the government’s development plan for primary education, 12 new primary and junior high schools were built, and others were renovated. Library furnishings and books were provided to all these and to some other schools. Following the inception of the School Library Development Project, 47 batches of books were bought with PEP funding for distribution to selected secondary schools. Each batch comprised 2,000-3,000 volumes of mainly fiction titles, but also some reference books for both students and teachers.

Second Education Project
The Second Education Project (SEP), which ran from March 1998 to June 2004, assisted Bhutan in providing better basic education to more children, particularly those from rural areas. Library provision (including books and furniture) was included in each of the 12 schools that were built or substantially upgraded under SEP, and library book consignments were also sent selectively to other schools.

SEP supported the development of libraries in primary and community schools through a two-year supplementary reading programme launched in 1999. Twenty schools from 10 districts were selected as pilot schools for the programme, which was designed to improve reading skills and foster positive reading habits among students and teachers. Each school received a batch of 900 library books (comprising story books and reference books for both students and teachers) and copies of Guidelines for the Supplementary Reading Program (Rinzing Wangmo & Serra, 1999), a manual for language teachers and teacher librarians that outlines strategies to promote and monitor reading and provides basic information on how to maintain the library. Funding also covered refurbishing the library and the provision of basic library furniture. In addition, one teacher from each school was sent to the library induction workshop for training. A task force monitored and evaluated this pilot project, which if it proved successful, was to be extended to all schools.
Education Development Project
The current Education Development Project (EDP), which was approved in August 2003 and is to run to December 2009, supports Bhutan’s education development programme under the Ninth Plan (2002-2007) to expand access to primary and secondary education and to improve education at all levels. EDP includes extensive support for library development. Five new secondary schools will be built and 24 existing ones upgraded during the project period, and each school will be provided with a properly equipped library and a collection of library books. The supplementary reading programme introduced under SEP was expanded to 285 primary and secondary schools at the start of EDP, and by the end of 2004 had been extended to all schools as the School Reading Programme. The programme has now expanded into Dzongkha, which had previously been excluded due to paucity of reading materials in the national language.

Canadian International Development Agency
Canada’s assistance to Bhutan, routed through CIDA, is focused on human resources development in the education sector and is delivered through the UNB-Bhutan Project and the Canada Fund. Programme support is provided by CCO in Thimphu. The CCO Web site (http://www.cco.org.bt/) includes details of past and ongoing Canada Fund projects administered by CCO (many of which have a library component) and also details of the CIDA projects administered by the University of New Brunswick under the UNB-Bhutan Project.

UNB-Bhutan Project
CCO’s main focus is the UNB-Bhutan project, which links Bhutan’s education system with the University of New Brunswick’s Faculty of Education through successive five-year projects that focus on strengthening educational institutions and improving education. Two Bhutanese educators have received library training in Canada under the UNB-Bhutan Project. Under the current five-year project, the education sector will receive funding to help improve education, with a particular focus on basic education, especially the study and teaching of English. It is likely that school library resources will be further augmented as part of the project.

Canada Fund
Canada began funding small projects in the education sector through CIDA in 1984. Education drafts 15-20 proposals each year, and CCO and education officials meet to decide which have greater priority. Usually seven to eight are selected. CCO can also disburse small discretionary amounts on a one-off basis for activities that fall within its mission (e.g., a children’s writers’ workshop and Bhutan’s first National Reading Week in 1997; a one month mobile bookshop covering towns and villages of western and central Bhutan in 2000).
Project funding supplied three newly upgraded high schools with library books in 1999. Under projects approved since then, library books have been sent to 74 community schools, 29 primary schools, and 12 secondary schools. Reading workshops for teachers were held in 29 of these schools, and some schools also received library equipment and furniture. In the 2004-2005 project period, Canada Fund is supporting a Pilot Project on Reading in three selected schools, which will receive new reading materials as part of the project. A separate project, supporting a newly established Youth/Resource Centre in eastern Bhutan, includes in its objectives enhancement of students' English language and reading ability through provision of appropriate reading materials, and promotion of the reading habit among children.

Creating a Reading Culture
Reading is not an established pastime in Bhutan and historically was mainly confined to the recitation by monks of sacred texts written in classical Tibetan, a language that exists only in written form. People of the various regions had their own dialects that existed only in spoken form. Development of a written form of Dzongkha (the western Bhutanese dialect adopted as the national language) began only in the late 1960s. When children start school, they are taught to read and write Dzongkha, and as English is the principal medium of instruction, they also begin learning English and how to read and write in English. In this situation, it is understandable that reading should be seen as a study-related activity. A major problem is that reading is associated with textbooks and passing examinations, and this is an association in the teachers' as well as the children's minds.

Rinzin Wangmo and Serra (1999) observe that although most Bhutanese children come from a non-reading sociocultural environment, the country does have a strong oral tradition, and storytelling is recognized as an important activity in promoting the reading habit.

There is not much difference between children growing up in an environment of oral tradition of storytelling and children of literate families to whom stories are read by their parents; they equally transfer knowledge, positive attitudes and motivation to the reading process. (pp. 21-22)

Reading has to be taught and encouraged and also supported with appropriate resources. Although class library periods were introduced in 1984, it was only after the School Library Development Project was under way that the need for more positive action to foster a reading culture was formally addressed.

Reading Week
In 1997, the Department of Education launched an annual programme aimed at generating awareness of the lifetime importance of the reading habit. The first reading week (with the theme "Books: Your windows to the
world”) was sponsored by CCO; since then, the event has been funded by UNICEF. National Reading Week is usually held in late summer, with a theme announced each year to give focus. Individual schools arrange their own programmes around the nominated theme (e.g., reading competitions, talks by teachers on the importance of reading, book reviews, dressing up as characters from books, telling stories, and writing and illustrating books). For the first few years, schools needed some guidance about how to organize events, but now many schools have incorporated the reading week in their respective school calendars and mount the event on their own.

**Reading Workshops**

Reading is further promoted through an annual reading workshop for English teachers, at which the 40 selected participants (two from each district) on the 7-10 day course learn how to create an interest in reading in their students and how to improve students’ reading skills. After training, the teachers go to their district schools at weekends, giving informal workshops to teach others what they have learned. Teachers are showing great enthusiasm for this programme and giving up much of their leisure time to conduct these activities. Through these informal workshops, language teachers provide valuable reinforcement for successful implementation of School Reading Programme activities in the schools.

**Reading Promotion Through School Clusters**

Measures introduced in the ongoing Education Development Project to improve education include school cluster development, in which schools are organized into regional clusters and a centrally located school in each cluster is developed as the Resource Centre (RC). One teacher from the school in which the RC is located manages the RC and coordinates its activities, and a teacher from one of the other schools acts as resource person. Based on local needs, RC co-ordinators arrange and conduct inservice training for the teachers of their respective school clusters.

The cluster system provides a swift and efficient vehicle for enhancing the reading culture in individual schools. When a school develops effective reading or library promotion strategies, the teachers can easily disseminate knowledge of these to other schools through workshops and school visits arranged by the RC cluster coordinator. Bhutan’s School Reading Programme is going well in the Thimphu school cluster (established in 1999 with four schools and now with 10) where there is an enthusiastic and determined RC coordinator.

A review of reading promotion strategies initiated at two of the Thimphu cluster schools (a lower secondary school that has seen splendid results from the introduction of a special reading programme, and a higher secondary school that vigorously promotes its library) demonstrates that much can be achieved without additional funding provided the commitment is there.
Reading Strategies at Changangkha Lower Secondary School
Changangkha Lower Secondary School (CGLSS), established as a primary school around 1960, is the oldest school in Thimphu and currently has 1,084 students in classes PP-VIII. I visited CGLSS once in 1987 and three times in June 2005. CGLSS was selected as RC for the Thimphu school cluster when it was established in 1999. The RC coordinator (who joined CGLSS as an English teacher in 2001) is now also principal of the school. At the 8th annual Education Conference held in December 2004, CGLSS was singled out for its success in encouraging students to read. This year, the Department of School Education has selected CGLSS as a model reading school for the Thimphu district.

The Library
The library is housed in a large, sunny room on the upper floor of a new classroom block. The collection currently comprises about 8,000 volumes. Several hundred new books are bought for the library each year from discretionary components of the annual school budget. There is also a collection of several hundred books (mainly junior stock, easy readers, etc.) in the separately funded and administered resource centre. In addition, each class section has its own class library stocked with books brought from home by the children and sometimes donated by their parents.

The Library In-Charge is English teacher Mrs S. An LA (a class X graduate who has attended the library induction workshop) looks after the daily running of the library. The LA also assists teachers in a classroom reading programme once a week to enhance her status in the eyes of the students. A resource assistant (RA) is employed to look after the resource centre books and teaching materials. The RA is also a class X graduate. He has had no formal library training.

Each class has one library period per week. Mrs S. takes the library period for her own class, but the LA takes most of the library periods for other classes. Teachers accompany their classes to the library for the library periods. Teachers are not expected to assist with the library periods, but may do so if they wish. Some help the children select books, and they also spend time reading in the library. Wearing her other hat as principal, the RC coordinator observed, “I don’t allow teachers to skip this period. Children need to see their teachers reading too.”

The school’s library club meets for the eighth and ninth periods on Friday afternoons (a time set aside weekly for club activities.) The LA takes the library club, but Mrs S. comes to observe.

Resource Centre Reading Programme
The CGLSS resource centre has been concentrating on the theme “Improving Reading.” All the cluster schools are expected to focus on this theme, and all RC activities are geared toward this end. The RC coordinator organizes several meetings per year, to which each participating school
sends a teacher. Participants then conduct their own school-level workshops on fixed dates.

The school has been conducting an intensive reading programme for classes PP to VIII since November 2001 and has been very successful in its reading strategies. A “reading hour” of 80 minutes was incorporated into English periods for each class. The RC coordinator selected two English teachers for training as reading teachers and worked with them to develop a series of sample lesson plans. Each of these incorporated a specific reading strategy designed to build up individual reading abilities, for example, Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA), the Anticipation Guide, Text Talk, Split Image, Know/Want to know/Learned (KWL). The RC coordinator carried out the programme in the classroom first, and the teachers observed, giving their feedback afterward. Then the teachers carried out the programme with their own classes while the RC coordinator observed and gave her feedback at the end of the lesson. As the reading teachers gained confidence, she gradually extended the programme so that now CGLSS had 18 trained reading teachers. The reading teachers and the RC coordinator plan new programmes together.

The reading teachers are expected to create a good reading environment and to provide a range of reading experiences in their respective classrooms. This has been achieved by creating class libraries, set up as attractive reading corners, which are stocked with books brought from home by the children and sometimes donated by their parents. Children may also exchange books from their class library. The books can move up through the school with their owners or can be left behind. Teachers do not normally lock away the books for safekeeping, but each class has a reading captain who is responsible for looking after the books in the class library.

Although some teachers were at first reluctant to deviate from established routines and try the new strategies, once the programme was established and they could see marked improvement in the children’s reading and writing skills, they all became enthusiastic. The CGLSS reading programme is now expanding into the other cluster schools.

Cluster school teachers initially expressed reservations about their ability to implement the new reading strategies, so they were first invited to CGLSS to observe some of the reading lessons and to see the reading corners that the teachers had set up in their classrooms. After each lesson, the RC coordinator met with the teachers from the cluster schools for group discussion and to obtain their feedback. She said that this procedure had been helpful to all and that the cluster schools have now made a commitment to conduct reading hours in their schools. They have promised to invite the RC coordinator to observe some of their reading lessons and also the reading corners they are expected to develop in the classrooms.

As further reinforcement, in June 2005, the RC coordinator organized a resource centre-based inservice programme on teaching reading skills. The two-hour workshop, facilitated by a Canadian reading specialist from the
National Institute of Education in Paro, was attended by the trained reading teachers and teachers from the cluster schools who would be implementing the reading programme in their own schools.

The RC coordinator is now looking into getting the CGLSS teachers to read, observing that as reading broadens the mind and stimulates critical faculties, teachers who read have more to bring to their students. She first established a teachers’ reading circle with the 18 trained teachers as core membership and then expanded the membership to teachers of subjects other than English. The reading circle now has 24 members including the LA and Library In-Charge. All other teachers are to be gradually drawn in. Members meet monthly, bringing to the group their thoughts on what they have been reading.

Library and Reading Promotion at Motithang Higher Secondary School

Motithang Higher Secondary School (MHSS) was established in 1974 and currently has over 900 students from class IX up. MHSS is a member of the Thimphu school cluster. I visited the school six times in 1986-1991, once in March 2004, and three times in June 2005.

The school library has been developing well and in 2004 was selected by the Schools Inspectorate as a model library for the district. In August 2005, the RC coordinator organized a visit to the MHSS library for LAs and teacher-librarians of the Thimphu school cluster.

The principal of MHSS is a keen reader and a firm supporter of reading as an activity. She said that with the advent of television and the Internet, people want ready-made information these days and have cut down on reading. At the twice-yearly Parent Teacher Association meetings, she always stresses to the parents the importance of encouraging their children to read. She tells the students, “Always carry a book with you. Take it out of your bag and read it if you have time in hand after finishing your lunch. Read while you are waiting at the bus stop for your bus.”

Reading is strongly promoted in the annual school diary, which includes “Important tips on enhancing Reading Programme in the School” in addition to the usual general information about school rules, examination timetables, and so forth. As part of Reading Programme enhancement, students are required to keep a record of the books they read and to write book reviews every month or two. Class teachers monitor the reading records and submit monthly reports to the Library In-Charge. Parents are also advised to monitor their children’s reading records. Teachers (in rotation) are required to read aloud for 10 minutes during the daily morning assembly on a subject of their choice, which could be an interesting story, a moral lesson, or news of national or international interest.

The Library

The library is housed in a two-storey science and library block erected in 2002. The book collection and library office are on the ground floor, and a
staircase leads to a first-floor reading room. Library stock is now around 7,000 books. Several hundred new books are bought for the library each year from discretionary components of the annual school budget.

English teacher Mrs K. is the Library In-Charge. When Mrs K. was studying at NIE Samtse, she took the library education option offered in the second and third year B.Ed. degree programme. She teaches 21 of the 34 class periods per week, and whenever she has free periods, she takes her work to the library. Two LAs (both class X graduates) look after the day-to-day running of the library. Neither has attended the library induction workshop.

Each class has one library period per week. Mrs K. and the LAs share supervision of the library periods, and all three give library orientation to classes at the start of the school year. When I called at the library on the morning of June 3, 2005, students were streaming out after a library period. The staff proudly told me that over 900 books were out on loan, at least one for each student!

Reading promotion activities
The LAs and Mrs K. hold various activities to raise the library’s profile and to interest students in reading. The LAs initiated some of these activities themselves without prompting. Current activities include the following: quizzes; library tests on what students have been reading; extempore speeches (students improvise short speeches of 3-5 minutes’ duration on topics written on folded slips of paper, which they take out of a box); Bhutanese question-and-answer dialogues in Dzongkha; and library club (held in the last period on Saturday mornings). Students have also been invited to complete questionnaires asking what they think of the library and the books in it, their reading habits, and what kind of books they would like to be bought for the library.

To encourage reading, all students are required to write a book review every month or two. These are displayed on a table in the library for other students to read. In 2002, library use was introduced into the school’s internal assessment programme. Mrs K. said that she and the LAs had come up with the idea, and that the principal had liked it. In the school’s assessment programme, 80 marks are assigned for examination and 20 marks for internal assessment, which includes 10 marks for project work, five marks for class work, and five marks for English I (language skills and development), with this latter component coming from library activities. Mrs K. says that the introduction of library use into the internal assessment programme has helped greatly in encouraging students to read more.

Case Studies: Appraisal
From the above case studies, it can be seen that strong leadership is required to give focus and direction to a school’s reading programme and that if the school principal is a keen reader, a reading culture is more easily
established in a school. Although effective implementation of the School Reading Programme undoubtedly requires a high level of commitment and continual effort, much can be achieved in a school in quite a short time provided the input is there. Recognizing that the content of the book collection is also an important factor in encouraging reading, each school uses discretionary funds to build up its library, ordering new stock from local bookshops following a comprehensive book selection exercise.

Conclusion
Leaving aside the collections of religious institutions, in most of the country the school library will be the only literary resource of the district. And in remote areas, where English is seldom encountered outside the school setting, the school library is the single most important aid to both students and their teachers in acquiring and retaining language skills and extending vocabulary. With the School Library Development Project carrying over into the current plan period, and the main donors remaining enthusiastic, financial support for further enhancement of school library collections seems assured. All (or nearly all) schools now have a properly furnished library room stocked with books provided under one or other of the donor-funded projects, and each school has a teacher or LA (who may or may not have received workshop training) to look after the collection. The challenge now is to develop a reading culture.

In “Why Bhutanese Students Do Not Read” published in Bhutan’s national newspaper Kuensel, Gopilal Acharya (2001) reported the views of teachers gathered at NIE Samtse to observe Bhutan’s fifth annual reading week in September 2001. Most teachers agreed that students’ reading habits were not encouraging and that this was an important issue facing the Bhutanese education system. An overcrowded school curriculum, absence of the reading habit among teachers, lack of both sufficient and appropriate reading materials, and the failure of teachers to create interest in reading in students were recognized and highlighted as some of the major hurdles.

Encouraging progress has been made since then. By the end of the 2004 school year, the supplementary reading programme first introduced in 1999 as a 20-school pilot project had been extended to all schools as the School Reading Programme. Reading workshops are now held to train English teachers in reading strategies, and after training the teachers hold informal weekend workshops in their districts to pass on what they have learned. The school cluster system introduced under the ongoing Education Development Project as a measure to improve education is also proving an effective vehicle for the wider dissemination of reading and library promotion strategies.

Positive reading experiences are crucial for developing a reading culture among the students, and more attention is now being paid to book selections to ensure that what is ordered will be of interest to students in the recipient schools. UNICEF is working to establish reading age standards for
English and Dzongkha so as to be better able to match books to students. Other upcoming donor-funded workshops and pilot projects are now geared not only toward promoting reading, but toward establishing reading preferences, with a view to drawing up a revised list of books to be supplied to the various categories of schools. All these developments augur well for continued strengthening of Bhutan’s nascent reading culture.

Note
The citation of Bhutanese names in this article takes several forms. Indigenous Buddhist Bhutanese do not normally have a family name. The names they bear were chosen by the monk to whom they were taken for blessing in the months following their birth. A child is usually given two names, but sometimes only one. Both personal names carry equal weight. However, some families are starting to adopt their “second” given name as “family” name, or else to add a third name to be retained as family name. Also, as there is a fairly narrow range of names commonly bestowed, an adult may adopt a variant name spelling or form to avoid being confused with other people.

References
CAPSS Newsletter/CAPSD Newsletter. This newsletter, launched in 1994 as CAPSS Newsletter, covers a wide range of education-related issues and frequently includes items on school library development. In 2000 the title changed to CAPSD Newsletter, when the former Curriculum and Professional Support Section (CAPSS) was renamed as part of a restructuring exercise. CAPSD Newsletter is published by the Curriculum and Professional Support Division, Department of School Education. Some issues are posted in the CAPSD section of the Ministry of Education Web site (http://www.education.gov.bt/).
Author Note

Felicity Shaw is a professional librarian (now retired) with over 30 years of working experience, mainly in the academic sector. She retains academic links as Honorary Research Fellow, Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong. Her professional interests focus principally on library organization and management. Since the mid-1980s she has been engaged in research and writing on library development in Bhutan. Felicity visits Bhutan at least once a year with her husband, an academic now retired, who has been following Bhutan's development process since the early 1980s. These visits are entirely self-funded and are not sponsored by any organization.
## NAME OF SCHOOL

*General introduction including date and time of visit and who I met there.*

*Collect information under the following topics:*

### The school:

- **Library:**
- **Librarian:**
- **Library stock:**
- **Stock acquisition:**
- **Processing:**
- **Loan system / Library periods:**

### Specific questions to ask:

#### Library stock

- **No. of books**
- **How many & what magazine, newspaper subs.**
- **What if anything is supplied by Indian Embassy?**
- **Kuensel:** No. of copies received of each issue - do they get Nepali, or just Eng. & Dzongkha?
- **Arrangements for safeguarding Kuensel issues**
- **Budget:** How do they get books?
- **Do they buy anything from school funds?** If so, from where?
- **Shelf arrangement:** by subjects? or by DDC?
- **Processing:** How does library record new stock?
- **Look at accessions register & note how they enter items:**

#### Circulation

- **Loan regulations:** Loan period and do they fine for overdues? If so, what is fine rate?
- **Is charge made for missing lost books?**
- **Do they use fines money to buy new books?**
- **Loan record:** How are loans recorded? i.e., book register, loose sheets or card pocket system?

#### Librarian/Library staff

- **Name of teacher-librarian; subject he/she teaches & no. of teaching periods per week**
- **Name(s) and educational level of any other staff**
- **No. of library periods the teacher librarian takes weekly**
- **Do other teachers take some of the library periods?**

#### Hours of opening

- **Is library open even at lunchtime or after school?**
- **Can students come freely, or only during their library periods?**

#### Library

- **Where is it housed? What is the room like?**
- **Do students have library periods in this room or in their regular classroom?**
- **Any special features; problems; plans for future, etc.**