

# Policy Formulation and Practical Implementation Problems: Kwazulu-Natal, School Library Policy, South Africa

*By Dr Mariana Du Toit*

## Research overview

This research was undertaken to analyse and critically assess the adequacy of the KwaZulu-Natal *School Library Policy* and its implementation strategy and to test the policy's feasibility for implementation in the South African province.

The research was guided by eleven research questions of which the following relate more directly to policy formulation and implementation and are relevant to this article:

- The key elements of the provincial policy and their adequacy in terms of policy formulation and development;
- The implementation strategy and issues of equity and redress;
- The identification of practical implementation problems that need to be addressed;
- Key strategies and foci identified by experts in the field through the use of the Delphi Method

## Methodology

The Delphi technique was used as the main methodology for the critical analysis of the policy and its implementation strategy and to structure thinking around the characteristics of good policy as set out in the literature. This technique is a group facilitation one that seeks consensus on the opinion of experts through a series of structured questionnaires where panellists respond independently and anonymously to one another's opinions.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, pp. 237-238) perceive the Delphi method as the written partner to the Nominal Group Technique. The Nominal Group Technique is a face-to-face group judgment technique in which participants generate silently, in writing, responses to a given problem. The responses are collected and posted (but not identified by author) for others to view. Through group discussion the responses are clarified and further iterations may follow until a final set of responses is established (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000, pp. 237-8).

The Delphi method has the advantage of not requiring the participants to meet together as a group. Data collection resembles the Nominal Group Technique in that participants respond to a series of questions and statements in writing. The researcher collects written responses, collating it into clusters of issues and responses. The analysis is passed back to the respondents for comment, further discussion and identification of issues, responses, and priorities. Respondents are asked to respond to the group response, and can agree or indicate more substantial disagreement. By presenting the group response back to the participants there is general

progression in technique to the polarisation of responses, thus a clear identification of areas of consensus and dissension.

## Research setting

There were great inequalities in the provision of libraries to South African schools under the former pre-1994 education departments which resulted in widespread lack of facilities, inadequate resources, and a lack of trained personnel in the majority of schools. The disparities were further aggravated by the fact that there was no legislation enforcing education departments to provide school libraries and establish library standards. However, the implementation of Curriculum 2005 in 1998 (South Africa. Department of Education. 1999a) was seen in many ways as a watershed in South Africa's educational history and represented a new paradigm in education. It was anticipated that the outcomes-based curriculum with its concepts of integration and lifelong learning as part of a new approach to education would transform the legacy of the past and provide equal access to education for all learners.

The school library sector perceived the focus on information literacy and lifelong learning in an outcomes-based teaching methodology as critical elements underpinning the teaching and learning environment offered by school libraries. The sector assumed that these views would be

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similarly endorsed by national guidelines and policy which, in turn, would structure and focus interventions at national, provincial and school level. However, school libraries have thus far been largely ignored in education reform strategies and the onus on establishing and developing school library services has been left to provincial education departments.

## Service delivery background in KwaZulu-Natal

KwaZulu-Natal consists of densely populated urban areas as well as deep rural areas where schools are spread out or sometimes clustered. Schools vary in size from small farm schools with one or two staff members to schools with more than 2500 learners and 70 staff members. The demographic and socio-economic environments in KwaZulu-Natal present major stumbling blocks to the provision of education in the province. The learning environment is compromised by the challenges of rural education such as lack of running water, sanitation, electricity, infrastructure and transport. In many schools the language of instruction is seldom spoken outside the classroom. Critical health issues such as malaria, bilharzia, and the high prevalence of HIV and AIDS in the province have resulted in a decline in teacher numbers and the loss of expertise, and an increase in the numbers of orphans and out-of-school youths. In the classroom these conditions have translated into poor concentration, absenteeism, and lack of motivation for teachers and learners alike (Bot, Wilson and Dove, 2000; EduAction, 2004).

School library services in KwaZulu-Natal have to be conceptualised and implemented against this background and, moreover, without the support of national policies or guidelines. In 2002 the Directorate Education Library, Information and Technology Services (ELITS), responsible for school library services in KwaZulu-Natal's Department of Education, argued that it would no longer be possible to plan and deliver appropriate services in a vacuum. The directorate initiated a process to develop a provincial school library policy based on the then national policy draft initiatives.

The KZN *School Library Policy* (KwaZulu-Natal. Department of Education and Culture, 2003) promotes among other things a whole-school information literacy policy, and its vision takes into account that such a policy at school level will inform, and be informed, by all other aspects of policy and planning. The policy document "acknowledges the shared responsibility of the teacher, and the truth that information literacy requires a close partnership between the school librarian and the teacher" (De Jager, Nassimbeni and Underwood, 2007, p. 143). The implementation strategy envisaged a rollout of a starter collection to 1000 schools per annum, starting in 2005. However, the annual allocation for the project has not increased and to date fewer schools have been resourced (KwaZulu-Natal. Department of Education, 2007).

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## Theoretical framework

In order to interpret and evaluate policy development and implementation, the research considered both the traditional policy model as well as the social construction view of the policy process, since both these theoretical frameworks have relevance as far as the development of the KwaZulu-Natal *School Library Policy* and its suitability for implementation in the province are concerned.

Colebatch (2002) rightly observes that policy means different things to different people, and that the policy process involves not simply the pursuit of shared goals but the more difficult task of constructing a basis for collective action among participants who may have quite diverse views on the nature of the task (2002, p. 4). Policies are driven by a particular logic or ideology, and shaped by historical, cultural, institutional and political factors (Levin, 2001, p. 6). This view of policy is particularly true in South Africa where school library policy must be seen within the context of transformation in both the education and Library and Information Services sectors.

For the purpose of this research the following policy related conceptual frameworks were taken into account:

- The policy cycle (stage) approach which sees policy as a logical succession of steps when the design of the policy document is evaluated. The phases of the policy process typically include initiation, design, analysis, formulation, dialogue and advocacy, implementation and evaluation;
- The social construction perspective on policy which sees policy as something that has to be constructed and sustained by the participants "in circumstances where they have choices about which interpretative maps to use, which cues to follow" (Colebatch, 2002, p. 4). The suggestions of the Delphi panel were viewed against this background too.

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## School library policy research

As far as school library policy is concerned research undertaken by Knuth (1995, p. 290) stresses the importance of "understand[ing] the interplay between policy and social, economic and political realities in order to achieve goals involving the evolution of effective school libraries". Policy is developed at all levels, from the macro level of worldwide trends and national legislation, to the micro level of the school, and Knuth (1995, p. 290) argues that it is essential to understand the

fuller picture in order to understand the implications of policy at one's particular level. Since policy-making is a complex process, intervention in policy formulation and implementation is more effective if participants have a "basic knowledge of the limitations and complexities of policy-making". At the same time it is a social process reflecting varying systems and values.

Although policy without a statutory basis may be expressed in many other ways such as policy statements, the creation of regional services, forming advisory committees, the use of consultants, or affiliation with organisations on projects, it is formalised policy that tends to make "subsequent action more coherent and consistent" because it "provides a rallying point for development", and prevents "scattered school library programs and marginal development". Knuth (1995, p. 292) states:

*Lack of a statutory base creates critical gaps in school library development, variable implementation, a lack of coordination, inadequacies in institutional infrastructure, duplication of effort, and under use of resources. School library provision that is not supported by official policy becomes vulnerable to financial retrenchment and local educational politics.*

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Research of various frameworks for school library policy and surveys of a broad range of policies show that school library policy is frequently connected with national development initiatives, and reading projects (Knuth, 1995). At the same time, effective policy is "congruent with national perceptions of the definition and purpose of

the school library; when this congruency is lacking, difficulties arise" (1995, p. 293). Where school library statutes are embedded in education legislation, often within curriculum reform initiatives, they are viewed as educational tools and framed within an educational context, and substantive school library development has resulted in these countries.

Curriculum 2005 offered such an opportunity in South Africa, but the 'congruency' was lacking and the opportunity was not exploited. School library development has reached its highest level in countries where federal initiatives sponsored short-term policy initiatives resulting in 'spurts' in school library development (Canada, the United States and Australia). When the states or provinces are responsible for policy and infrastructure, development can be uneven (Knuth, 1995).

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## Policy design and formulation

In order to evaluate a policy's adequacy, the criteria for good policy design and development in the process of policy analysis need to be established and the quality of the decision-making in the policy process evaluated. The main elements of policy design were incorporated in the Delphi questionnaire to enable the panel members to identify the key elements of the KZN *School Library Policy* and assess their adequacy.

Policy design is probably the most important phase in the policy analysis process (Roux, 2000, p. 115) and it requires clear formulation of the policy problem, goals and objectives, and policy alternatives.

Policy theorists have devised different models of the policy analysis process (Anderson, 1997; Hart, 1995). The policy process usually starts when a policy issue or problem is identified by

stakeholders who feel that they are detrimentally affected by the status quo (Meyer and Cloete, 2000a, p. 97). Dubnick and Romzek (1999, p. 197) wrote on the “ecology of policy-making”, and detailed the stages in the process: problem identification, problem articulation, agenda-setting, policy formulation/design, policy legitimisation, program design and development, program implementation, policy evaluation, policy reassessment, and policy change.

Colebatch (2002, pp. 49-51) likewise refers to the cycle model where stages are presented as a cycle, suggesting a natural progression from one stage to the next. The successive stages are broadly:

- The determination of goals according to the objectives the authorised leaders wish to achieve;
- The choosing of courses of action that will realise these goals, from a range of options and in the light of the relative costs and benefits of each;
- The implementation of these courses of action or choices which are then carried out by other workers;
- The evaluation of the results. The outcome can and should be evaluated in order to ascertain whether the decisions were thoroughly and economically put into effect (efficiency evaluation) and the implementation of the decisions had the expected outcome (effectiveness evaluation),
- Modification of the results which can be achieved by amending the policy in the light of the evaluation.

## Defining the problem

Despite the different ways in which the policy process is conceptualised, most authors agree that it always begins with the identification and definition of a specific problem (Anderson, 1997; Colebatch, 2002). Roux defines a problem as “a significant and unwanted discrepancy” (Macrae and Wilde, 1979, p. 23 cited in Roux, 2000, p. 115) and observes that a:

*researchable problem must exist which, after thorough data collection and systematisation of knowledge, can lead to a point where alternatives can be identified and recommendations made . . . [and it is thus] clear that the method of policy analysis, be it prospective or retrospective, aligns closely with the procedure and methods followed in conducting any kind of scientific research (Roux, 2000, pp. 115-116).*

Roux (2000, p. 117) cautions that “systematic, methodological policy analysis is not possible if the problem is not defined”, and that ideally the problem should be concerned with target group expectations, with those affected by the policy outcome, as well as with the significance of differing values and culture groups in South Africa (2000, p. 115).

## Goals and objectives – the desired future

There is no value in problem identification if clear goals and objectives are not formulated (Roux, 2000, pp. 115-116). There should be no confusion regarding “where we want to go, what we want to achieve, and where and how we want to address the issue at stake”. For the purpose of policy design Roux (2000, p. 117) views goals as broad purposes and objectives as specific aims. Fox and Meyer (1995) offer the following definitions:

*[a goal is] . . . an unrealistic state not yet achieved by the members of an organisation but which they regard as desirable . . . [and] an unrealised state or condition that the members of an*

*organisation do not possess, but which they deem necessary* (1995, p. 55)

[an objective is] a short-term goal that can be deduced from an organisation's mission and that could be stated by means of a process or negotiation (1995, p. 88).

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## Policy constraints

The identification of goals and objectives is not always easy and precise. Policies that are complex in terms of the demands of the interest group may display multiple and sometimes conflicting goals and objectives, and may require that some objectives be traded off for the more widely acceptable ones. This can be achieved by prioritising objectives and then optimising them in sequence, thus selecting perhaps not the best solution but one that will satisfy a larger section of the interest group, and agreeing on the minimum, acceptable level of performance for some goals to find possible solutions for the remaining goals, for example, to convert less important goals and objectives into constraints (Roux, 2000, p. 122).

Other constraints that should be avoided (Roux, 2000, pp. 122-124) include:

- budgetary: the best policy option may not be practical or favourable;
- political: policy options favoured may be in the best interest of the party and not the people who are supposed to benefit from the policy;
- organisational: these include ineffective structures, lack of training and inadequate human resources;
- inadequate information which limits policy-makers' ability to specify clear objectives or, on the other hand, information overload which likewise makes it difficult to identify precise objectives;
- fear of change resulting in officials' reluctance to accept policy options;
- over-quantification where policy issues could be better addressed by common sense, good judgement and logical reasoning;
- subjectiveness that hampers the setting aside of personal value preferences and the impartial investigation of options;
- inadequate satisfaction of divergent needs where finding solutions to one problem may complicate others.

It is important that these restraints are taken into account during the policy design process to ensure that the policy that is eventually developed will have anticipated and addressed the issues that could hinder and limit successful policy implementation.

## Generating policy alternatives

There is a certain complexity and interrelatedness in the identification of clear goals and objectives and the identification of alternative policy options. After formulation of the problem, the policy analyst should determine precise goals and objectives and identify alternative policy options. This is a process that requires lucid judgment and anticipation of future events, but at the same time it demands a coherent understanding of the identified goals and objectives. Policy

analysts should be acquainted with underlying considerations and principles, not only when determining sound policy goals, objectives and alternatives, but also when choosing between feasible alternatives. It is easier to identify objectives that are realistic when alternatives and their consequences have been identified (Roux, 2000, p. 119). Dunn (1994, pp. 196-197) suggests that alternatives may be found in sources such as:

- authorities (experts in a specific field);
- scientific themes (development of new theories and paradigms – for example Curriculum 2005);
- parallel cases (experiences in other countries, but taking local values and practices into account); and
- analogy (similarity between different kinds of policy problems).

These guidelines linked well with the purpose of the Delphi technique since opinions were sought from panel members who had expertise in the field and who could also compare the situation with parallel cases.

The identification of alternatives as well as strategies to achieve these alternatives requires not only a systematic search, but critical and creative thinking, intuition and sound judgment. It is important, too, that this enquiry should not be biased in favour of a specific outcome. It is necessary to systematically consider even what may be perceived as unthinkable options, since this thoroughness will ensure that policy-makers are prepared for dramatic changes and reverses that may significantly change the basic criteria which they use. This way, paradigm shifts like the transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa, which caught many strategic planners unawares, are introduced (Roux, 2000, p. 130).

When searching for suitable alternatives it should be kept in mind, too, that:

- it is unlikely that any policy will be ideal in terms of all goals (there is no perfect policy alternative);
- a preferred policy should not be contrasted with obvious unattractive alternatives, subjectivity should not overrule objectivity;
- alternatives should be mutually exclusive (if they relate too closely they should be combined into a single new alternative);
- there should not be too many alternatives;
- alternatives that are too general and all-inclusive may not be practical;
- alternatives should be described in terms of a concrete set of action, i.e. move from concept to reality (Roux, 2000, pp. 131-132).

The elements of analysis in determining alternatives represent an iterative and interactive series of events, as Roux points out (2000, p. 133), and as such, the elements of analysis are not a linear series of steps. Good policy works backwards and forwards as the understanding of the problem deepens.

## **The feasibility of alternatives**

When the analyst determines the feasibility of alternatives, relevant evaluation criteria should be set up that align with the requirements of a specific policy issue to bring goals and alternatives together in a way that will facilitate choices. Evaluation criteria include effectiveness, political acceptability and socio-economic feasibility, as well as cost. The policy analyst must identify the advantages and disadvantages of different alternatives to choose the best policy option and, as such, is faced with three tasks when bringing goals and alternatives together, namely:

- predicting the impact of alternatives;
- valuing impact in terms of criteria;
- comparing alternatives across disparate criteria (Weimer and Vining, 1989, p. 203).

Forecasting enables the policy-maker to construct various policy scenarios and to rank options before selecting the alternatives that will bring about the expected future (Roux, 2000, pp. 134-135).

## Forecasting

Roux describes forecasting as a "rational, explainable phenomenon based on the realities and facts which surrounds us and which enable us to develop insight and intuition" (2000, p. 139). The members of the Delphi panel were required to likewise use insight and intuition to predict and assess the suitability of the *KZN School Library Policy* for implementation in the province.

The determination of alternative policy options by means of information is the objective of policy analysis, and forecasting, even if not a perfect process, makes it possible to account for the possible effect of a proposed policy. As such, those who formulate policy cannot risk implementing policy decisions without formulating the implications of policy choices over a specified period (Roux, 2000, p. 141).

## The Delphi Panel and policy formulation

### Conceptual framework

The interpretation of data is influenced by the theoretical framework of the project as well as the intellectual bias and experience of the researcher (Bertram, 2004, p. 154). For this reason it was necessary to ensure that the value judgments or conceptual framework emerging from the panel members' response in the first section of the questionnaire relate closely to the conceptual framework underpinning the research. Policy is value driven and it is clearly important to be aware of the values or perspectives with which panellists approach the subject when the data is interpreted. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2002, p. 3) state that "research is concerned with understanding the world and . . . this is informed by how we view our world(s)". Hart (1995, p. 18) similarly emphasises the importance of identifying values ("a belief that something is good and desirable") and aspirations ("the desire to achieve something that is presently out of reach"), since policy decisions may demand a choice between conflicting values and aspirations, and then it is important to determine which ones should take precedence.

The Delphi panel's value judgments and their recommended strategies should be viewed in the context of the importance panel members assigned to the following beliefs which are fully endorsed by this study:

- Credible policy needs to be authorised at national as well as provincial level in order to provide guidelines for and anticipate outcomes of implementation, in other words to guide change. This type of focussed intervention has resulted in the accelerated development in school libraries in other countries;
- Policy without an implementation plan remains a statement of intent. The implementation plan tests the appropriateness of the intervention;



- School libraries are instruments of redress and equity, and have the potential to contribute to educational transformation. An absence of equitable library provisioning, including ICT, will widen the gap between well-resourced and under-resourced schools;
- Policy alone will not bring transformation, but by involving stakeholders at all levels during the policy process one builds a sense of ownership and responsibility. This involvement will ensure that policy options take into account educational practice on the ground;
- Training is a crucial ingredient in successful school library development. It will bring about and entrench new perspectives and promote holistic insight into the school library's role as a facilitator of reading and information literacy skills, and the construction of knowledge.

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## Clear identification of the policy problem

The policy process starts when a policy issue or problem is identified by stakeholders who think that they are detrimentally affected by the status quo (Meyer and Cloete, 2000a, p. 97). Colebatch (2002, p. 60) points out that policy participants often have markedly different ideas about what the policy problem is, in other words they are not 'context-free', they have their own analysis of the problem and will seek support for what they perceive to be the most appropriate course of action.

In order to determine whether the *KZN School Library Policy* clearly defined the problem it wished to address it was necessary in the first place to evaluate whether underlying problems as well as the major causes of these problems had been considered in such a way that there was no blurring of issues, and whether these issues were considered in the context of the underlying values which underpin the document.

## Underlying issues

A clear understanding of the underlying issues the policy seeks to address assist policy makers to choose the best policy options. The Delphi panel was of the opinion that these issues had not been identified and defined clearly and some panellists suggested that the underlying problems be articulated in one place (*crisper statements*), preferably in an annexure, to outline the problems and disparities more exactly. Some panel members observed that policy responds to problems in the light of already identified issues without necessarily exploring them, and believed that policy should not generalise but present the bigger picture. However, all agreed about the importance of identifying, acknowledging and delineating the problems for which the policy seeks to find remedies, namely inequitable resourcing, lack of access to resources, and lack of insight and knowledge regarding the importance of information skills and reading *in assisting learners to cope with their learning requirements*.

The panel's perception of the importance and benefits of reading were clearly illustrated in the comments put forward, namely that learners are frequently not taught in their mother tongue, and yet it is vital that they read widely in both their mother tongue and the language of instruction. Panellists made three important observations:

- research has shown that mother tongue skills transfer to a second language, thus improving overall performance, and wide reading in the second language is markedly more effective to acquire fluency in that language than formal tuition;
- extracting meaning from print is an acquired skill implying practice;
- national and regional studies such as the systemic evaluation of Intermediate learners in 2005 (South Africa. Department of Education, 2005) have shown that reading levels are very low and, while there is a general understanding of the importance of reading in learning, there is no associated appreciation that voluntary reading and access to resources will *vastly improve reading development and enhance school performance*.

## The major causes of the problems

Panel members suggested that the causes be explicitly linked to a problem statement since management as well as teachers ought to be made aware of the need for, and effective use of, library material, and even more importantly, its contribution to the *educational experience* since most educators came through a system similar to the one that still pertains, as was pointed out by Karlsson (2003) and Hart (2002). The Library Association (2000, p. 1) further expands this view of the influence of the school library by stating that "school libraries are important to the learning outcomes of the whole school and the impact goes beyond its walls to the family and the wider community".

## Values underpinning the document

Hart (1995, pp. 18-19) cautions that decision-makers should firstly identify underlying values (a belief that something is good and desirable), as policy decisions frequently require that a choice be made between conflicting values and aspirations. This choice may require prioritising in the sometimes inevitable trade-off process that takes place during policy analysis.

The Delphi panel concluded that the values underpinning the policy document were identified and defined clearly, and that these inspired confidence on the pedagogical level (the vision of libraries' role, OBE and resource-based learning). However, the policy, without losing its sharp educational focus, needed to be stronger on the role of school libraries in social inclusion. Social inclusion may be difficult to measure (since *qualitative data often relies on anecdote*); yet at the same time panellists observed that it is inseparable from the library's mission and vision, and gave the example of both adult basic literacy and functional literacy being important social issues (in the wider school communities) that affect school library services in rural areas too.

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## Policy goals and objectives

Policy goals and objectives help to clarify the policy problem. Before the identification and formulation of policy goals and objectives can be evaluated it is necessary to ascertain whether the policy document is clear in the formulation of its **broad purpose**, in other words "where . . . we want to go" and "what . . . we want to achieve" (Roux, 2000, p. 116). This statement means that in order to decide on a suitable course of action one needs to understand what the policy seeks to accomplish. Moreover, policies are never "complete in terms of (their) outcomes or effect" and are affected by changes brought about by factors such as technological advances or new political

leadership. Colebatch (2002, p. 60) cautions that in practice there are many participants in the policy process, all with their own distinct and even contradictory ideas about goals and objectives. They may even have different ideas about what the problem is.

There was consensus in the panel that the broad purpose of the policy had been clearly formulated. One panel member, however, pointed out that the purpose, which is to build awareness, relies on the core notion of three models. Inherent in this conceptualisation is the transitory nature of the models since the ultimate aim is for schools to progress to a centralised school library, and it is important that the need for progression from one model to the next be spelled out and the factors that will bring about the shift be identified. The other panellists agreed and suggested including in the policy document an appendix providing examples in the form of three case studies that would make this progression of models clear.

## Target group expectations

A policy problem should be concerned not only with the expectations of those who will be affected by the policy outcomes, but also "with the significance of differing values and culture groups in South Africa" (Roux, 2000, p. 115). Panel members commended the clear statement that the policy *will establish and develop school libraries*. It was proposed that staffing, reading and literacy be included in the purpose and objectives of the policy.

The panel offered the following observations regarding teacher expectations, understanding and motivation:

- Teachers view central libraries as the only option: some panel members considered this an unrealistic expectation while others insisted that alternatives will be seen as perpetuating inequalities, and as second-best. Panellists suggested that this view might be based more on non-delivery of library services than on *efficient service delivery on a small scale*. Furthermore, this perception could point to a rigid view of a school library where teachers have no experience of a dynamic service. It could also be attributed to the fact that the alternatives to a central library are *complex and evolving*;
- Teachers have a limited understanding of the benefits of information literacy and reading, due in large part to the training received. A utilitarian emphasis on reading skills does not do justice to the myriad benefits of a reading culture in schools. Moreover, teacher training programs should acknowledge and deal with this problem, and where necessary, re-skilling of staff should take place;
- It can be problematic to sustain patience while managing such a big undertaking as the provisioning of core collections to schools over a period of six years. The issue is aggravated by the periodic restructuring of the provincial education department resulting in staff members being transferred before the policy aims have been achieved. What is important though is to keep those involved informed and motivated.

However, not all panellists agreed that the differing values and various cultural groups in South Africa had been sufficiently taken into account in the broad purpose, objectives, and values underpinning the policy document. Even though they concede that the policy document does refer to overarching documents which take into account values and cultural groups both nationally and in KwaZulu-Natal, and accepts that all groups want access to quality education for their children, panel members thought that the policy could be more culturally inclusive by

mentioning the building of literature collections reflecting and endorsing learners' cultures, and by listening to the views of the differing cultural and minority groups during future policy review.

An observation that the aim of the policy actually seems to be to promote the school library as a methodological tool in outcomes-based education (in fact the *essential underpinning of the educational approach*) solicited a mixed response. Panel members commented that the curricular emphasis could have been used as a device to promote libraries and reading with the Department's management (*framing the document in the language of the decision-makers*), but all approaches needed continual reassessment and they cautioned that it would be unwise to emphasise only one approach. However, research has indicated that successful policy should explicitly formulate the school library's expected role in teaching and learning (Knuth, 1995, p. 295).

## Policy issues and objectivity

The heterogeneous nature of South African society requires a particular fastidiousness about objectivity and the setting aside of personal values when formulating policy so that issues can be investigated impartially (Roux, 2000, p. 124). As far as the KwaZulu-Natal *School Library Policy* is concerned, most panellists agreed that policy issues had been treated objectively, but comments from one panel member solicited a number of responses in subsequent rounds. The first observation was that the policy assumed a common desire for information literacy and for inclusion in the information society. Panellists suggested that this assumption was correct and an important principle that should underpin the document and be *argued more forcefully and not taken as a given*. Reference was made to cellular telephone technology exposing users to the use of technology and access to information, and the lack of take-up of initiatives like the TeleCentres (TeleCentres are public places where people can access computers, the internet, and other digital technologies (Etta [2003])) was explained by observing that people needed to be sensitised to the reasons as to why they need information from external sources. Stilwell (2007, p. 103) agreed that this "form of [cellular] ICT access holds promise for addressing access and equity issues in future", citing Mostert (2005) who reported a mobile services coverage of 95 per cent of the population in 2005.

The second premise was that, although parents and teachers might want a school library with computers, when this option becomes one of a range of alternatives to choose from (such as toilets, sports facilities or laboratories) the choice becomes more difficult – and opting for a school library would not necessarily mean that this library would be used effectively. Panel members had strong opinions about this statement and agreed that parents and teachers should never *have to choose between toilets and education. If this is still the case, government has failed and is still failing its children*. They argued that the perception that education can take place without a school library and resources was the real problem, and believed that the policy should uphold *the assumption that the choice would be for education, and thus a library*. The panel agreed that in reality these choices still had to be made, and that these attitudes needed to be confronted and changed *with clear explanations* (to move beyond 'assumptions'). They rightly observed that priorities and resources did influence schools' choices at times and suggested one would initially work with the schools that choose libraries as a priority. It was hoped that, even though school libraries had been underutilised in the old dispensation, changes in curriculum and teaching styles would *make the school library a living force* that will achieve the policy's aim of *well functioning libraries where materials are used effectively and enhance educational and personal goals*.

## Forecasting and the expected future

Since the nature of goals and objectives is concerned with what ought to be achieved by a policy, it contains elements of forecasting, that is to say it identifies the expected future. Policy makers need to know what they want to achieve in order to be able to select the most appropriate policy alternatives; in other words, they need to take into account the probable impact of an envisaged policy (Roux, 2000, pp. 117-118).

The Delphi questionnaire firstly asked panellists to project what they perceived the expected future would be as revealed in the policy document, and secondly whether the task team had succeeded in selecting alternatives that would bring about this future. Each forecast was then ranked to

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indicate its feasibility. The panellists identified five broad policy areas in their forecast, namely access to school library services, library space, resources, support, and redress (ranked in order of feasibility below):

- **Access to school library services:** The panel envisaged the adequate provision of basic school library services to all schools in the province where learners will have some form of access to library resources, but on condition that teachers *allow* access and encourage learners as well as teachers to use the resources.
- **Library space:** Panellists forecast a library space, centralised, in the classroom, or in a cluster that would be configured, more likely, according to circumstance than to need. However, the issue of how the central library (third model) would evolve still needed to be resolved, and a 'virtual library' need not be seen as the ultimate model. It was further suggested that the central school library model in a revised policy might more firmly be sold as a learning resource centre, integrating a computer room with the traditional library.
- **Resources:** The panel envisaged (that the chosen school library model would house) appropriate resources, ICT, and programs to promote information literacy and reading. As far as ICT is concerned the panel concurred that, while it is difficult to keep up with *cutting edge* developments due to constant growth and change in this field, the basics can nevertheless be implemented. They cautioned that there should be a balance between all the available tools and technologies. Although ICT is not the panacea for all problems, the policy document may well come across as too rooted in the past and underestimating the role of ICT, hence widening the divide between the library and e-education sectors. The policy should *recognise and sell the potential of ICT in school libraries to leapfrog historical disadvantage*.
- **Support:** Panel members forecast that trained staff who will support the above implementation of services over time would be available and that this in turn would contribute to the holistic development of information literate learners in the province. Staffing is an important factor, since research has indicated that a trained (full-time) librarian collaborating with teachers to teach and integrate literature and information skills into the curriculum is essential for the full integration of the school library into the learning process (Todd, Kulthau and OELMA 2004; Montiel-Overall, 2005).
- **Redress:** The panellists anticipated that the implementation of the policy will provide some redress of the past for the majority of schools, the lower ranking of this outcome acknowledges that the matter is complex and will require more than the intervention of the policy to be resolved over time.

However, the Delphi panel agreed that the policy alternatives that were selected are appropriate and will most likely bring about the anticipated outcomes.

## Policy choices

During the policy formulating process, fear of change may sometimes make it necessary to accept less radical policy options (Roux, 2000, p. 123). Panellists pointed out that the policy choices made might have been politically or economically strategic, but agreed that a certain vagueness and gaps in the formulation of these choices could be useful provided that the original spirit of the document was not lost when these gaps were explored. Colebatch (2002, p. 66) explains that, for example, goal statements tend not to be very precise since policy participants try to build support for their activities through these statements and “the broader and less specific they are, the more likely it is that they will attract support”. The same would hold true for a certain vagueness regarding policy choices.

## Coverage of key elements

Policy failure can be the result of defects in the policy design, such as the lack of clear objectives, or inaccurate targeting of the policy programs resulting in inappropriate prioritisation or little practical application of the policy (Meyer and Cloete, 2000b, p. 249). This failing underlines the importance of addressing and including in the policy document all the relevant key elements that will ensure successful policy implementation.

The preceding analysis of the panellists' views, regarding the adequacy of the policy as far as forecasting and policy choices are concerned, is reflected in their ratings of the comprehensiveness of the coverage of each of the key elements individually identified in the policy document. All panel members agreed on both the key elements and the ratings assigned to each element by other panel members.

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The ratings for the following elements were given as follows: the vision and mission, purpose, principles, redress, inclusivity, models, literacy policy, norms, provision for future developments, and basis in experience were all rated as adequate. The purpose, principles, guidelines, diversity, and implementation were rated by the panellists as very adequate. Only the policy background was rated as inadequate. The problem statement and the principles underlying the document were considered as being neither adequate nor inadequate and therefore rated neutrally. However, panel members were confident that the extent to which the policy document identified, understood and expressed the problems it wanted to address was adequate and for some even very adequate

In summary, the interpretation of data pertaining to the adequacy of the policy document indicates that there are some policy areas that need a stronger focus. The underlying issues to the policy problem need to be articulated to delineate the problems the policy seeks to address, and the major causes of the problems linked to the problem statement. A stronger focus on social inclusion was suggested, and it was noted that although the broad purpose of the policy had been formulated the transition between the models should be spelled out. Taking into account the perception of teachers that a central school library represents equity of access, the panel nevertheless consented that target group expectations had been taken into account. It was noted

that collection building that reflects cultural diversity could be highlighted in order to provide appropriate resources and thus promote library usage. Lastly, the panel thought that divergent needs had been taken into account in the suggested models, and that the chosen alternatives were realistic and appropriate to bring about the expected outcomes of the policy.

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## Policy implementation and practical implementation problems

Dyer (1999, p. 45) comments that policy makers assume "decisions to bring about change will automatically result in changed policy or institutional behaviour" instead of planning out the implementation stages which follow from the decision to initiate change, and points out that "implementation is not a brief pause between a shiny idea and a smart delivery". These sentiments are mirrored by Brynard (2000, p. 177), who observes that implementation is not purely a managerial or administrative problem, it is a process concerned with who gets what, when, how, where and from whom, and not only are there multiple actors, but implementation also operates at multiple levels. Moreover, implementation cannot be viewed as an action to be carried out according to a "carefully predetermined plan . . . it is a process that, at the very best, can only be managed, and lessons must be learnt as one proceeds through the different implementation stages" (Brynard, 2000, p. 187). In managing implementation one strategically "fixes" variables over which there are some direct or indirect influence so as to induce change in the ones over which one does not have such influence, and through this process steer implementation towards more effective outcomes (Brynard, 2000, p. 187). One such example is where ELITS adjusted the number of school provisioned annually in order to continue with policy implementation and offset the detrimental effect of a fixed budget.

### Critical variables

Scholars of policy implementation consistently identify five interlinked, critical variables common to different sectors and to countries in different stages of development (Brynard, 2000, p. 165) namely:

1. The **content of the policy** itself (what it sets out to do [goals], how directly it relates to the issue, and how it aims to solve the perceived problem).
2. The nature of the **institutional context** – the corridor through which the policy must travel and the boundaries by which it is limited in the implementation process The institutional context came visibly to the fore in other sections of the research, e.g. a lack of ELITS advisors in districts and the subsequent lack of communication and training resulting in resource material being underutilised in schools, and the lack of IT hardware and software for advisors and of ICT support in the districts.
3. The **commitment** to the goals and methods of the policy of those entrusted with carrying out the implementation at various levels,
4. The **administrative capacity** of implementers to carry out the desired changes, and
5. The **support of clients and coalitions** whose interests may be either enhanced or threatened by the policy, and the strategies they use to strengthen or deflect policy implementation (Brynard, 2000, p. 165).

Variables 3, 4 and 5 were put to the Delphi panel and they were asked to indicate which of these would most probably influence the KZN *School Library Policy's* implementation

The Delphi panel ranked the commitment of those implementing the policy(3) and the support of clients and their strategies to strengthen or deflect implementation (5) as the two variables most likely to adversely influence policy implementation. They surprisingly ranked administrative capacity to carry out changes as less likely to influence implementation. In reality this aspect has been one of the biggest obstacles so far: cumbersome procurement procedures, having the budget approved timorously, and a lack of administrative support in district offices, resulted in the implementers at district level not always being able to support the policy initiative adequately. Factors that come into play are reporting lines where there are district demands that have to be met within certain timeframes, and where what head office perceives as urgent may be interpreted differently in district context. However, not all panel members agreed with the combined ranking results, and commented that these factors rank equally since they tend to be interconnected in an education setting. Yet they pointed out that with committed staff implementing the policy and clients supporting the implementation *there would be a basis for lobbying for the capacity required* – thus validating their ranking above.

Adequate allowance for human resources is a vital element of successful policy implementation, and panel members expressed some reservations regarding this aspect despite the inclusion of a training

**Adequate allowance for human resources is a vital element of successful policy implementation**

program in the policy document. Researchers such as Sturges and Neill (1998), Rosenberg (2001) and Hart and Zinn (2007) have likewise pointed out the adverse effect of lack of capacity to bring about the required changes regarding curriculum implementation, new methodologies and a paradigm shift as far as the role of the school library is concerned. Panellists suggested that effective training should start in pre-service teacher training, and that it might even be useful to encourage the establishment of (voluntary) local forums/interest groups for ongoing support. The importance of continuous professional development was stressed, especially for those in positions of responsibility, a factor that would obviously have implications for resourcing and training in the implementation phases of the policy. The panel acknowledged that a great deal will depend on the teachers' understanding of the curriculum. When teachers are unfamiliar with and apprehensive of the curriculum, teaching and learning suffer. Yet the panel expected that the policy process could *play a part in building teachers' understanding*. All conceded that human resources may be *the Achilles heel in the sustainability of the plans* and that the lack of teacher-librarians will hinder progress. At the same time it was pointed out that there are many trained teacher-librarians who are teaching full-time instead of working in school libraries, and that *in the urban areas the lack of a post is a much greater problem than the lack of trained staff*. At the same time it *may be a problem to attract (qualified) people to deeply rural schools*.

## Change and policy issues

Many of the observations so far endorse Brynard's (2000, p. 178) statement that "policies are continuously transformed by implementation actions that simultaneously alter resources and objectives . . . when we act to implement a policy we change it". It is important to realise that "policy changes take place before, during and after implementation . . . the truth is that policy change takes place throughout the policy life cycle" (Meyer and Cloete, 2000b, p. 239).

Taking into account the above observations, the panel drew on their own experience concerning change and commented on whether the following six policy issues identified from the literature (Meyer and Cloete 2000b, pp. 239-241) had been taken into account and adequately catered for in the KZN *School Library Policy*. These policy issues are discussed in order of their ranking as far as their perceived likelihood to influence policy changes throughout the policy's life cycle and during



implementation are concerned. Two issues, namely changes in political leadership and in policy solutions or service delivery strategies, ranked the highest, the dynamic and changing policy environment as well as institutional changes was ranked third, changes in technological advances fifth, and change in the resource base was ranked sixth.

## Changes in political leadership

Change of political leadership is a common cause of policy change in the government, and drastic policy change can occur when, for example, the ruling party is replaced (Meyer and Cloete, 2000b, p. 241). On the national level a marked change in policy focus was apparent every time a new minister took over the education portfolio, and in KwaZulu-Natal, too, from the researcher's observations, a change of the status quo was manifested whenever a new MEC for Education was appointed (2000, 2001, 2004) or when a new senior management team took over. Such change was even more evident when the ruling party in the province was replaced in 2004.

The Delphi panel ranked changes in political leadership high as an unforeseen issue that can call for policy change on both national and provincial levels. There was consensus that the aims of the policy should be seen as essential and therefore outside of the realm of political change, and though changes may be relevant when they impact on education, they should not affect the roll-out of these services. Furthermore, if policy is developed locally by those closest to the problem it would be difficult for new leadership to abandon implementation since the policy was already in place and being implemented.

The importance of lobbying and advocacy was stressed, and the panel conceded that, despite the above argument, in reality different political leaders have different agendas and priorities which do tend to impact on policy implementation. Yet with persistence, determination and flexibility these issues would be manageable.

## Changes in policy solutions or service delivery strategies

Conventionally the government was seen as the main provider of goods and services, but Meyer and Cloete (2000b, p. 241) note that this view changed during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Attributed mainly to a lack of financial resources and technological advances, governments are now more active in facilitating service delivery, in other words, considering alternative service delivery strategies to direct service delivery. The Delphi panel ranked policy solution and service delivery changes as an issue that can have the same high impact on policy implementation as changes in political leadership.

The panel members pointed out that innovative solutions and positive changes were needed and are in fact being implemented, and given that change forms part of any policy, they agreed that regular policy review should accommodate new planning. It was agreed that these changes should not influence good policy and are actually desirable if they are the result of feedback after implementation. Moreover, they suggested that policy implementation should be given enough time to show its practical strengths and weaknesses.

## The dynamic and changing policy environment

Social, political, cultural and technological changes may compel policy-makers to modify policies in an attempt to reflect the reality around them, and this issue ranked third in importance for the panel, together with institutional changes. The panel reiterated that policy development should be ongoing and implementation should change to incorporate and allow for changes.

Panellists agreed that the document deals with diversity in KwaZulu-Natal schools by way of the models, and though it may not be to everyone's satisfaction, it is a start. For them, the provision of basic services will lay the foundation for equity, and once this has been achieved the services can be improved. They brought up the issue of technological developments which demand flexibility, and pointed out even affluent countries struggle to keep up with changes in electronic resource provisioning. The panel suggested that, for a reality check, a mechanism was needed for monitoring and implementation that is at the same time informed by an environmental scan.

**Social, political, cultural and technological changes may compel policy-makers to modify policies in an attempt to reflect the reality around them . . .**

## Institutional changes

In 2008 the KwaZulu-Natal Education Department restructured for the fourth time since 1995, this time referring to a "re-alignment of the structure" (KwaZulu-Natal. Department of Education 2008, p. 1). The consequences are that every time a new Chief Director is appointed ELITS needs to once again embark on establishing trust and understanding with the appointee in order to ensure that the ELITS vision and mission, as well as the directorate's mandates and projects, are understood and supported.

The Delphi panellists commented, based on their experience, on three main aspects regarding institutional changes, namely the attributes of good policy, smaller operational units, and other service delivery options. It was argued that although these shifts may be out of their hands, policy developers need to be aware of the variables that operate and should put a practical policy in place. Well-written policy should not be affected by organisational changes if it has an implementation plan and is communicated to and owned by the policy implementers. This ownership of policy is not without problems, as Colebatch (2002, p. 4) points out when he observes that people construct their own (and often diverse) meanings. Yet the panellists agreed that as much allowance as possible had been made in the policy, but there remained a large number of possible variables and issues, many of which *cannot be dealt with in a policy document, but how they are dealt with will be informed by the policy document.*

There were noticeable differences in the observations made by panellists regarding allowances made for *ineffective organisational structures and work processes*. Those panellists not directly involved in the local school library sector commented that adequate allowances had been made, whereas those panel members familiar with local conditions in the school library sector identified this issue as a major constraint. The latter group of panellists pointed out the problems with head office and district line functions whereby there are the two lines of authority, and district ELITS officials report to district managers and not to ELITS which is a Head Office directorate. The KZN

Department of Education's structure is a typical example of matrix management that is "based on two or more reporting systems that are linked to the vertical organisation hierarchy, and to horizontal relationships based on geographic, product or project requirements" (*BNet Business Dictionary* 2008). All panellists acknowledged in a subsequent round that head office and district line function problems may compromise policy implementation, and should restructuring not address the problem, more and better policy advocacy will be needed.

Smaller and more efficient units in an organisation are a world-wide reality and perceived to be less bureaucratic and less formal (Meyer and Cloete, 2000b, p. 240). The panel perceived smaller units with budgets, autonomy (but not to the extent of derailing policy implementation), management capacity, and motivated staff to be a good solution for better service delivery. They pointed out that if these units can make decisions while maintaining support and guidance from the parent unit they will feel that they have some impact on decision making.

The panel identified additional organisational constraints which they believed should also have been taken into account or factored into future planning. These include the physical conditions in schools, and the rural environment in KwaZulu-Natal with its lack of other libraries.

## Changes in technological advances

This issue was ranked fifth in importance, although some panellists argued that it should have been ranked fourth or even higher. In 2004 only 10.4% of all schools in KwaZulu-Natal had access to computers for teaching and learning, and data analysis from the HSRC Survey (South Africa. Department of Education, 1999b) and the ELITS School Library Audit (KwaZulu-Natal. Department of Education, 2004) confirmed that learners in very few schools had access to technology for educational purposes. Other factors influencing the sustainability of ICT development in rural schools are the distance and terrain, the lack of technical support, and school readiness which requires more than just a school expressing a need for computers.

The panel emphasised that this is one part of redress that needs to take place, since there is a great demand by both learners and parents for ICT access, and even if there is a sometimes unrealistic expectation that ICT skills *will open all doors*, this perception should be optimised since it is common across countries and recognises a changing world. Panellists observed that the basic skills and principles of reading and information-seeking can be learnt without access to IT, and once acquired can be transferred to that environment when the facilities become available, so both basic skills education as well as ICT access should be ongoing. It was agreed that more research was needed on the subject of skills transfer as ICTs *have a huge impact on information-seeking and might change the ground rules*, but that both research and experience gained will facilitate change as and when more knowledge becomes available.

## Change in the resource base

Government departments are required to reprioritise and improve performance budgeting, and new interventions and strategic priorities are factors that need to be taken into account when budgets for policies and projects are decided and allocated. The Delphi panel ranked this issue as least likely to influence policy changes.

The panel agreed that reprioritising to improve performance budgeting *makes it doubly important for accepted policy to be in place*, and that improved budget performance is to be applauded as long as the benefits are *redistributed to education*. They correctly pointed out that, though the availability of resources may have been taken into account, it is nevertheless difficult to deal with this issue as the impact on performance is long-term. However, in practical terms the change in resource base has resulted in the program's budget remaining the same over a period of four years, and the project has lagged behind in terms of its performance: instead of provisioning 4000 schools by 2007/8 only 2780 schools have been provisioned and the implementation plan had to be adapted to reflect this backlog of 1220 schools (KwaZulu-Natal. Department of Education 2007). Other examples of reprioritisation have occurred when national priorities have had to be factored into financial planning at provincial level without the support of conditional grants from the national department.

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## Risk factors identified by the Delphi panel

The panellists were asked to draw on their own experience and to indicate and rank other factors that can limit the success of policy implementation. They agreed that training and ongoing professional development rank as the most important factor to ensure successful implementation. The second highest rated factor was the shifting of paradigms *because of entrenched habits, comfort zones and the like*, and they proposed that a *champion* (at senior level) was needed in each school. These two issues, training and teaching styles (paradigm shift), are supported in the literature by Olën, 1997; Rosenberg, 1998; Sturges and Neill, 1998; Christie, 1999 and Todd, 2001.

Six other factors that could influence the success of policy implementation were ranked equally in third place:

- The teacher-librarians as well as the teachers, their knowledge, motivation, skills and training, and their ability to communicate well;
- School libraries that make a measurable difference to the quality of teaching and learning in the school. It was pointed out that this factor was important for the credibility of the policy, since improved levels of performance and increased levels of funding should follow policy implementation;
- The ability to see the importance of resources in the context of enhancing reading and thinking abilities was another issue that the panel suggested could be addressed through training and lobbying;
- The problem of budgetary constraints and competing for the same funding allocation. A possible solution suggested was the ring-fencing of the school library resources budget, but at the same time it was mentioned that districts too need to take responsibility for their budgetary needs;
- The availability of appropriate and adequate (locally produced) resources, although some panel members disagreed and observed that locally produced resources are available, as is the capacity to produce them: *demand will ensure supply*;
- The availability of trained professionals in the field as well as adequate training facilities. Panel members added that, as with locally produced resources, demand will ensure supply as far as professionals are concerned, and pointed out that training courses can be run anywhere and not necessarily at a training facility. It should be noted that in the ELITS School Library Audit (KwaZulu-Natal. Department of Education, 2004) 2 401 schools indicated they have a venue that can be used for training purposes.

The panel ranked the following factors fourth in importance for successful policy implementation:

- The readiness of the school, specifically the school library, which must be transformed and able to implement a whole school information literacy policy so that the implementation process is not just a matter of provisioning. It was suggested that the policy should cover the plans for getting schools' support and buy-in more strongly. This aspect can be included in the training programs, or in the implementation strategy. By securing the understanding and cooperation of school management and staff, and by lobbying, one can assume that the implementation of a whole school information literacy policy will be an achievable objective.
- The dropping or flagging in drive and commitment over a number of years can jeopardise policy implementation. The panel advised that policies needed committed and energetic *champions*, and that teams had to reinvent themselves and their enthusiasm.
- Innovative thinking will be needed when it comes to the use of all available resources. This issue can be addressed by relevant training; for example, people tend to think that resources must be all ICT but training in the use of print materials can show that even newspapers can be a valuable resource.
- The demographics of the province could pose a problem. Distances and inaccessibility can affect the dissemination of resources and information.

In summary the panel members agreed that some of the failures of local policy initiatives defy rational explanation, and *reside in the realm of chance, personality, factions, different agendas, champions and allies in the unpredictability of the policy process.*

However, they believed that the extent to which the policy outcomes are embraced by those who implement these policies on the ground (and who should have the necessary skills to do so) can have a major impact, particularly if the policy is not seen as relevant, or possible. Staffing policies inside the schools too can either nurture or break the policy, but adequate teacher training can alleviate this problem.

**... some of the failures of local policy initiatives defy rational explanation, and reside in the realm of chance, personality, factions, different agendas, champions and allies in the unpredictability of the policy process.**

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**Dr Mariana du Toit** is a Chief Education Specialist in the Education Libraries, Information and Technology Services Directorate, KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, South Africa. She is responsible for the implementation of the directorate's School Library Development Program that supplies starter collections to the province's more than 6000 schools, and oversees the Education Centre Library, School Library Excellence awards, and Mobile Library programs.