

# The “Tricky Business” of Dual-use School Community Libraries: A Case Study in Rural South Africa

**Genevieve Hart**

Dr. Genevieve Hart, Associate Professor, Department of Library and Information Science, University of the Western Cape, Bellville, South Africa  
Email: ghart@uwc.ac.za

## Abstract

The article describes an interpretive case study of a group of six dual-use school community libraries in one remote region of South Africa. Its focus is rather more on the libraries as school libraries than public libraries. The recent government sponsored LIS Transformation Charter has placed a spotlight on the backlogs in school and public library provision. The case study, conducted in April 2009, investigates if dual or joint use libraries might help fill gaps and, if so, under what conditions. The article describes the background, research questions, methodology, site and some of the findings. The study highlights the relationships among role-players, the realities of dual-use functioning and the complex issue of librarian identity. The study concludes that, although many of the international criteria for dual-use libraries are not met, the six libraries do provide a crucial service for their schools and other schools in the surrounding areas. And they offer a tantalising picture of the possibilities of dual-use for rural information services. The article suggests that, with more dynamic leadership, these possibilities could be fulfilled.

## Introduction

This article reports on a research project in a group of six dual-use school community libraries in a rural region of South Africa [1]. The six dual-use libraries were established with donor funding in 2001 as part of a larger project in their province’s public library service. In 2009, the donor no longer funds the libraries and they now operate under the provincial public library authorities. The case study, conducted in April 2009, investigates the value of dual or joint

use libraries in the context of drastic shortages of both school and public libraries and the calls in government circles for the sharing of resources.

The title’s phrase “tricky business” quotes a participant, a provincial Education Department school library advisor:

It is a tricky business because I see this as a Department of Arts and Culture library in one of my schools. So everything that we’ve managed to do together is based on the good working relationship that Mr [M] and I have. Because we both have the same end in mind ... and that’s to deliver a quality library service to the students in the school and the community.

Her ambivalence is clear in the possessive “my” in her first sentence. But also clear is her desire to do what is best for the school. This article explores the “trickiness,” the challenges, of dual-use by means of a case study of one site. The angle of vision of the paper is perhaps more on the libraries as *school* libraries than community libraries, although comment on their dual nature is inevitable. In another publication (Hart 2010) the author uses a different angle to view them as public or community libraries.

In the South African situation, where millions are out of reach of libraries and information services, the sharing of resources among schools and their local communities certainly is an attractive option. But Haycock warns that the mention of dual-use in library circles “not only inflames passion but also seems to release all reason” (2006, 489). The fear, apparently, is that politicians and bureaucrats might see a dual-use library merely as a cheap alternative to two separate libraries. An editorial in the *School Library Journal Online* in 2000, in response to government endorsement of “joint-use” in California, quotes the Californian School Library Association’s warning that shared school and public libraries are “a politician’s dream solution, because it doesn’t take any thought, and you’re not actually talking to public and school librarians” (Glick 2000). The

author herself has encountered reservations about the dual-use model among people working within the school library sector in South Africa. Her research has, moreover, uncovered doubts among public librarians over their capacity to work with school learners (Hart 2006b). As Haycock says, the way to negotiate emotive reactions is to look for research evidence. The purpose of the case study is to identify the possibilities and the pitfalls by means of a close study of one site. Informed by benchmarks from the existing international research, it hopes to provide information useful for the South African context.

An understanding of the governance structures of school and public libraries in South Africa is necessary to make sense of the account that follows. South Africa has a three-tier system of government: national, provincial and local. Policy is built at national level and the nine provinces and the local authorities or municipalities are responsible for its implementation. The 1996 South African Constitution defines public libraries as a provincial responsibility and public libraries across the country fall under the provincial Departments of Arts and Culture, which in their turn report to the national Department of Arts and Culture. School libraries fall under the provincial Education Departments, which report to the national Department of Education. Some provincial Education Departments – but not all – have school library support services. The South African Schools Act grants a fair amount of autonomy to schools' governing bodies. Significant for school libraries is that the governing bodies have control over the budget allocations from government, and thus decide whether to fund a school library – or not.

## Background

The decision to investigate dual-use models came out of the author's work on the Technical Team of the Library and Information Services (LIS) Transformation Charter (2009), commissioned in 2007 by the National Council of Library and Information Services (NCLIS). The Charter is a component in the revitalisation of South African public libraries, to which the national Department of Arts and Culture has allocated a grant of R1.3 billion and which involved a nationwide investigation over several months. The Charter articulates a vision for new developmental models of library. Of special interest

for this article are the section on community library and information services and the separate long chapter on school libraries. The decision to give special attention to school libraries came soon into the investigation as participants in the Charter's consultative workshops across South Africa constantly brought up the plight of school libraries.

In 2007 the Department of Education's National Assessment Report estimated that only about 8% of South African schools have a functioning library. The LIS Transformation Charter points out that almost all South African school libraries are to be found in middle-class, usually suburban, schools, which are able to charge fees to supplement their budget allocations from government and thus pay for library materials and staff. The fundamental premise of the Charter's chapter on school libraries is that good school libraries are essential to the transformation of the South African education system, which aims to provide quality schools for *all* South African learners. The Charter states that, if school libraries are essential to quality learning, then the principles of redress and equity in the South African Constitution and educational legislation mean that ways must be found to provide them. It calls on the national Department of Education to return to the school library policy building, which was begun in 1997 and which, after four draft documents, stalled in 2005. National policy is needed specifically for the establishment of school librarian posts since school-staffing policy is a national responsibility.

However, school library advocates have to confront the reality that the South African social and educational context is very different from countries with well-developed school library systems such as Australia and the United States. The socio-economic and educational backlogs bring two challenges:

- The advocacy for school libraries has to convince that quality education *demands* libraries. The advocacy, perhaps, might build on the consensus that gaps between the new ambitious resource-based curriculum and the lack of resources in schools have hindered the transformation of South Africa's education system (Hart and Zinn 2007).
- Innovative models of service must be found. It will be impossible to provide all 30,000 schools with their own well-equipped central library in the short term.

The LIS Transformation Charter provides sobering evidence of the lack of capacity within the provincial Education Departments, which would be responsible for the implementation of future school library policy. Not all of the nine Provinces have established school library support services, and the existing services have inadequate resources. The author's photographs of piles of boxes of books in one province, still unopened after three years because of a lack of staff, provide evidence in support of this statement. The Charter points out that such backlogs imply the need for flexibility and pragmatism. Chapter Five of the Charter endorses dual-use models thus:

In some communities, education and public LIS authorities might together establish dual-use school community LIS, available to the school in the school day and open to the community after school hours. Memoranda of understanding and policy will clarify the roles and responsibilities of the governance structures. (LIS Transformation Charter 2009, 50)

But, elsewhere in the chapter, a significant proviso is added – namely, that levels of service for both school and public communities should not be compromised:

A fundamental criterion is that the service in a dual-use LIS must equal that of two separate LIS. ... The principles for an effective school LIS ... cannot be ignored. Research is needed to assess whether South African dual-use LIS conform to these fundamental principles. (LIS Transformation Charter 2009, 48)

The author's case study responds to the above recommendation for more "research." It asks the question: Could dual-use libraries help fill some of the gaps in the provision of school and public libraries? It sets out to answer this question by means of a case study of a group of dual-use libraries in a rural region.

### Dual-use libraries

The need to be open to different models of school library explains the study reported on in this paper. South Africa has a fairly well-established public li-

brary infrastructure with almost all municipalities running a library service, serviced often by the provincial library services. But the library buildings are in the towns and their adjacent so-called townships. There are hardly any in the rural but densely populated areas of the apartheid era "homelands." Setting up community libraries in rural schools might thus be an attractive option to public library services. The six libraries in this case study are based in schools and serve the surrounding communities.

Haycock's definition of a dual-use library is "a common facility from which library services are provided to two ostensibly different communities of users" (2006, 488). Staff, collections and services are "co-located." McNicol (2006, 519) stresses that the guiding principle is that a dual-use library should provide both user communities with "a better service than would otherwise be possible." As suggested earlier, commentators in the field agree that the model has received much negative comment in the professional literature. Librarians recognise the differences in user communities and ethos between public libraries and school libraries, which are not perhaps clear to people outside the profession. However, shifts in thinking might be evident in the recent initiatives to provide access to research and prior experience, such as Birmingham City University's Joint Use Evidence Base (<http://www.ebase.bcu.ac.uk/dualuse/bibliography.htm>).

Despite the negative comment, the dual-use model is a growing trend across the world, largely because of the insistence of policy-makers and local communities (Bundy 2003, 145; McNicol 2006, 517). Traditionally, the most common argument in favour has been economic. If two entities cannot afford to offer an independent service it makes sense to merge resources. Developing countries and rural areas in developed countries might not have many public libraries but they generally have schools within which they might be housed.

The implication perhaps is that dual-use might be no more than an expedient compromise. However, Bundy (2003) and McNicol (2006) offer a more positive motivation for the growth in dual-use. Bundy emphasises the opportunities for community information literacy programmes. He suggests that a dual-use library can be an exciting arena for community vision and professional commitment (2003, 143). McNicol attributes the growth in dual-use libraries in the United Kingdom to the rise of the notion of

the “extended” school among public policy makers. An extended school provides a range of services and activities beyond the school day to its students and their families. The community library in a school could make the school a focal point for lifelong learning, intergenerational interaction and family learning. Both Bundy and McNicol thus claim that a school based community library can generate more social and intellectual capital than two separate services. They acknowledge the pitfalls of dual-use; but they suggest that the possibilities might well outweigh the often-cited difficulties around space, access, and governance.

The discussion of joint-use libraries in South Africa goes back to the thinktanks of the early 1990s that aimed at transforming the library landscape in post-apartheid South Africa, which foreshadow today’s LIS Transformation Charter. Multi-purpose libraries were seen as a way to optimise resources (National Education Policy Investigation. Library and Information Services Research Group 1992, 61). In 1999 UNESCO established a committee to investigate library cooperation. The resulting report focussed on dual-use public libraries (National Committee for Library Cooperation 2000). Although today there are examples of dual-use libraries scattered across South Africa, the UNESCO project faded.

As mentioned in a previous section, at central government level and across all nine South African provinces, school and public libraries fall under different government departments – the national and provincial Departments of Education and the national and provincial Departments of Arts and Culture respectively. This clearly presents challenges to dual-use which are indeed evident in two rare reports in the South African literature. Both describe ostensibly dual-use libraries based in public libraries. At the IASL conference in Durban in 2003, Le Roux and the Director of the provincial public library services of Mpumalanga presented a plan for a community library - to be built by the Province in a village in a “rural tribal area” in Mpumalanga (Le Roux and Hendrikz 2003, 258). It was deemed a prototype for the kind of joint-use community/school library recommended in Le Roux’s Master’s Degree dissertation (2001). The library was completed by the Province in the following year. It is a spacious building with a classroom leading off the central room. However, on visiting it in April 2004, one year later, the author found it locked up just a few

days after its ceremonial opening because the local municipality had not allocated a staffing budget (Hart 2005, 82). (Happily, the crisis was resolved some months later and, at the time of writing, the library is up and running.)

The second example of bureaucratic obstacles to dual-use lies in a report of the Library Practice for Young Learners project (Naiker and Mbokazi 2002, 17-23). The report provides a useful empirical study of what is called a community/school library, Makhuva Information Centre, in Limpopo Province. The main insight of the study is the effect of divisions between government departments. In the course of the project, Limpopo Province placed its school library division within its Department of Education and its public libraries in the provincial Department of Sport, Arts and Culture. This halted progress as each had different policies and approaches.

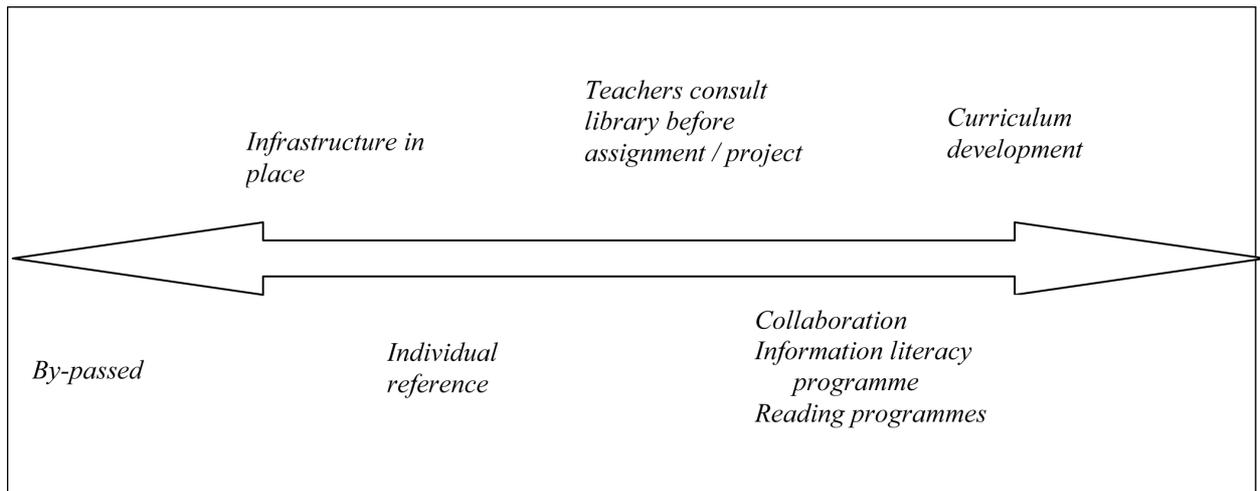
The problems encountered in these two cases confirm the importance of clear and formal agreements on governance, administration and financing, which is a strong thread in the international literature on dual-use libraries.

### Theoretical lenses for the case study

The case study has two theoretical lenses: Haycock’s guidelines for the success of dual-use libraries (2006) and Loertscher’s taxonomy of school libraries (2000). Haycock deals specifically with principles of dual-use and Loertscher provides a useful lens through which to assess the libraries as *school* libraries. The study has to be mindful, however, that both theorists are North American; their theorising might well not apply in the South African context.

Haycock synthesises research in dual-use school community libraries in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand to come up with 10 predictors of success:

- user communities of a manageable size – less than 10,000
- a formal planning process involving the stakeholders
- written legal agreements on governance, administration, finances, assessment and termination
- a single decision-making committee representing all stakeholders which develops policies and procedures

**Figure 1:** Loertscher's taxonomy of school libraries (2000) (adapted by author).

- visible and convenient location, accommodating a variety of groups and a separate area for adults
- connections to a larger network or regional system
- a strong desire for success and support among the principal and teachers
- one highly motivated professional librarian in charge, preferably qualified in both education and librarianship
- regular discussion and communication between public library staff and school staff
- no restrictions on access to resources or on the circulation of materials.

Perhaps two further success factors might be added to the list from McNicol's synthesis of research in the United Kingdom (2006): community consultation and a shared ethos of service.

At first sight, these factors provide a checklist to benchmark the case study libraries, which could imply a questionnaire survey approach. However, how would one assess from a distance "desire for success", "motivation", "communication" or even "convenience"?

A fundamental criterion mentioned frequently in the international literature is that, for long-term sustainability, the service in a dual-use library must equal that of two separate libraries. To reassure school librarians, measures of quality in school library programmes have to be considered. These include quantitative measures such as infrastructure, resources, budget; but they also include less tangible

assets. For example, research has identified attributes of "library-friendly climates" in schools such as:

- recognition by principals and teachers that the library is the hub of the school's teaching and learning and that it has multiple roles in the life of the school community
- a shared learner-centred philosophy of education among a school's principal and its educators
- explicit mention of information skills in school policy statements
- the flexible scheduling of information skills instruction so that the skills are encountered "just in time", as students engage in real-life learning
- collaborative partnerships between teacher and librarian – in planning and running lessons
- recognition of the librarian as a teacher (Kuhlthau 1997; Henri 1999; Asselin 2001; Hartzell 2002; Klinger *et al.* 2009).

The author's research in schools and libraries in South Africa has highlighted the importance for library programmes of affective factors such as teachers' and librarians' beliefs about learning, information and libraries (Hart 2006a, 2006b). Moreover, her work in school librarian education at the University of the Western Cape also uncovers the risks in relying on a simplistic checklist of measures. She knows of school library programmes that might well perform quite well in terms of the more qualitative measures listed just above but that are operating

on tiny budgets and with totally inadequate facilities.

Loertscher's so-called taxonomy of school library programmes (2000) provides a flexible tool to assess the case study sites as school libraries. It identifies eight different levels in the evolution of a school library - ranging from the "library" that plays no meaningful role in the life of the school to the library that is crucial to the school's existence. He claims that the most evolved school library programmes are those that are involved in curriculum development. According to Loertscher, the school library only begins to fulfil its potential when it is actively collaborating with educators, teaching information skills and running dynamic reading programmes. Figure 1 depicts the taxonomy as a continuum.

In the short term it is unrealistic to expect schools in South Africa to have the infrastructure that Loertscher and other international writers assume. This does not mean that international experience is ignored. Rather it points to the need to assess whether other, more affordable models might provide the kind of access to learning and reading resources and information literacy education found to be necessary for quality education in the international research.

### Case study

A case study is the study of a single entity or phenomenon, within a defined period and using a variety of data collection techniques. The preceding discussion has shown why a qualitative case study approach was chosen. Only observation of the daily life of the libraries could provide the data required to answer the questions which came from the review of literature and theory – and to assess the applications of the international experience in the South African context. It is generally agreed that the key factor in the success of school libraries is beliefs and attitudes – about learning, assessment, teaching styles, and the use of learning resources. A qualitative study might uncover these beliefs.

Klein and Myers's principles for qualitative case study (1999) guided the study. Fundamental is the notion of the hermeneutic circle in which a researcher understands or interprets a situation through reference to the individual parts and understands each individual part through reference to the whole. Their other principles include: acknowledgment of the significance of context, openness to contradictions

between theory and findings, a search for multiple meanings among the various participants, and a sceptical desire to look beneath the surface.

### Research questions and methodology

One set of research questions comes from the international research in indicators of success for dual-use, which were mentioned above. These require data on the formal relationships between the two government departments responsible for school libraries and public libraries, management and governance, the sharing of responsibilities and, so on.

As mentioned earlier, the emphasis in this article is rather more on the dual-use libraries as school libraries than public libraries. So, one fundamental research question asks whether dual-use school community libraries might provide a useful model for South African schools – and if so, under what conditions? Answering this implies subsidiary questions on the principles for effective school libraries, which were described in an earlier section. These questions involve a deeper analysis of the role of the library in the school's educational programme. For example:

- What programmes does the library run?
- Does the library staff have adequate knowledge of the curriculum? And of teaching information literacy?
- How is the library used in the course of the school day? Who uses it? For what?
- What are the relations between the teachers and the library staff?

The author spent two weeks in the area in April 2009. Six days were spent in a senior secondary school chosen on the recommendation of the provincial Education Department's district school library advisor, who has the title Media Learning Facilitator. The second week comprised visits to the other five dual-use libraries, interviews with their management and gathering of relevant documents. The two sets of questions called for a mix of data-gathering methods as follows:

- analysis of documents such as policies and memoranda of agreement
- visits to the school community libraries to document conditions and interview their staff

- interviews – with the library staff, public library and education department officials and managers, and principals and teachers
- observation in one dual-use library, a senior secondary school providing for the last three grades of schooling, 10 to 12. The workings of the library in the school day and afterwards over one week were documented in photographs and field notes. Participation in the life of the library hopefully unpeeled the realities as experienced by key role-players in the school and community.

Some limitations have to be acknowledged upfront. The long distances between schools and poor roads meant that the visits to five of the schools were too brief. And perhaps, one week was too short a time for an in-depth ethnographic field study in the chosen site. However, the interviewing in the weeklong stay in that site was, in qualitative terminology, “iterative,” which allows for more in-depth exploration. Thus the librarian in this school sat down for three formal interviews and in the course of the week engaged in much informal chat. A similar process was engaged in with the Media Learning Facilitator. Follow-up clarifying phone calls and email messages continued once the author had returned home. Triangulation across the various data types allowed for the emergence and corroboration of themes and the conclusions that are presented in this article.

### The context

The socio-economic conditions in the area are probably fairly representative of the former apartheid era “homelands” or “Bantustans.” The “homelands” never came close to economic self-sufficiency or political legitimacy. As the political scientist Butler (2004, 135) points out, many are not “rural” at all but rather immense and densely peopled townships placed far from economic opportunities. He points out that the former homelands are characterised by high unemployment, poor health care, limited public services, and high levels of child mortality and HIV/Aids. By the early 1980s, the population of the case study region had grown tenfold since its establishment in 1974 – leading the Surplus Peoples Project to label it a “peri-urban slum in the middle of nowhere.” The case study region, now integrated into

one of South Africa’s nine provinces, is the poorest region in the Province. The author’s photographs attest to the degradation of the land and the prevailing poverty – as well as to the beauty of the region.

A stay in the area also provides much evidence of a growing state bureaucracy of all three tiers of government and dynamic commercial development. It is now divided between two municipalities and its 910 square kilometres (565 sq miles) is home to about 1.3 million people. The central business district, down town, beneath the old “homeland” Parliament is crammed with shops, banks, street stalls, taxi ranks and municipal buildings. Just outside the central business district, two new huge shopping malls have just been completed where the main South African retailers and banks have set up shop. In the central business district, there are two libraries – a large central building and a smaller children’s library. Both were beneficiaries in 2001 of the same donor that established the school community libraries, using the funds to build study rooms and toy libraries. The downtown central library serves more than 200 schools, according to its Manager.

Once out of the busy downtown streets, street names disappear and the roads revert to rough stone and sand. Because of the poor transport infrastructure and the wide scattering of the population, access to the central library is difficult. This is why, in 2001, the provincial public library service approached the international donor for help in setting up six community libraries in remote schools. The six schools under the research lens are about 50 minutes drive away from the business and commercial hub. Kombi taxis are the main means of transport – and the fare from the schools to the downtown library is R15.00. The high fare is not the only deterrent, as evidenced in the comment from one participant that she might well sit downtown for two hours waiting for her taxi home to fill up with passengers.

Two criteria were used in the choice of schools: their remoteness and the existence of a library room. In the case study region, the more remote schools have empty rooms since their student numbers are declining as families move into the government housing schemes, nearer the business centre, which have electricity and sanitation. The donor support came to an end in 2004 and at present the six libraries are staffed and maintained by the provincial public

library service. The case study libraries are closely connected with one another as evidenced in the camaraderie and constant communication among the six librarians. They are viewed as a unit by the provincial library service, as shown in their winning of that library service's "Community Library of the Year" award in 2007.

Six percent of the schools in the case site's Province have functioning libraries. The Education Department's district library advisor or Media Learning Facilitator, under whom three of the six schools fall, has 155 schools under her wing, hardly any with functional libraries. She runs a series of training workshops for all schools, but each year is able to supply only one or two schools in the lowest (or poorest) quintile with library materials out of the provincial school library support service budget. Her strategy is to spend R50,000.00 to set up one decent library rather than spread her budget thinly across all her schools. In theory, schools themselves are expected to allocate a portion of their so-called government Norms and Standards annual budgets to their libraries but as the LIS Transformation Charter investigation found out, in practice very few do.

### Case study analysis and interpretation

Wolcott (1994, 12) provides useful questions to guide the analysis and interpretation of the reams of data gathered in qualitative case studies. He suggests that the analysis should address questions like "What is going on here?" "How do things work?", "What is not working?", "How might things work better?" And then the researcher's interpretation should ask "What is to be made of it all?" This implies looking for connections and contradictions among the data. The purpose in this section is to engage in this kind of description, analysis and interpretation. The discussion has three foci: the relationships among the various role-players; the day to day functioning of dual-use; and the identity of the dual-use librarians.

### Communication and relationships among the key role-players

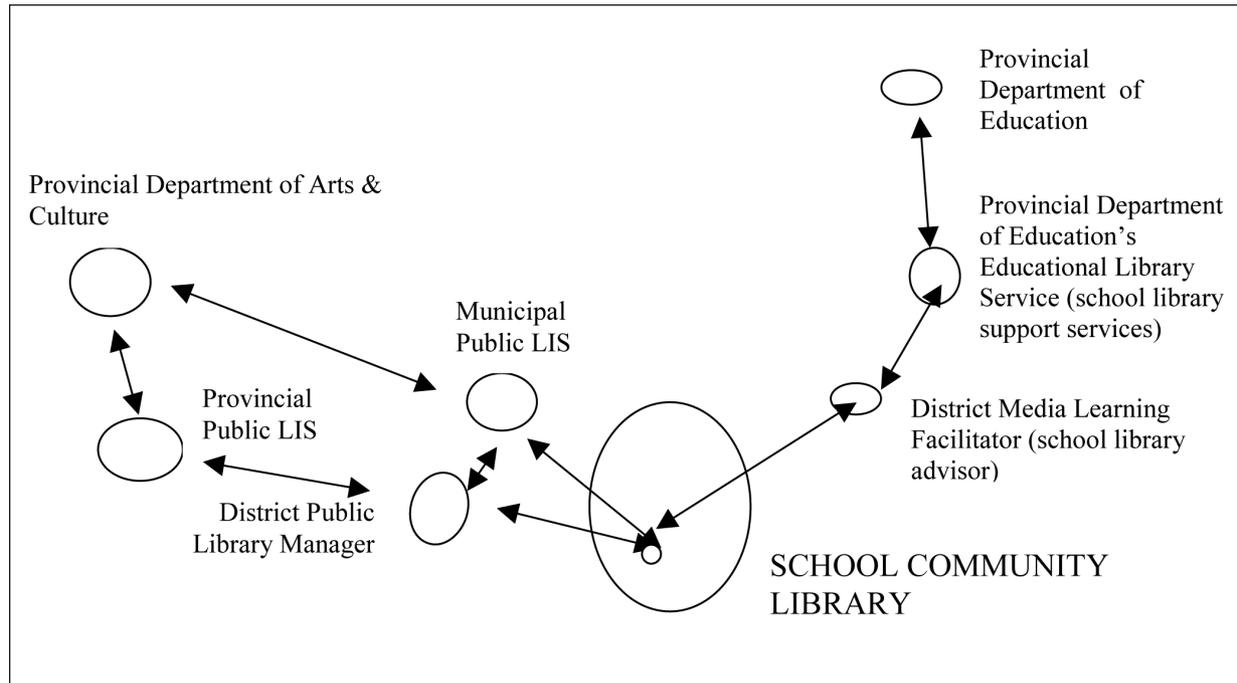
The study began with an examination of the provincial public library's motivating document for the project, which was presented to the donor in 2001. It describes the aims as:

- increasing numbers of libraries and bringing them closer to the people
- providing electronic access to information
- improving study facilities
- broadening the scope of services offered and
- teaching people how to use information to their benefit, this creating an environment supportive of sustained economic, social and civic development.

Perhaps because of its authorship, the public library service, the list shows no specific awareness of the role of a school library, apart from the mention of "study facilities." A perusal of the 20 page document finds only two other mentions of the libraries as school libraries, when there are references to the libraries being "available for formal education purposes in the mornings and for the general public in the afternoons and evenings" and the desire to "improve student performance with a number of programmes." There is no attempt to elaborate on the nature of "formal education purposes" or the programmes.

The three parties to the original service level agreement in 2001 were the provincial Department of Sport, Arts and Culture, the provincial Department of Education, and the Schools' Governing Bodies. International experience highlights the importance of good communication lines among the various stakeholders in a dual-use library. Figure 2 depicts the author's analysis of the positions of the various role-players and the complex relationships among them.

All six case study librarians report to the District Public Library Manager, who is based in a town some 80 kilometres distant. So, perhaps what is most striking in the above figure is the absence of connection between this Manager and her equivalent in the Education Department, the district Media Learning Facilitator. Also absent is a line between the schools' managements and the Public Library District Management. In 2001 the initial agreement was signed by the three main parties, the province's Department of Arts and Culture, its Education Department and the schools' managements, but some years later little communication among the role-players on the ground is evident. For example, the Media Learning Facilitator reports that, although she has met her informally, she has never met the Public Library District Manager (PLDM) to discuss

**Figure 2:** School community library role-players and links.

the school community libraries. This extract from the interview with the Public Library District Manager confirms this and adds the information that she does not meet with the school principals either:

No, on the ground there is currently nothing [no relationship] ... And ummm, from both sides even from my side or from their side we haven't structured a ... [meeting]

In the course of the interview, the Manager seems struck with the idea for a meeting:

There's something that I am thinking about now as you was talking. (GH: Yes?) A structured meeting with the Principal ... you think that's a good idea? I think, I think ... I think you gave me an idea. Maybe if we have a structured meeting with the Principal and a representative from the Education Department who's responsible for the libraries.

She then reveals that “conflict” does arise from time to time and suggest that regular meetings might prevent this:

And then you find that there are problems like ... when the new Principal comes; they come with

new arrangements ... [they say] “the keys must stay with me.” ... And it creates conflict when the new principal comes there, we are not informed. and we are involved only when the conflict has already arisen. So I think this formal structured meeting will help us to know what is happening in those schools. So that we can iron out things before they become conflict or problems.

(GH: So you have had the odd conflict or problem?)

Yes.

More ambiguity lies in the relationship of the Media Learning Facilitator to the dual-use librarians. The Facilitator's ambivalence was quoted at the start of this article and also her decision to support the project because of its benefits for “her” school. In two interviews, she mentions her hesitance to intervene in the libraries:

And also, I felt that I couldn't come here and throw my weight about. Because I haven't provided the resources, nothing has come from my Department. But at the same time I was also concerned because I didn't know how sustainable the project

was. You know, if you've worked for government for long enough you are sceptical. So I thought you can't abandon this school completely. And at the same time the teachers on the library committee here they have come to all my training, and then ummm ...

Because I haven't provided the resources, nothing has come from my Department. ... You know, you feel that it would be arrogant to come and tell another department how to work.

Here, perhaps, there is an echo of the comment in the international literature that the success of joint use libraries depends on mutual need and on equal power among the stakeholders. Each stakeholder brings something that the other needs. However, it has to be said that resources are not always physical. The Facilitator and her colleagues in the school library support services have a wealth of experience in school librarianship and information literacy education which might be of great help to the six dual-use librarians. However, in the extract that follows the Facilitator expresses doubt that they value her expertise:

I never had the feeling that they really wanted any other kind of input from me, except to help them with very basic things. They needed somebody here, who could drive up and down getting telephone numbers and addresses and ... Very basic ... they were never interested in my professional input.

There is no rancour in her words. And the case study found no evidence of animosity on either side. In fact the relationship seems cordial – if rather distant. The lack of recognition might rather come from certain gaps in the six librarians' understanding of the role of school library in the educational programme and in the curriculum. In some earlier research, the author has explored the impact of public librarians' conceptions of their job on their services to schools (Hart 2006a, 2006b). Perhaps, the librarians just have no conception of the possibility that their public library background might not quite be adequate for an effective school library and that therefore they might need guidance from the Media Learning Facilitator, an experienced teacher and school librarian.

### Dual-use functioning

Despite the similarity in layout, to an outside observer each library is different – largely due to furnishings, quantity of resources and position in the school. In one library, the author's photographs record youths stooping over chess boards on the floor since that library has only one table; and two have only old-fashioned double school desks. Photographs record the sparsely stocked shelves in most of the six libraries. The original donor funded the start-up collections and the toy libraries and since then the provincial library service has been responsible for the collections. Only one of the six schools provides an occasional small sum for the library. The Principals plead poverty on being asked about this – citing shrinking budgets and delays in their annual Norms and Standards budget allocations from the Education Department. As mentioned earlier, the Education Department's school library support services have limited resources and only provide occasional boxes of books. With each first consignment of books, a computer and a cataloguing system are also provided. The librarians catalogue and shelve the Education Department books separately from the public library books – claiming that the merging of the two collections would confuse the annual public library stock take.

No books from either collection are allowed out of the libraries. Observation in the course of the study reveals the possible impact of this policy on reading habits. The chief reading activity for the groups of students sent to the library in the course of the day appears to be skimming magazines; and the women in an adult literacy class, who are sent across to the library most days to sit and read, just choose any book from the easy readers section, read a few pages and leave the book unread when they have to go back to their classroom. On the researcher's querying the lending policy, the Media Learning Facilitator defends it as follows, "But to have anybody from the community walk in and want to take books out, I think that must be quite nerve racking."

Significant in terms of the international criteria for dual-use are the geographical positions of the libraries on their campuses. Only one is clearly visible from the school gate and might conform in terms of community access. One is situated right at the back of its campus and is reached by a muddy path overrun by long grass; another is reached by a nar-

row circular dark staircase; and another is at the furthest upstairs corner of its school, two blocks in from the school entrance. None has any sign at the school gates.

Informed by the concern in the dual-use literature over the risks of allowing outsiders on to school grounds, the study had questions over the safety of staff and young library users. Each school has a caretaker living on the grounds but the libraries have no dedicated security guards. It is perhaps evidence of the relative lack of crime in the rural region that none of the participants themselves brought up this issue as a possible problem. However, in response to the author’s queries, the recent decision to close the libraries during the end of year Christmas holiday was revealed – because of the vulnerability of the women librarians on the deserted campuses. Another observation that might throw light on the standing of the libraries came on hearing that the computer room was closed in one school, after it had been vandalised a year earlier. The librarian and educators in this school dismissed any suggestion that the library might be at similar risk, claiming vaguely that the computer room had been targeted by an aggrieved group in the outside community.

The lack of easy and visible access might partly explain the rather low usage of the libraries by the adults in the surrounding villages that was documented over the two weeks of the study. Observation in the course of the week in one library recorded a steady stream of *young* people, recent school-leavers still out of work and NGO workers. They come in to read the newspapers and magazines, play chess, look up information on the Internet, type up reports and learn computer skills. Two other regular groups are a small group of women in a literacy class hosted by the school and a nursery school group who play with the toys and listen to stories. Although many might believe that this usage justifies the existence of the dual-use libraries, it has to be said that it is low. The low use raises the question of sustainability. The District Public Library Manager acknowledges the low use by adults, saying:

It’s mostly used by the schools. But you know it’s something that happens in our black communities. They – the adults are not using libraries. We are still trying to teach them that they use libraries for all their information needs. But it’s the culture that is going on in our black community.

Here she lends support to the author’s earlier research in a neighbouring province that found a philosophical acceptance that rural public libraries at present are used almost solely by young people, for their education (Hart 2006b).

The Education Department’s Media Learning Facilitator echoes public library manager’s comment on the prevailing lack of reading or library “culture”:

I’ve never seen an elderly or middle aged person here, idly browsing through a book ..., because maybe that culture, they didn’t have that culture when they were growing up.

One of the school Principals later points to her own childhood experience:

No, we were in the disadvantaged areas where libraries were too far from where we stayed. Because in the rural areas, the use of a library, it was not something that was in mind, or that we were making aware of it. So, but nobody at that time used to tell us about anything about the library.

Another explanation for the rather low use by adults might lie in doubts inside the schools over community use. The lack of signage for the libraries, which was described above, might come from more than the public library service’s oversight or budget restrictions. Interviews and observation uncover some ambivalence inside the schools over their dual role as community libraries – although this was denied in the formal interviews with educators and principals. The original service level agreement reveals that the original plan was for the libraries to be school libraries in the morning and open to the community after school hours. However, observation shows community members coming in in the mornings, with learners from the neighbouring schools dominating the afternoons. This librarian acknowledges that the school is not always welcoming towards the community in his comment:

The school wants to run the library; they want to own the library. Whereby they don’t sometimes want the community to use the library ... Because sometimes you’ll find that the gates are closed.

His frustration is again evident in a later admission that he would prefer to run a purely public library

because at times he is caught between conflicting expectations:

Yes, I'd prefer that because students and children will know exactly after school hours they have to go to the library. And they will use that the way a public library is. So that will be an understanding of using a library, from the community at large. Because the community doesn't understand that the library belongs to the schools.

Comment from a teacher, an English teacher, suggests that pupils from other nearby feeder schools might be more welcome than adult community members. As he points out, his own work benefits if they are able to read:

Quite ... I ... it is of importance because it's going to facilitate the pre-programming that we are facing. Because it is open to the very Grade 9 primary school learners and teachers. ... Because if those feeder schools learners are exposed to the library it means it will be easier for them to be exposed to reading and eventually, when they come here it will make my work easier rather than if there is no library.

Yes. We actually have two feeder schools. We have M ... Intermediate School and T ... Primary School.

(GH: So you welcome that, that other schools are using the library?)

Yes, I do welcome it, very. Because it's assisting these kids. Besides the fact that it makes my work easier. It really assists these children.

### Librarians' identity

Soon into the study, the librarians' perceptions of their work came into focus. Two questions across the interviews with all six were "How do you see yourself – a librarian or a teacher?" and "How are you regarded by the principal and teachers?" They came from the international research that shows how crucial it is that school librarians are regarded as peers by teachers.

The author's previous research found unease among public library staff over their capacity for sup-

porting school learners and for information literacy education (Hart 2004, 2006b). Internationally, school librarians see themselves as teachers as much as librarians – and are often dually qualified. Some school librarians might thus be concerned at this case study librarian's perception of his job in working with students:

But I'm not thinking like a teacher.

(GH: You don't think you think like a teacher?)

I don't think like a teacher, I'm thinking like a librarian. Because I understand the field.

So I don't teach a person or I don't teach my users or people who are coming to the library how to read information. I don't teach them, but I refer them, I show them how to search information. But a teacher refers to the book, quoting and teaching the strategy. Teaching children or taking some articles from that particular book or from the books. We are directing, we are referring. We are searching for information and give to the person, so as a person can by himself or herself, go and read.

Perhaps in keeping with the ethos of public librarianship, he takes no responsibility for the whole information literacy process as described by experts inside the field of school librarianship such as Kuhlthau (2000). He sees his job as finding relevant information for students and referring them to it.

The issue of the dual-use librarians' identity is complex. A strong thread in their interviews is their pride in their work. For example:

I feel, to be a librarian that's, I'm passionate about it. Yes, that gives me a passion, because if you talk about the library, my ears are open and I have to listen attentively towards what you are saying about the library. ... Yes, I'm really passionate about this position.

We have to try to know almost everything from your community, so that when someone comes from outside they have to see someone who knows everything about your community. You have to be a leader, yes, yes.

However, at times a sense of alienation comes through. The following comment alerted the researcher to a possible reason for the discontent that emerged from time to time, namely a perceived lack of “status” in their schools:

Status always undermines us. Even if you as the librarian are part of their [teachers’] meetings, you are like ... you are nothing from other people. They undermine you.

All six report that, although they are invited to schools’ funeral club meetings or end of year parties, they are not usually invited to curriculum meetings. One puts it down to their being seen as public library staff – and, by implication, not as fellow educators. (The irony is that three of them are in fact qualified teachers.)

Another hindrance could be the puzzling role of the so-called “teacher-librarians” in each school. The teacher-librarians are full-time teachers in each school who have been identified as being responsible for the school library by the Education Department’s Media Learning Facilitator. However, interviews and observations reveal that they are hardly involved in the libraries. One explains that, as a fulltime teacher, he is too busy but he does “peep in” sometimes:

We do sometimes peep in the library, when one sees the chance to do so. But it is not enough. It is not enough.

They are part of the library committee in each school, but all six librarians admit that the committees are defunct, largely, they say, because the teacher members are “too busy” to attend meetings. Some irritation is shown in the following comment from one dual-use librarian:

Yes I have a library committee, although it’s not functioning well.

(GH Why doesn’t it function well?)

In the short I can say teaching staff, in the short I can say staff ... Sometimes we have to sit down after school meetings to address some issues. But members will say ‘I have to get the bus’, ‘I’m going to town’ ‘I have to meet the doctor before five’ – all those things.

The ambiguous role of the teacher-librarians in the six schools might cause some tension as is clear in the following extract from an interview with one of the dual-use librarians. He has been talking of teachers’ lack of understanding of the role of the library and then goes on to include the teacher-librarians in his comment. He adds that they are reluctant to share what they learn in their Education Department training:

Yes, you know, teacher-librarians who attend LIASA [conferences], teachers who are attending education programmes, ... They don’t bring information to the library; they just hold the information. For what reason we don’t know. That is why I’ll always say the understanding towards the library by the school is not clear.

(GH: Even the so called ‘teacher librarian’?)

Yes ... that person doesn’t even understand the library.

## Conclusions

The fundamental question of the study asks if dual-use libraries might offer a useful model for South Africa, given the backlogs in both school and public library provision. This concluding section aims to make sense of the data and findings in terms of the research questions. In keeping with the aims of qualitative research, the case study has uncovered the ambiguities of the social life of the case study’s dual-use libraries. But, overall it is clear that despite the contradictions and shortcomings, the libraries are an important attempt to serve the school-going population in a rural area of South Africa and, to a limited extent, its adult communities. They represent an innovative and generous decision on the part of the provincial public library service to step into the school library gaps, and they offer a useful learning opportunity for the development of school and public libraries in rural South Africa.

A return to Figure 1’s adaptation of Loertscher’s eight-point taxonomy of school libraries might make sense of the data with regard to the libraries as *school* libraries. It is apparent that the libraries probably fall just to the right hand side of the continuum. Teachers might not be consulting the library staff as they plan their programmes but they routinely

refer their classes to the library. Observations of the constant coming and goings of school pupils and interviews with the library and school staff show that the case study libraries are certainly playing a significant role in the lives of their schools *and* the neighbouring schools.

However, if they are to fulfil their potential role in the learning programme, there are some issues to be addressed. The most crucial is the status of the librarians inside the schools. The study uncovers the tenuous position of the librarians in the life of the schools. They lack educational status and play no part in curriculum planning. Their role is reactive rather than proactive. A crucial finding is that they, moreover, tend to identify with the public library service more than the educational service. One of the contradictions of the study is that, although their community information services are minimal and their day-to-day work lies with school learners, their interviews are steeped in the public library service discourse. They perhaps lack insight into the central mission of school libraries, information literacy education, and the result is that they do not fully exploit the relationship with the information skills specialist available to them, the district Media Learning Facilitator.

The case study inevitably raises questions over the role of the so-called “teacher-librarians,” who are part of the team of teacher-librarians being built up by the provincial Education Department advisors. Whatever the good intentions of the Education Department, the reality is that they are fulltime teachers and play no real role in the libraries. Their claim to the label “teacher-librarian” perhaps only weakens the position of the librarians. The school library sector might well have to compromise its position on the necessity of teaching qualifications for school library staff and rather educate public library staff in the critical competencies required of a school librarian.

The study reveals that the libraries, as yet, do not conform to many of the international criteria for successful dual-use, which were listed above. Figure 2 reveals the critical shortcoming to be the lack of communication between the Public Library Service and the Education Department at all levels, from top management to school level. A dawning realisation among all participants of the need for better and formalised communication is evident. According to Haycock (2006), a prerequisite for dual-use libraries is that the partners are fairly equal in terms of com-

mitment of resources. This certainly does not apply to this South African case study. However one of the insights of the study is that “resources” need not be physical or financial. The Education Department, in the person of the Media Learning Facilitator and her school library support service, has other intangible resources to offer - namely, expertise in literacy and information literacy education, knowledge of the curriculum and credibility among educationists.

The public library service’s intention in establishing the dual-use libraries was to penetrate remote communities in order to contribute to socio-economic development. However, all acknowledge that the adult communities in the surrounding villages make little use of the libraries. Another article (Hart 2010) has explored the questions that arose in the course of the study over the possible mismatch between present library services and the needs of the surrounding rural communities. But one of the possible reasons for the under-use might be ambivalence inside the schools, which creates invisible barriers. The study has raised the vital question: Do the schools *really* want to be open to the community? And another question for all parties is, if the libraries were to become bustling community information and education hubs, what changes would be needed to infrastructure and security arrangements?

The question whether the case study libraries provide a “better standard of service than otherwise would be possible” – the guiding principle for dual-use, according to McNicol (2006, 519) – might have two answers. They certainly offer a better service than is available in other schools and villages in the region. But whether it is the best “possible” service is debatable. The study has uncovered gaps; but it also has pointed to how some might be filled, with more dynamic leadership. Soon into the study, the fuzziness evident in the project proposal over the two missions of the libraries became evident. However, the case study must conclude that the fuzziness is inevitable in the “tricky business” of dual-use. It suggests that the compromises that it found do not invalidate the model. The goodwill, pragmatism and commitment of the role-players on the ground [2] compensate for the imperfections.

## Notes

1. Place and people’s names are withheld to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality that was promised to participants

2. The author acknowledges the generosity and courage of her hosts – especially the Media Learning Facilitator, who acted as guide as she visited the sites, and the librarian at the senior secondary school where she spent a week.

## References

- Asselin, M. M. 2001. "Factors of Effective School Libraries: A Survey of Perspectives of Teachers, Teacher-Librarians, and Principals." In *Inspiring Connections: Learning, Libraries and Literacy: Proceedings of the Fifth International Forum on Research in School Librarianship and the 30th Annual Conference of the International Association of School Librarianship*, Auckland, New Zealand, 9–12 July 2001, edited by P. Hughes and L. Selby, 1–17. Seattle, WA: International Association of School Librarianship
- Bundy, A. 2003. "Joint Use Libraries: The Ultimate Form of Co-operation." In *Planning the Modern Public Library Building*, edited by G.B. McCabe and J.R. Kennedy, 129–146. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited. Accessed 30 January 2010. <http://www.library.unisa.edu.au/about/papers/jointuse.pdf>
- Butler, A. 2004. *Contemporary South Africa*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Department of Education. *National Assessment Report (Public ordinary schools). National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS)*. Pretoria: Department of Education. Accessed August 15, 2011. <http://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=avkJ2i84KcQ%3D&tabid=358&mid=1261>.
- Glick, A. 2000. "All Together Now?" *School Library Journal* 46(3): 109.
- Hart, G. 2004. "Public Libraries in South Africa: Agents or Victims of Educational Change?" *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science* 70 (2): 110–121.
- Hart, G. 2005. The Readiness of Public Libraries in South Africa for Information Literacy Education: The Case of Mpumalanga Province. PhD dissertation, University of Cape Town.
- Hart, G. 2006a. "Educators and Public Librarians: Unwitting Partners in the Information Literacy Education of South African Youth?" *Innovation* 32: 74–94.
- Hart, G. 2006b. "The Information Literacy Education Readiness Of Public Libraries In Mpumalanga Province (South Africa)." *Libri* 56(1): 48–62.
- Hart, G. 2010. "New vision, new goals, new markets? Reflections on a South African case study of community library services." *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science* 76(2): 81–90.
- Hart, G., and S. Zinn. 2007. "The Conundrum Of School Libraries In South Africa." In *Libraries For The Future: Progress And Development Of South African Libraries*, Edited By T. Bothma, P. Ngulube, and P. G. Underwood, 89–107. Pretoria: Library and Information Association of South Africa.
- Hartzell, G. 2002. "The Principal's Perceptions of School Libraries and Teacher-Librarians." *School Libraries Worldwide* 8(1): 92–110.
- Haycock, K. 2006. "Dual-use Libraries: Guidelines for Success." *Library Trends* 54(4): 488–500.
- Henri, J. 1999. "The Information Literate School Community: Not Just a Pretty Face." In *The information Literate School Community: Best Practice*, edited by J. Henri and K. Bonnaro, 1–10. Wagga Wagga, NSW, Australia: Charles Sturt University, Centre for Information Studies
- Klein, H. K., and M. D. Myers. 1999. "A Set of Principles for Conducting and Evaluating Interpretive Field Studies in Information Systems." *MIS quarterly* 23(1): 67–94.
- Klinger, D. A., E. A. Lee, G. Stephenson, C. Deluca, and K. Luu. 2009. *Exemplary School Libraries in Ontario: A Study by Queen's University and People for Education*. Toronto: Ontario Library Association.
- Kuhlthau, C. C. 1997. "Implementing a Process Approach to Information Skills: A Study Identifying Indicators of Success in Library Media Programs." *School Library Media Quarterly* 21(2): 11–18.
- Kuhlthau, C. C. 2000. "The information search process: a search for meaning rather than answers." *Library and Information Science* 43: 35–42.
- Le Roux, S. 2001. School Community Libraries: Some Guidelines for a Possible Model for South Africa. M.L.I.S. thesis, University of Pretoria.
- Le Roux, S., and F. Hendrikz. 2003. "Rendering a Comprehensive School and Community Library Service to Remote Rural Communities in South Africa by Forging Partnerships." In *School Libraries: Breaking Down Barriers; Selected Papers from the 32nd Annual Conference of the International Association of School Librarianship and the 7th International Forum on Research in School Librarianship*, Durban, South Africa, 7–11 July 2003, edited by S. Zinn, G. Hart, and E. Howe, 258–269. Seattle, WA: International Association of School Librarianship
- Library and Information Services (LIS) Transformation Charter. 6th draft. July 2009. Commissioned by the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) and National Council for Library and Information Services (NCLIS). Accessed August 15, 2011. <http://www.dac.gov.za/publications/reports/2009/Transformation%20charter-6th%20draft-22102009.pdf>
- Loertscher, DV. 2000. *Taxonomies of the School Library Media Program*. 2nd ed. San Jose, CA: Hi Willow.
- McNicol, S. 2006. "What Makes a Joint Use Library a Community Library?" *Library Trends* 54(4): 519–534.
- Naiker, S., and S. Mbokazi. 2002. *Developing Libraries for South African Learners and Teachers: Three Case Studies*. Durban: Education Policy Unit (Natal).
- National Committee for Library Co-operation. 2000. *National Guidelines for Co-Operation between Community and School Libraries*. Pretoria: UNESCO Pretoria Office.
- National Education Policy Investigation. Library and Information Services Research Group. 1992. *Library and Information Services: Report of the NEPI Library and Information Services Research Group*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press / NECC.
- Wolcott, H.F. 1994. *Transforming Qualitative Data: Description, Analysis, and Interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Editorial history:  
Paper received: 7 January 2010  
Revised version received: 3 September 2010  
Accepted: 13 September 2010