

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

The aim of this study has been, first, to investigate the variants of the school-community library model - as has been manifested in overseas countries - and to determine whether this model would be appropriate for a tribal, rural community in South Africa or whether a variant, a South African prototype of this model, geared to the needs of this particular community, would be more suitable. The second aim has been to develop a set of guidelines to facilitate the establishment and operation of this model or a modified variant of it in a rural, tribal community.

The findings with regard to the research questions, emanating from the research problem, identified in Chapter One, will be discussed, after which an exposition of the main findings of the study will be given. This will be followed by some recommendations and suggestions for further research.

8.2 Findings with regard to research questions

The first research question stated in Chapter One, paragraph 1.3 was:

Which variants of the school-community library model were found in overseas countries, if any?

A review of the literature on the historical development of combined school-community libraries in the selected overseas countries has found that basically two variants of the school-community library model have been established in the countries studied. The most common is the school-housed school-community library model, where the combined library is either housed inside the school building or on the school premises. This library model was predominantly found in remote, rural areas with the population ranging from one thousand to three thousand people and a school population varying from less than fifty to four hundred. A variant of this model is where the school-community library is located in multi-purpose community centre complexes. This model was mainly found in urban and metropolitan areas.

The second research question was:

What were the reasons why the school-community library model was implemented in those overseas countries? Are the factors, which led to the establishment of this model in those countries, relevant to South African circumstances?

It was found that the main reasons for the establishment of the combined school-community libraries, in the selected overseas countries, were:

- Historical backlogs in either school or public library services, in spite of an expressed need for such services on the part of the relevant communities;
- A pattern of population settlement featuring remote rural communities which could not sustain separate school and public library services;
- Declining funds and resources for library services and pressure from politicians and authorities to avoid duplicate services and to utilise educational facilities optimally. This was often accompanied by government incentives and enabling legislation to encourage co-operative ventures;
- An emphasis on life-long learning and new teaching methods, resulting in a growing need for information and library services;
- Strong historical links between education and public library services in, especially in the remote rural areas, as well as the construction of multi-purpose community centres in urban and metropolitan areas, which encouraged the sharing of facilities.

It was found that many of the factors that led to the establishment of the school-community library model in the selected overseas countries prevail in South Africa. In South Africa there are substantial backlogs in both public and school libraries, especially in rural and urban township communities, previously disadvantaged by apartheid policies and practices. Most of these communities will not be able to establish and sustain separate school and public libraries. In South Africa there is also an emphasis on life-long learning, and the government has introduced an outcomes-based curriculum, the success of which will, to a great extent, depend on the availability and use of learning resources.

Remote, rural communities such as those found in Saskatchewan, the North West Territories and the Yukon in Canada, as well as in South Australia and Scandinavia, are also common to South Africa. The small rural villages in South Africa, however, differ markedly from the small rural villages in South Australia, as the development of the former has been distorted as a result of apartheid policies and practices. The South Australian rural village also has a homogenous population, sharing the same cultural background, levels of literacy and information needs, while in South Africa one finds towns and villages with two communities, living in separate residential areas, having different cultures, literacy levels and information needs.

The next research question posed the following:

What was the experience of these overseas countries with the implementation of this model? What benefits, strengths, weaknesses and limitations were perceived? What problems were experienced and what were the success factors?

This led to an analysis of the practical experiences which the selected overseas countries had with the implementation of this model. It was found that the establishment of such combined libraries had not always been adequately planned, especially as far as location and design of the facilities was concerned. Space limitations often caused the separation of services at a later stage. Overlapping jurisdictions and undefined lines of authority often resulted in conflict situations. Disagreement on organisational and administrative procedures, as well as the absence of formal contractual agreements, added to the problems experienced. Central support services proved to be indispensable, especially for small remote, rural communities. Savings were mainly achieved by co-ordinating the acquisition of materials, by avoiding duplication of stock, and by the sharing of facilities and staff.

The next research question was:

Does the South Australian school-community library model function more effectively than those in other overseas countries? If so, to which factors could this be attributed?

To answer this, the functioning of the school-community library in Australia was thoroughly studied by perusing the literature and official and internal

documents. It was found that the thorough planning for the implementation of the model in the rural areas by the state of South Australia was the main reason why this model was more successful in that state than in other Australia states and, for that matter, than in any other country. The formulation of detailed guidelines especially for the establishment and operation of the school-community library model also played a crucial role. Other reasons for the successful implementation of this model were: wide representation of all stakeholders on the planning body; the fact that the service model was only established after a formal request from the community, which ensured a sustained commitment on the part of the community to the funding and effective functioning of the library; central co-ordination and ongoing support from the state library service and education department; and the utilisation of the latest technology, enhancing the services rendered to small communities.

The experience of these selected overseas countries in establishing and operating the school-community library models were thoroughly analysed in order to find answers to the next research question which was:

What are the prerequisites for the successful implementation of the school-community library?

Various prerequisites were identified - according to the experience of the selected overseas countries - which appeared to have contributed to the successful implementation of the combined school-community library, such as: a political commitment by the government to school and public library co-operation; the ongoing commitment of funding authorities; the provision of adequate, suitable, and compatible staff; central support mechanisms; involvement of all parties in planning and sustaining the services; the offering of needs-based services; a locally representative and skilled management body; and the formulation and regular review of clear and flexible guidelines by the authorities to guide the process and provide the necessary framework for operation.

The next research question was expressed thus:

What is the particular South African context, with respect to school and public library services, in which the school-community library model would have to operate? What are the obstacles to effective delivery of school and public library services in South Africa and in other African countries?

These queries elicited an extensive analysis of the historical development of school and public library services in South Africa as they emerged from the apartheid era. It was found that there was an unequal distribution of LIS structures throughout the country, and that certain communities were especially disadvantaged as to the quality and quantity of LIS services. It became clear that the traditional Anglo/American model of library service delivery failed to meet the needs of certain communities, and that a new approach towards service delivery would have to be considered in dealing with these disadvantaged segments of the community, having specifically different information needs. It was also evident that the recent restructuring of LIS had caused a deterioration in school and public library services, and that appropriate, cost-effective models of service delivery - rooted within the social needs and cultural patterns of specific communities, and based on partnerships between the school and the public library sector - could probably alleviate some of the pressure on the delivery of LIS services.

The research of this study then focused on evaluating the applicability of the school-community library model to South Africa in order to find answers to the following research questions:

Have the prerequisites for the successful implementation of this library model in South Africa been identified?

Are overseas variants of the school-community library model appropriate for South African conditions?

The prerequisites, identified in Chapter Three, were used as the basis of an assessment to determine whether the school-community library model had any chance of success in South Africa, in the current situation as to the delivery of school and public library services. Analysed findings revealed that some factors, such as the funding of the

facility and services, staffing, and central support by the provincial LIS and PEDs, as well as the current restructuring of local government, could jeopardise the implementation of the school-community library model in South Africa.

There was also evidence that, because of the disparities in LIS infrastructure and varied socio-economic conditions, more than one variant of the model could be appropriate to South Africa, depending on local circumstances. It was suggested that a variant of the school-community library model, with the library forming part of a community centre which acted as the cultural and educational centre for the surrounding schools and the wider community, especially deserved careful consideration in the urban and metropolitan areas of South Africa. Further study on this variation of the school-community model would, however, be needed as such an investigation falls outside the parameters of this study.

The study then centred on the following research questions:

What are the characteristics of a South African community living in a rural, tribal area?

Why should a variant of the school-community library model be considered for communities in the rural, tribal areas in South Africa?

What characteristics would a variant of the school-community library model, adapted to conditions in the rural, tribal areas in South Africa, display? What would be its advantages, and what conditions are needed to implement successfully this variant of the model in these areas?

The rural, tribal community, which was described in Chapter Six, paragraph 6.2, displayed distinctly positive characteristics such as initiative, and a willingness to help themselves, in spite of a high incidence of illiteracy. The community also participated enthusiastically in educational and cultural activities. The community comprised a relatively small and homogeneous group of people, who lived and worked together in close, interdependent proximity and shared the same culture and language.

In the selected overseas countries, it often happened that there had already been a core library service point (usually a functional school library) which could be upgraded to serve both the school and adult community. But, as the *Schools Register*

of Needs Survey indicated, school library facilities in the rural, tribal areas are almost non-existent, whereas clusters of schools in the rural, disadvantaged areas of South Africa are quite common; consequently it would appear that the public library-based school-community library – serving a cluster of schools as well as the broader community - would probably be a more cost-effective and a more easily implemented proposition for communities living in these areas.

The information resources of the public library-based school-community library would, in addition to the usual printed material, also include materials and media to meet the needs of non- and newly-literate users. The role of the librarian and the teachers would be that of an “animateur”, a community leader, who would assist the community in any matters for which his training and education would have prepared him. The library would also circulate book boxes with classroom collections to the cluster schools. The combined library would form part of the existing provincial library system with the added benefits of participating in the interlibrary loan system, of sharing resources with other libraries, and of receiving block loans of scarce material from the provincial LIS. Incorporation of ICT initiatives and partnerships with NGOs in the field of literacy and information would further enhance the services of this library model.

The advantages of the public library-based school-community library would *inter alia* be: a more comprehensive use would be made of the facilities; building costs would be lower (fewer specialised rooms would have to be built in the participating schools); less responsibility would be placed on the principals of the participating schools; and maintenance costs would be shared.

One could, however, assume that this library model would only succeed in communities where a public library facility already existed, which would be effectively used by the community. The central location of the library within the educational cluster, a commitment from all the partners involved to fund and staff the facility, the community’s desire to have such a library, and its choice of librarian would all be contributing factors to the successful operation of the library model.

Finally a set of guidelines were formulated in response to the following research question:

What guidelines are needed to facilitate the effective implementation and operation of this variant of the model in the rural, tribal areas of South Africa?

The guidelines covered the following administrative issues: the conducting of a community survey; the planning, funding and staffing of the combined library; organisational structures and line functions; administration and organisation; collection development; and training.

The guidelines are not meant to be prescriptive but are designed to guide decision-makers and communities in the rural, tribal areas in South Africa who consider the public library-based school-community library model a possible option in their area.

8.3 Summary of main findings

There is ample evidence that the school-community library model has been both a success and a failure in the selected overseas countries where it has been tried. Thorough, advanced planning, involving all the stakeholders, is crucial to achieve success.

It appears to be that the emphasis on local circumstances rather than on universal principles is the determinant factor in making the combined school-community library a success. To be successful, the combined school-community library model must be established for the right reasons, that is, in the most suitable geographical and societal contexts. The exact local circumstances, infrastructure and community dynamics should, therefore, be thoroughly established before deciding on a specific library model.

The experiences of all the selected overseas countries indicate that the establishment of the school-community library model should not be used as a means to providing a cheap library service, but should rather be evaluated as the most cost-effective way to provide a community with the best access to information resources.

In the South African situation, the availability of library service points, which could be upgraded to a school-community library to serve both the school and the wider community, would be the determinant factor in choosing the most appropriate library model. In the rural, tribal areas, where it is a fact that school library facilities are extremely rare, and the schools are often of an inferior standard, the school-based school-community library model would not be an appropriate one to implement. The public library-based school-community appears to be a far more suitable model, provided that a centrally located public library service point already exists to serve the schools and the adult community, and that the library service is being optimally used by the community.

8.4 Recommendations

In view of the findings and conclusions reached regarding the school-community library model and, in particular, the public library-based school-community library model, certain recommendations are made:

- 1) That the Department of Education should clearly commit itself to promoting the different school library models introduced in its draft policy document, *A National Policy Framework for School Library Standards*, which should be translated into **practical policy guidelines** for PEDs, and local councils, wishing to experiment with those models;
- 2) The **generic standards** for school libraries, contained in the department's draft document, *A National Policy Framework for School Library Standards*, should be confirmed as **national policy** (South Africa. Department of Education 1999:29-33);
- 3) The allocation by the PEDs of **special grants**, such as those under "Supplies and Services-Other" or "Media Collections", should be assured as basic funding **for schools** who wish to establish a combined school-community library. This allocation could be used for a start-up collection of curriculum-oriented material for use by the learners in the combined library;

- 4) The allocation of **conditional grants to local councils** for funding extra expenses in establishing combined school-community libraries should be guaranteed;
- 5) It is strongly recommended that the DoE and PEDs make a concerted effort to communicate to the SGBs, parents, and local councils the **important role that the school-community library could play in providing access to information resources for those active in the school and the community at large**. This will ensure that priority can be given by these stakeholders to provide funding for library-based resources and for the establishment of this model.

8.5 Suggestions for further research

8.5.1 Public library based school-community library model

It is suggested that a case study be done, either in the Maphotla community, or in a community with comparable characteristics in a rural, tribal area of South Africa, so that the findings and guidelines in this study can be tested. The results of such a study will determine the appropriateness of the public library-based school-community library in the rural, tribal areas, before the model is introduced on a large scale by the different PEDs and provincial LIS.

8.5.2 Urban community centre-based school-community library model

This study has also revealed the urgent need for research into the school-community library located in the large town community centre complex – offering a wide array of social services to the community and incorporating a school or cluster of schools - to determine its appropriateness in the urban and metropolitan areas in South Africa.