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Preparing Personnel to Staff School Libraries in Botswana: The National Library's Input

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The development of school libraries in Botswana is the responsibility of the Educational Libraries Division of the Botswana National Library Service (BNLS). The Division carries out its school library development mandate primarily through workshops for school library personnel. Usually four days in length, the workshops are often held at one of the 14 education centres located across the country. Workshops focus on topics such as how to set up a school library, basics of library classification, maintenance of the card catalogue, development of library manuals and guides, development of circulation policies, and library budgeting.

Background Information

Botswana is a vast landlocked country that lies between South Africa, Zambia, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. With a land area of 581,730 sq km, Botswana is one of the largest countries in the subregion of Southern Africa. It also has one of the highest per-capita incomes in Africa. Botswana's per-capita income for 1997-1998 stood at P12049 (P4.8 = US \$1); its gross domestic product stood at P20428.3 million for the same period. In 1999, Botswana's per-capita income stood at US\$3,380, above that of South Africa at US\$3,160 and of Egypt at US\$1,400, for example (World Bank, 2000).

National development programs and economic emphases have concentrated on education, mining, and health. Education has been considered at both formal and informal levels. In 1977, the Botswana National Commission of Education introduced the Nine Years of Basic Education for all children. The 7-3-2 system (7 years of primary, 3 of junior secondary, and 2 of senior secondary education) will eventually change to a 6-3-3 system. As an interim measure, however, the 7-3-2 system remains in use. That Botswana's current national emphasis is on human resources is evident in the recent developments in education. Since 1994, almost 50 new secondary schools have been built and furnished. In 1998, there were 725 primary schools and 272 secondary schools; the net enrollment rate (the number of pupils enrolled in primary school who are of the official primary school entrance age as a percentage of the corresponding population) was 98.4% for primary schools, and over 95% of students completed primary school go on to secondary school.

The School Library Situation

Botswana has one of the best school library infrastructures in Southern Africa. Although not comprehensive, some comparative work has been done on school libraries in Africa; there has been the occasional report on school libraries by country in different forums such as South Central East Standing Conference of Library Associations. Reviewing all these reports together presents a messy picture of the school library situation in Africa; a systematic study of the situation or a continent-wide survey needs to be done.

However, the school library infrastructure in Botswana is such that library provision looks relatively abundant. Every one of the 27 public senior schools and the two private senior schools has a library building. Every one of the 205 community junior secondary schools has a library building. Each of these secondary school libraries has shelves; each was provided with a core collection at the inception of the service. Equipment such as bookends, date labels, issue trays, and all the usual library paraphernalia was also provided. However, only a few government primary schools have libraries. Most of the excellent English-medium (English language) primary schools such as Broadhurst and Thornhill have libraries comparable to school libraries anywhere in the world. The responsibility for the development of school libraries lies with the National Library Service.

Botswana National Library Service

The Botswana National Library Service (BNLS) came into being through an Act of Parliament in 1967. Since then, the BNLS has been the one major overseer of the library profession in Botswana. The facilitation of training of library personnel at all levels is only one of the numerous responsibilities of the BNLS. This training has taken many forms: formal training; study tours; inservice training; and conferences, symposia, and seminars.

The most formal training has been identifying and sending officers to train abroad or locally at the University of Botswana. Since the University's Department of Library Studies extended its programs to include the Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) and the Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS), professional library training has been almost exclusively undertaken locally. There are still a few rare cases of officers being sent abroad for specialized training. For example, in 1996 one officer was sponsored to study printing and publishing in the United Kingdom.

Another category of training that still requires sending people abroad is short specialized courses. A senior librarian was in Malaysia in November 1999 attending one such course on performance management. Previous beneficiaries of short external training studied information technology in the UK. The International Graduate Summer School has in the past also been subscribed to, although the strong British pound makes the program expensive.

Study tours have also been undertaken from time to time. Before the National Library's computerization project began, a team of four officers toured sites in South Africa to get a feel for what was happening there. Previous to this, an officer newly appointed to run the Village Reading Room Project (rural village libraries) was sent to look at the rural library situation in Tanzania and Malawi.

Inservice training is a major part of personnel development in the Educational Libraries Division of BNLS. As well, conferences, symposia, and seminars are frequently used to expose staff to developments in particular areas. The Zimbabwe Book Fair, which also incorporates workshops, is a popular training arena for BNLS staff. Conferences of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) have also been used as training forums. Seminars are organized occasionally for secondary school heads, but mostly the Division tries to be included in school heads' general seminars and conferences to pursue the issue of administrative support for the school librarians. Symposia tend to be external; the latest was attended in 1999 by three people from the School Libraries' Division and one from the In-Service Section of the Department of Teacher Training and Development in the Ministry of Education. Papers were presented, and the whole exercise was seen as a learning experience for the participating staff, who also were given opportunities at the Department's Annual General Meeting to share the learning experience with the rest of the Department.

BNLS Workshops for School Library Personnel

Workshops are the most popular means of training school library personnel. These workshops usually span three to five days and provide housing and conference facilities for the participants, as well as workshop papers and material for practicals. The workshops are comprehensive in terms of the coverage. The various types include cluster, school-based, and general. Over the years, we have worked with different types of workshops. For example, we might invite a particular group of people, such as junior secondary school teachers who run libraries, to a predetermined venue and program.

An average of 35 participants are trained at one time. However, there have been times when these figures were grossly exceeded. For example, a Book Box workshop was held in Francistown in 1995 that was meant for teachers handling the Book Box, as well as for teachers who were running the service without previous training. An enthusiastic education officer made the mistake of inviting all the primary schoolteachers in his jurisdiction to the workshop, and a total of 78 participants turned up. It was a nightmare. More and more teachers turned up, many in the middle of the night and having traveled all day. We met all 78 participants the following morning, travel-weary but expectant and determined to learn. We did not have the heart to

turn any back. But we resolved that, in future, numbers would have to be strictly controlled.

The workshops usually start by focusing on the reasons for the meeting. Participants introduce themselves and indicate how far they have traveled. Having established the distances traveled, the issue of expectations is addressed. What do they expect to gain from their journey, having left work and family responsibilities and traveled so far for so long? Because of the vastness of Botswana, participants sometimes come great distances to attend these workshops, sometimes as far as 700 km and, on a few occasions, over 1,000 km. A list of participants' expectations is drawn up and discussed alongside the aims and objectives of the workshop as designed by the resource personnel. Usually there is an attempt to link the two. Some expectations that are different become a basis for future workshops, but generally the divergence is not wide.

Workshop Topics

Book Processing from Receipt to Shelf is a regular topic; in one sequence, it provides all the essentials for starting a school library. Other standard topics are *Introduction to Classification; Practicals on Classification; Introduction to Filing; Practicals on Filing; and Discussion and Group Reports on Filing*. Filing exercises and assignments usually feature in the workshops for CJSS teacher-librarians, most of whom find filing of cards tiresome and often neglect to do it. Other popular topics include *Shelving, Road Map to the Library, Exercises on Shelving; Feedback on Shelving Exercises; Managing Periodicals; Maintenance and Care of Books; Practicals on Care and Repair of Books*. The latter topic is usually reinforced with a video on the care and repair of books. More topics include *Issuing Library Material: Library Rules and Regulations*, usually handled as a brainstorming exercise and practicals on library rules and regulations where participants develop their rules and regulations. We usually judge the work of the participants and sometimes offer prizes. *Reference Work, Developing Manuals and Guides, Budgeting, Mounting Displays*, practicals on mounting displays, visits to a local library, and reporting back on visits all offer a means of evaluating what has been learned theoretically during the week. Evaluation and summary usually bring closure to the workshops. Evaluation forms are filled in anonymously, but we also have evaluating discussions. At the end of the workshop, participants from afar stay the night and leave the following day.

Target Groups

Over the years, we at BNLS have trained various groups. This is in fulfillment of the BNLS's legal obligation to provide a library service to the nation. One way to ensure the provision of a library service is to empower those requiring our service to provide it for themselves. The target range for our training programs has been wide. We have targeted education officers, using a train-the-trainers approach, so that training could cascade down the line.

Library messengers have been trained and equipped to substitute in the absence of their librarians. We have trained teachers as teacher-librarians, and we have provided training for our school, public, and special librarians.

Workshop Delivery

Workshops are usually delivered by officers of the BNLS. On the whole, officers are willing to deliver papers, although we get the odd refusal every now and then. We tend to have external personnel come in to open or close workshops for us: they add weight to the proceedings. It is especially pleasant where we have developed certificates to request either a senior education officer, the local chief, or somebody of stature in the community to close the workshop and award the certificates. Some brilliant opening speeches have in the past almost preempted the keynote speakers.

The workshops usually last four days: Monday to Thursday. Occasionally, they run for three or five days. Most school heads complain when they run into five days. Although school heads would rather we had the work-shops during the school holidays, teachers are reluctant to use their holidays for library workshops. However, to be fair to the teachers, other subject workshops are held during the holidays. If the teacher has library responsibility, she or he might end up in workshops for the entire duration of the holiday.

Most of the time, the workshops take place in any one of the 14 education centres located across the country. These are convenient and mostly out of town, which ensures the participants' focus of interest. Recently, the Ministry has taken over the actual cost in terms of accommodation and meals. Whereas in the past the National Library paid the settle bills for accommodation and meals, now only claims for our resource personnel who choose to live in private premises have to be catered for. The venues used have been the Rural Innovation Industrial Centre (RIIC) in Kanye, the Centre Hotel also in Kanye, the Kologano Centre in Palapye, the Kalamo Centre in Mahalapye, and the YWCA in Francistown. These are private facilities, and their charges tend to be fairly high.

Participation, Feedback, and Evaluation

Participation has been usually quite enthusiastic. In sessions where we have organized tests and competitions, it has been lively. Group work often generates such rewarding team spirit that links are forged that last well beyond the workshops we have together. We do receive feedback from school heads and teacher librarians of how much better the participants are performing, but perhaps the most rewarding feedback is seeing a library transformed after a participant has acquired skills from a workshop. Work-shops usually end with an evaluation, and these help us to look back at the program. They also provide feedback on the venue and facilities at whichever centre we are using. Evaluation even helps us with the timing of

future workshops. Certain times in the school calendar might not be conducive to the release of teachers for workshops.

Training Policy and Planning

A draft training policy might soon be ratified to give better direction to the Department's training activities. For example, the Department's phase one automation project is over. School libraries are not yet automated, but all schools have computers. The next step is to prepare the librarians for the imminent arrival of computers into their libraries. They have been trained in basic computer skills, but it is a foundation that has to be built on.

A lot of effort and time go into these in-house training programs, although the state of our libraries does not always reflect the effort put in. We do get pleasant surprises when in some remote place we see a well functioning, aesthetically appealing library welcoming us in. It makes it all worthwhile.

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