The state of book development in South Africa

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Abstract

South Africa has a strong publishing industry, but it is not development oriented. Illiteracy remains high, there is no growth of a reading culture, and resources for education of adults and children are both inadequate and under-utilised. Publishers rely on the education sector, and the collapse of the textbook market in the 1990s cost the industry almost half its jobs.

The need for state support for book development remains. Although pivotal policies such as the Constitution demonstrate intentions that could support a stronger book culture, and value indigenous languages and multilingualism, they do not promote the publication of reading material in indigenous languages. The disregard for copyright law continues to have a negative effect on publishing, as did the shift to outcomes-based education (OBE) which was widely interpreted to imply that textbooks were unnecessary.

The shrinkage of the textbook market in the 1990s coincided with loss of financial support for the alternative press, and many small anti-apartheid publishers closed or were taken over by larger publishers. There is now less diversity of ownership and output than there was during apartheid, and there has been little development of senior black staff in publishing.

Since 1994, black schools have seen increased resources, upgrading for teachers, reductions in class size, and growing competence in administrative procedures. State spending on textbooks, which by 1998 had dropped to 16% of what it was in 1994, is slowly growing. In the ABET sector, publishing is minimal; the needs and rights of adult learners are simply not being addressed.

In the private sector, a range of endeavours aim to promote African writing and interest in reading. However, key issues that undermine the growth of a reading culture and a more vigorous publishing industry are:

- the dissonance between the recognition that for the establishment of a true reading culture, reading must be promoted for its own sake, and the lack of support for attempts to do this

- the devaluing of African languages as languages of reading and learning, and publishers' consequent reluctance to publish in African languages in spite of evidence that conceptual development is aided by strengthening literacy and oral skills in the mother-tongue.

Book development in the African context

Patterns of the production and use of books in Africa are very different from patterns in continents where traditions of literacy have become established in multiple formal and informal contexts. In Africa, less than 5% of the population of most African countries are active readers, and book production is almost entirely for the educational sector, where donor funding has stimulated the demand. Also, nearly all bookshops in Africa are in urban areas, sometimes many hundreds of miles apart and, in contrast to most Western countries, little attention is paid to copyright laws (Wafawarowa, 2000).

Governments of some African countries have attempted to foster a culture of reading. Zimbabwe has gone some way towards preparing for a national book policy and has been acclaimed for its annual Zimbabwe International Book Fair. Tanzania, Ghana, Mozambique and Kenya have book policies that attempt to make books more accessible to ordinary people, to shift book provision from the State to the private sector, and to promote local involvement in the book industry. Effects of these policies have not so far been dramatically positive, although there are strong arguments for the contribution they can make (Wafawarowa, 2000).

Aid policies, which have seldom been effective in the long term in laying the foundation of even a small sustainable publishing sector, have changed recently, partly because of lobbying by the African Publishers' Network. In newer models of implementation, financial aid is given to purchasers of print material rather than to publishers or suppliers of material. Previously, aid was in the form of the donation of material commissioned from publishers who were often external to the country targeted for aid. Implicit in the new model is a greater likelihood of local professional involvement, local commercial initiative and local political support (Anderson, 2001). The African

Publishers' Network is working towards lobbying governments, the private sector and development agencies for more support for book development in Africa (Wafawarowa, 2000).

The South African context

In its *Research report on book development in South Africa* (Book Development Council of South Africa, 1997), the Council noted that the producers of books in South Africa competently produce high-quality books on a range of subjects, but described the sector as weak in its orientation towards development. Reasons given for this description, which largely echo the description above of general patterns of usage of books in Africa, are that the publishing industry has geared itself towards the school book trade, there has been little provision for reading in indigenous African languages, distribution outlets are almost all in traditionally white areas, and people employed in the sector are not representative of South Africa's population (Book Development Council of South Africa, 1997, p. i).

This reliance on the production of school books for bulk purchasing by education departments is a common survival strategy among publishers in countries such as South Africa where illiteracy, poverty and social and economic instability hamper the development of a culture of reading and book buying. The collapse of the textbook market in the 1990s in South Africa, where education departments lacked both the funds to purchase textbooks and the capacity to distribute them, was disastrous for publishers (Seeber, 2000, p. 279). The South African publishing industry shrank by 40% between 1990 and 2000, with 1997 being a particularly bad year (Inglis, 2001), and spending on textbooks declined by approximately 84% from R900-million in 1994 to about R150-million in 1998 (Easy Reading for Adults Initiative, 1999). At the same time, international financial support for anti-*apartheid* organisations and initiatives came to an end and, consequently, much of the alternative publishing sector lost its support.

Policies that have influenced book and print media development prior to 2002

The environment facing current book developers in South Africa is daunting: eight years after the end of the *apartheid* era a quarter of the population remains functionally illiterate, there has been no discernable emergence of a reading culture, resources allocated to education of both adults and children are, in many instances, woefully inadequate or underutilised, or both. However, on the positive side, some publishers express cautious optimism for the future.

Policies related to book and print media development and the promotion of literacy in South Africa include:

- the Constitution
- the establishment of the Pan South African Language Board
- the establishment of organisations meant to promote reading and nurture a reading culture
- copyright law
- outcomes-based education and Curriculum 2005.

The Constitution of South Africa (December 1996)

The languages section of the Constitution 6 (1-5) accords official status to eleven languages: Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, Sesotho sa Leboa, Sesotho, siSwati, Xitsonga, Setswana, Tshivenda, isiXhosa and isiZulu. As part of according this status, the Constitution states that 'conditions shall be created for their development and for the promotion of their equal use and enjoyment'. The text of the Constitution deals with people's right to be addressed in any of these eleven languages in their dealings with any public administration at the national and provincial levels of government, and with the promotion of multilingualism and the encouragement of their use in appropriate circumstances.

It also states (Section 10(a)) that provision would be made by an Act of Parliament for the establishment by the Senate of an independent Pan South African Language Board, which would function to further the development of the official South African languages.

The Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB)

PANSALB was established by an Act of Parliament (No. 59 of 1995). Its central purpose was to provide for the recognition, implementation and furtherance of multilingualism in the Republic of South Africa. In order to do this, the board was given the task of development of previously marginalised languages, and to promote the use of all the official languages.

In its discussion document, *PANSALB's position on the promotion of multilingualism in South Africa* (February 1998), PANSALB includes in its description of its role:

- engagement in language development and elaboration
- the creation of conditions for extending indigenous languages
- promoting multilingual communicative competence among South Africans.

It would seem reasonable to expect that publication of books or other texts in indigenous South African languages, especially easy-to-read publications, would be essential in working towards the achievement of the goals articulated by PANSALB. However, the promotion and support of the publication of accessible and engaging reading material in indigenous languages is not mentioned at all in the Act of Parliament by which PANSALB was established, nor in any of the subsequent amendments to this Act. In PANSALB's discussion document, *PANSALB's position on the promotion of multilingualism in South Africa* (February 1998), there is only one reference to texts being made available in South African indigenous languages: in reference to official documents (point number 5.1), there is a suggestion that official documents be made available in languages relevant to their target audience.

The establishment and demise of the Book Development Council of South Africa

This Council was constituted in May 1994, buoyed up by hopes of positive political change and of its potential for playing a strong role in supporting the growth of a reading culture. People associated with the Council hoped that its work would include the development of a national book policy, the promotion of books as tools of transformation in educational and social spheres, and the strengthening of the book industry.

The Council received a grant from Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology in 1996, and produced its *Research report on book development in South Africa* in 1997. It was envisaged that from recommendations included in this report a national book policy would be developed. However, this report was not well received within the publishing community, and its recommendations, including those relating to the role that government could play, were not implemented. Because of poor support, structural weakness and lack of further funding, the Book Development Council never fulfilled the role initially envisaged for it and became defunct in 1998 (Anderson, 2001) without having managed the development of a South African national book policy.

The establishment of The Centre for the Book

While the Book Development Council was still in existence, the South African Library started to set up a Centre for the Book, not associated particularly with any sector, but modelled on the Centre for the Book at the Library of Congress in Washington, to promote books and reading. By the time the Centre for the Book was set up in 1998, the Book Development Council had ceased to function, and the Centre for the Book was seen as an organisation which could take on much of what had been expected from the Council. Although the Centre for the Book is performing some of the activities envisaged for it, its role and structure were still being debated late in 2001, and its functioning has been hindered by this lack of final clarity about its form and purpose.

Print Industry Cluster Council

In 1998, the Print Industry Cluster Council was formed with the purpose of voicing the interests of the book industry. Like the Centre for the Book, this organisation could act to advise government and co-ordinate policy development (Anderson, 2001).

Copyright law

Controls dictated by copyright law can be seen in a negative light, in that they can limit access to knowledge to those who can afford to pay for books or other forms of recorded information. In this light, copyright law may be interpreted as entrenching control of knowledge and information in developed countries, and there is a lingering perception by many in Africa that it is an artefact of colonialism. However, without some guarantee that there is a financial reward in publishing books, there is little incentive for books to be produced at all, and in recent years, with the increase in works by African writers, support within Africa for the protection of intellectual property has

increased (Seeber, 2000, p. 281).

Copyright has been a contested issue for many years between the industrialised north and so-called developing nations, which argued for a lifting of controls to allow them to reproduce and circulate material, especially educational material, developed in better resourced countries. Concessions were granted in 1962 through the Stockholm Protocol, and in 1971, when the Paris Revision of the Berne Convention obliged developed countries to allow institutions in undeveloped countries to use educational and research material without the usual copyright controls. In the last two decades, however, as publishing industries were started in poorly resourced countries, they have adopted – at least in terms of their legislation – positions supporting international copyright law as expressed in the Berne Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention; most African countries, including South Africa, are signatories to the World Copyright Treaty (1996) of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (Seeber, 2000, p. 281). Nevertheless, infringement of copyright law is customarily taken far less seriously in nations that are not industrially developed, where making multiple copies for use in classes or other teaching contexts is condoned, and – where huge numbers of counterfeit copies of books, CDs, and tapes are made specifically for sale – even piracy is tolerated.

In South Africa, the Copyright Act (Act No. 98 of 1978) protects publishers from having their work illegally reproduced. In spite of this, though, it is widespread practice for teachers to buy one copy of a book and use it to produce multiple photocopies for their classes and the classes of colleagues. Prosecutions are rare, and many teachers and programme planners are possibly not aware that they are breaking the law, or do not take advice to the contrary seriously. They freely admit that they photocopy whole books, and readily state that they intend to continue to do so. The amount of money that schools spend on paper for photocopying rises continually. They may even spend more money on photocopying than they would on buying the books they are copying, but with the widespread availability and immediacy of photocopying facilities, the relative costs are probably not even compared. In addition, the ease of immediate photocopying, often on the premises of the end-user, avoids the forward planning necessary for the buying of books, where a budget must be compiled in advance, orders must be placed, and arrangements made for delivery.

According to John Inglis, a Pietermaritzburg publisher, the photocopying of texts in schools is a worldwide problem. Although the practice is illegal, it is very difficult to police – as is the related but potentially more damaging practice of pirate publishers who make exact copies of whole books, complete with covers and, using cheap printers, make large profits by selling these counterfeit copies for a significantly lower price than that charged by the genuine publishers who bear the costs of royalties to authors, editing, design, layout, illustration and proof-reading, in addition to printing and distribution (Inglis, 2001). Fortunately, this piracy is currently far less prevalent in South Africa than in some other African countries.

In the South African context, one of the main reasons given by school staff for photocopying texts is that when they submit budgets for buying books, their orders are arbitrarily cut by the finance departments of provincial education departments, and they are unable to get the books they need. They then tend to spend the money originally allocated to learning materials on paper for photocopying, and copy what they are unable to buy (Inglis, 2001). The irony of this situation is that if the projected sales are low because of the practice of illegal copying, print runs are small and the unit price of books is relatively high, thus making illegal copying more likely, and so entrenching the practice. It is estimated that 300 billion pages are copied annually worldwide in contravention of copyright laws, constituting a loss of US $15-billion to publishers (Seeber, 2000, p. 283). It is estimated that 80% of English texts sold and used in Egypt are illicit copies, and in India it is estimated that trade losses due to piracy reached $25-million in 1995 (http://publishsa.co.za/copy1.htm).

The rare prosecutions that do take place are seen by the clients of pirate sellers of material as the acts of self-serving publishers persecuting worthy organisations who strive to make material available to poor students at affordable prices. Because prosecution results in such a negative perception, publishers are reticent to bring charges against pirate sellers; also, they do not want to alienate institutions who remain potential clients in spite of frequent infringements of copyright law (Seeber, 2000, p. 283).

At an SADC (South African Development Community) seminar in 1991, participating countries acknowledged the difficulty of preventing the copying of material, and opted to attempt to regulate it through the establishment of Reproduction Rights Organisations whose role is to license some agencies to make copies, and to charge for these copies, so that authors and publishers

could be compensated to some extent, at least, for the copying of their property. Kenya and Zimbabwe subsequently established Reproduction Rights Organisations (Book Development Council of South Africa, 1997).

In South Africa, the Book Development Council of South Africa (1997) contended that the situation would not be improved by the existence of such a copyright licensing agency, and that what was needed was increased public awareness of the need for writers to earn a living from the sale of their work. The Council suggested that publishers and writers should orchestrate a public awareness campaign and, as an example of a successful initiative along these lines, cited a Zimbabwean video in which writers explain the effects of copyright infringement on their ability to make a living (Book Development Council of South Africa, 1997).

The Publishers Association of South Africa (PASA) started working with the South African reproduction rights organisation, the Dramatic, Artistic and Literary Rights Organisation (DALRO), to find a way of allowing libraries and educational institutions some leeway in reproducing materials, but to limit the use of copied material where no payment is made to its developers. In 1996, PASA was invited by the Copyright Sub-Committee of the Standing Advisory Committee on Trade Marks, Patents, Copyright and Designs in the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to draw up a set of proposals to amend the regulations (promulgated under Section 13 of the Copyright Act) that relate to multiple copies of published texts for use in educational institutions and to certain photocopying concessions for educational libraries. According to Seeber (2000, p. 289), these regulations are poorly expressed and unworkable in practice. Accepted in 1998 by both the Sub-Committee and the Standing Advisory Committee, PASA's recommendations were published for comment in the Government Gazette, but when they were made public they met with a storm of protest from a number of librarians and academics. A task team was set up under the auspices of the South African Universities Vice-Chancellors' Association (SAUVCA) and the Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP) to argue against the DTI's proposed amendments on the grounds that the academic and library sectors had not been consulted.

In an attempt to put amendment of the regulations back on the agenda, the DTI held a workshop, chaired by Professor Esme du Plessis, in March 1999. The purpose of the workshop was to extend the consultative process, and thus reach a decision on how the regulations might best be amended. However, the opinions expressed at the workshop, by rights owners on the one hand and

users on the other, were irreconcilable, leaving the DTI with the near-impossible task of drafting legislation which would satisfy all the stakeholders and still be within the bounds of the Berne Convention and the TRIPS Agreement. At the end of the workshop, the officials of the DTI undertook to make the day's proceedings available on its website and to carry the consultative process further with the aim of eventually coming up with acceptable legislation. However, the proceedings never appeared on the DTI website, and no further proposals for amendment of the regulations have since been forthcoming from the DTI (Seeber, 2002).

Thus, effectively, after promising beginnings, the whole process of finding a way of allowing libraries and educational institutions some leeway in reproducing materials and at the same time protecting writers and material developers has been stalled for the last three years.

Outcomes-based education (OBE) and Curriculum 2005

The change in curriculum has doubtless been a contributing factor in the crisis facing the South African publishing industry. Some of the international advisors consulted in the process of curriculum change introduced ideas that appeared to suggest that textbooks were obsolete, in models where learners' own experience and contexts were used as the basis for classroom discourse (Evans, 2000, p. 200). These approaches must have seemed irresistibly attractive to organisers of the new curriculum in that they appeared to solve two problems in one stroke: the problem of making learning relevant to the context of African learners and, simultaneously, the problem of budgeting for change – in that it implied that there need be no outlay on new materials. It has since been acknowledged that these ideas did not offer the solutions they might initially have appeared to. Arguments against these ideas cite the enormous demands they make of teachers, their effect of trivialising content knowledge, and the way they ignore the value of access to rich and varied learning material (Evans, 2000, p. 201).

The approach to textbooks implicit in the curricula preceding the introduction of OBE undoubtedly favoured publishers in that textbooks, in many cases single prescribed textbooks, were regarded as essential sources of knowledge. Publishers whose books were selected as 'set books' were assured of massive print runs and certain profits. The shift to OBE has been a move towards eliminating this reliance on and attitude towards textbooks in that, as mentioned above, it attempts to emphasise the value of using learners' own life experiences as a basis for learning, and registers the limits on knowledge

inherent in any published work. In conditions ideal for OBE, however, there should be a plethora of texts readily available in all learning areas, so that learners have frequent opportunities to practise critically comparing information from different sources. This is actually integral to one of the central 'critical cross-field outcomes' of the current OBE model, 'Collect, organise and critically evaluate information'. It is unfortunate that the shift from reliance on single textbooks has been commonly misinterpreted to mean that there is no longer any need for textbooks (Mpe and Seeber, 2000, p. 38). In addition, the shift in curriculum meant that much educational material developed prior to the shift was rejected or not considered for use in schools because it was not expressed in wording specifically associated with OBE, and was therefore assumed to be incompatible with the approach, regardless of its content and integral approach. For example, if the content of books was not explicitly linked, throughout the text, to the 'specific outcomes' of each learning area, the material was not considered for purchase, regardless of its worth or real suitability.

The years 1996 and 1997 were particularly devastating for the educational publishing industry. In 1996, some of the provincial education departments announced their intention to publish their own educational materials, and at least one invested in a printing press (Evans, 2000, p. 197). This plan was not carried through, partly because departments lacked the capacity to produce books, and perhaps also partly because of vigorous lobbying by the Publishers Association of South Africa (PASA). However, at least in part as a result of this intention, education departments had placed very few orders for books with publishers, and by the end of 1998, many publishing initiatives had closed, merged or been acquired by those financially strong enough to withstand, at least for a while, the orders drought (Mpe and Seeber, 2000, p. 39). Ironically it was, in general, publishers who had profited from sales to the education departments of the *apartheid* government who were best able to survive.

With reference to the attempt of education departments to produce their own materials referred to above, Evans (2000, p. 211) argues that while State publishing is important in its communication with its citizens, when the State prescribes, creates and supplies books to be used in schools, learning material tends to be of poor quality, and teachers and learners are deprived of freedom of choice in learning, as well as access to diversity; both of which are vital elements in the development of critical reasoning skills.

An effect of the collapse of the textbook market is that even the stronger publishers are no longer willing or even able to subsidise less viable projects, such as literature designed for special interest groups or small market groups. This effectively stifles, among other initiatives, the production and promotion of reading material in indigenous African languages, which naturally requires risk taking and loss bearing on the part of publishers.

The need for a Book Development Policy

The Book Development Council of South Africa (1997) noted the importance of the role of government in promoting reading, and suggested that public-private partnerships would be effective in the speedy development of the sector, although some publishers are wary of partnerships with the State because they perceive possibilities of State control implicit in the partnerships. Wafawarowa (2000) notes that the role of the government should be to ensure an environment in which book development is protected and encouraged, possibly through incentives offered to publishers. The Book Development Council argued that the formulation of a national book policy should be part of a national plan, based on co-operation among government departments that would enable the publishing industry to shift from its bias towards and reliance on the school book trade towards a form which could make a more general contribution to growth and development.

The book development programme envisaged by the Council would address:

- prioritising the development of reading and writing skills throughout the nation
- achieving a better balance between educational and general publishing
- addressing the serious shortage of books in South Africa's indigenous languages
- developing the market for books through increasing outlets at local level
- vigorously marketing books and reading
- supporting the development of a diverse community of writers
- ensuring that translation expertise is developed in all South African languages
- developing skills of people required by the book sector so as to provide the means for its growth and greater representativity of the population as a whole
- improving sectoral co-ordination so as to grow the book sector as one of South Africa's economic and cultural industries
- forging closer links between South Africa, the rest of Africa and the world in relation to book trade and cultural exchange between readers and writers.

(Book Development Council of South Africa, 1997, p. 3)

Wafawarowa emphasises the need for a book policy to be developed with reference to the problems faced, and lists policy considerations for the different sectors as:

Policies for authors

- international instruments on copyright protection
- adoption of national law on protection of intellectual property rights and speedy and deterrent penalties against piracy
- tax incentives on royalties and measures to avoid double taxation of royalties in the international context
- creation of reproduction rights organisations
- promotion of reading and literacy
- creation of associations of authors.

Policies for publishers

- acknowledgement of the industrial character of publishing and access to credit facilities
- reduced tax rates on the proceeds of domestic publishing
- price control policy
- preferential assessment of local companies on international financing of publishing programmes
- introduction of ISBN through the book law
- facilitation of attendance at international book fairs
- creation of publishers' associations.

Policies for the printing and production sector

- access to finance for equipment
- regular training
- measures to facilitate the importation of paper and other raw materials
- professional associations.

Policies for the trade and distribution sector

- flexible facilities in state banks to promote the book trade and opening of book stores, particularly in rural areas
- promotion of fixed price control to protect small bookstores and avoid high profile price slashing
- access to foreign currency
- simplification of customs procedures on imported books
- tax incentives for the book trade and elimination of indirect taxes
- preferential rates for book publicity on state television and radio
- encouragement of the exportation of books
- training and attendance at book fairs
- accession to international instruments that facilitate the free flow of cultural information, like the Florence Agreement and its Nairobi protocol.

Policies on reading

- literacy work and encouragement of reading to introduce people to reading and avoid the lapse of new readers into functional illiteracy
- establishment of budgets for the establishment of libraries and library services
- organising and strengthening the national library as a repository of national bibliographical heritage and making legal deposit a requirement for the registration of book titles
- training for librarians
- reading campaigns
- surveys on reading habits that would yield useful indicators for state cultural policy, as well as feedback on publishing decisions (adapted from UNESCO, 1997).

(Wafawarowa, 2000)

Anderson calls for attention to the following aspects of book policy:

- the promotion of South African writing in all official languages
- a recognition by government of the need, when involved in a single, mass education system, for greater access to a wide variety of books outside of that system
- inter-ministerial co-operation and co-ordination on book budgets for schools and libraries, on export strategies, and on developing the book industries
- the role and practice of donors, particularly in the South African context where there is a case to be made that the development of an active civil society may be hampered by donor contributions[1].
- the need for a vibrant NGO sector
- increased South African involvement in regional book initiatives
- an acceptable copyright policy
- the inclusion of courses on encouraging reading for pleasure in library science and education training
- recognition that public libraries should be African institutions, taking into account great distances, poor infrastructure in rural areas, in particular problems with electricity, and an overwhelmingly young population.

(Anderson, 2001)

Anderson argues that the changes she calls for necessitate an independent co-ordinating body, funded by both the State and private sector, that would have a mandate and the necessary credibility to bring together all stakeholders, first in the process of generating policies with wide acceptance, and secondly in monitoring their implementation (Anderson, 2001). It is possible that this call has been answered with the establishment in 2001 of the *Masifunde Sonke* committee.

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1 This refers to a case described by Anderson where donor aid to emerging publishers resulted in dependence. She urges that donor aid for publishing be given to the end user.

The current state of South African book and print media development

Book and print media development in South Africa is characterised by extremes of strengths and weaknesses.

South Africa is fortunate that, unlike countries which lack basic industrial development, it has a well-developed local publishing industry. However, this industry has developed in response to the interests of the White group, and is White dominated in ownership and management, in the positioning of resources, as well as in the literature it produces. Since the double blow the industry received in the latter half of the nineties, with the dramatic reduction in books bought for schools and the loss of financial support for the alternative press, there has been an ironic reshaping of the industry. Strong local and multinational publishers acquired struggling, traditionally anti-*apartheid* publishers, in an attempt to reinvent their public image. In the long term this has meant even less diversity of ownership than there was in the *apartheid* years, as well as reduced diversity of output (Oliphant, 2000, p. 121).

As a result of the massive shrinkage and rationalisation in the publishing industry noted above, projects that by their nature require cross-subsidisation, such as the production of material for adult basic education and contributing to the development of a reading culture in African languages, were curtailed. Possibilities that members of the publishing sector might have opened bookselling outlets in rural areas have virtually disappeared. Many trainee African publishers, editors and designers were made redundant (Easy Reading for Adults Initiative, 1999, p. 35), and the possibilities for their contribution to a reading culture are lost.

While large companies tend to be controlled and owned by White males, there have been shifts in the demographics of the people employed involved in the publishing industry. Perceptions of people employed in the area are that the sector overall can no longer be said to be overwhelmingly dominated by White males but that such changes as have occurred appear to have been the promotion of white women into positions requiring advanced skills – such as editing – and the co-option of Black men from outside the industry into managerial positions.

The educational sector

Evans (2000, p. 189) presents a gloomy picture of the state of South African education:

> The Department of National Education revealed in 1999 that it takes eighteen years of instruction for the average South African to complete twelve years of schooling, and repeater rates are bankrupting provincial departments. The provinces experience huge backlogs, high personnel costs and a lack of management capacity. Educational initiatives like Curriculum 2005 or the teacher redeployment exercise undertaken in 1996 have been constrained by financial shortfalls or driven awry by poor planning.

Evans, (2000, p. 193) also describes problems that continue to plague the system:

- old book lists and terms of reference are still being used in some cases; some 60% of learners, who are outside the phases in which the new curriculum is being phased in, use old books
- resources available to provincial education departments, even in the better resourced provinces, are so limited that they have cut costs, for example, by not buying teachers' reference material, and making only intermittent provision for materials for one or two grades at a time; this has 'had a fatal impact on the scale and success of the implementation of the new curriculum'
- many of the policy documents produced between 1994 and 1999 did not support book and print media development or provision
- where policies do support book and print media provision, gaps frequently continue to exist between policy and implementation.

Evans further contends that there are attitudinal problems that militate against the provision and use of good learning materials. In his view, textbooks have been 'demonised' in that 'textbook dependency' has been mooted as a weakness among teachers, who are encouraged to design, adapt or create learning materials themselves. In addition, after our history of a biased presentation of information in so many of them, textbooks often tend to be regarded with suspicion (Evans, 2000, pp. 195-196). In direct contrast to these negative perceptions, it must be pointed out that where teachers lack resources, and where they themselves have had poor learning experiences and come weary and uninspired from years in the Bantu education system, appropriate and structured teaching material can be a lifeline. Good, well-prepared materials that have been designed for use in the South African context can dramatically lessen the load of preparation that frequently overwhelms teachers, and there are many

available examples of good material on which teachers could rely to provide structure and organisation to learning, and to provide revision exercises, as well as exercises that assess learners' progress.

In the face of negative reports such as this, it is important to bear in mind that for many South Africans the schooling experience has been significantly improved since 1994. Many schools that previously operated under Bantu Education have seen an increase in available resources, accessible upgrading courses for teachers, and reductions in class size. In addition, staff in administrative departments are gaining experience and competence in managing the procedures and programmes they initially found bewildering and, particularly with the end of the teacher redeployment programme and the resumption of the hiring of recently trained teachers, there is a promise of further improvements in the future. However, this does not mean that the system can be expected to become problem-free.

An organisation which works with government education departments to provide resources and educator training to a variety of educational institutions is the READ Educational Trust. Established in 1979 with the objective of providing support in establishing reading and library facilities to marginalised schools and communities, READ now has offices in twelve centres across the country. It works with primary schools, high schools, teacher training institutions and community libraries, and runs several projects at selected schools in all nine provinces. READ's project implementation is described on its website as:

> a systematic, in-service training and delivery plan: consultation with the national and provincial education departments, selection of clusters of schools, consultation with the project school communities, training entire school staff, providing resources in tandem with training, school management and governance training, regular school monitoring visits, continuous assessment, independent evaluation and motivational and recognition events and parental involvement.
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> http://www.read.org.za

According to details of the different projects published on the READ website, approximately 1 200 schools have been reached through these projects. The largest project, in terms of numbers of pupils targeted, is the Business Trust Learning for Living project, which aims to reach one-million pupils over five years, and currently has a database of 180 000

learners (Hugo and Mathee, 2002). This project entails a significant effort to involve all stakeholders in a comprehensive plan aimed at ensuring sustained improvement in reading and writing levels. Disappointingly, though, an evaluation which compared the reading scores of children in schools involved in the project with those of children at schools not involved showed a surprising proximity between their reading scores, with the children involved in the Learning for Living project scoring only slightly better than the control group (Hoffman, 2002).

According to Evans (2000, p. 197), private publishers have a poor public image as a result of accusations of collusion with the *apartheid* regime for monetary gain, some of which are valid, and negative emotions continue to run high in relation to this history. Ironically, the publishers that suffered most in the 1990s and which, in many cases, failed to survive tended to be those who had not worked with the *apartheid* education departments. Those who had built up resources during the *apartheid* years by working with *apartheid* education departments were better able to survive the siege, and the reinvented versions of these publishing houses, embellished by acquisitions and mergers effected during the 1990s, continue to operate.

With regard to publishing for the educational sector, specifically the school sector, 1997 appeared to be the worst of the lean years that publishers have endured. In that year, very little money was spent on school textbooks and almost half of the jobs in the publishing industry were lost. At a time when publishers could possibly have worked to implement affirmative action and gender equity, they were reducing staff and limiting training. However, the overall state of affairs has improved. As people in schools and departments of education have gained experience in budgeting and in planning and implementing procedures associated with textbooks, the situation improved and by the end of 1998 was not as bleak as it has been. Each year since then publishers have found more stability than the last, with processes of buying books characterised by increasing reliability (Inglis, 2001). Government spending on textbooks, which dropped from R900-million in 1994 to R120-million in 1998, climbed in 2001 to R350-million (Easy Reading for Adults Initiative, 1999). Currently schools are allowed to spend money allocated to them from the provincial education departments as they deem fit, provided that they have approval from their governing bodies. Schools have tended to spend a significant portion of their allocation on things such as school

fencing, refurbishing principals' offices, and the purchase of computers and photocopy machines. Where they do purchase learning materials, schools tend not to order according to pupil enrolment; for example, if there are 100 children enrolled in a grade, only 20 books might be ordered. Unfortunately, it is still not uncommon for schools simply to fail to spend their budget, in which case the money reverts to the treasury (Buthelezi, 2002). Provincial education departments appear to be cognisant of the problems. A memo from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture to regional chief directors, principals and educators in April 2002 explicitly discourages the purchase of single copies of learners' books and urges schools not to photocopy books for children or to accept photocopied books from suppliers.

Timeframes within which books have to be supplied for the school sector are extremely difficult to work within, and not conducive to the production of quality materials. For instance, books for the Further Education and Training (FET) band had to be ready for selection by June, 2002. But the the curriculum statement for FET had not been finalised by the end of October 2001. With such deadlines there is simply insufficient time to produce well-researched and planned books, and publishers are forced to produce material that is simply not as good as it should be (Inglis, 2001).

The ABET sector is faring even worse than the school education sector. In spite of the receipt of generous donor funding, the national Department of Education has not expanded literacy provision. More than two years after its establishment in June 2000, the SANLI initiative has yet to demonstrate any real progress in the aims stated for it by Minister Asmal (2001) of tackling illiteracy in predominantly rural and marginalised communities. People who are in need of adult basic education tend to live a life characterised by abject poverty, and ABET organisations operate on very limited resources. Clearly, neither individual ABET learners nor ABET organisations can be expected to pay enough to publishers for ABET materials to support their publication, and therefore publishing endeavours for ABET are very thin. In spite of political rhetoric to the contrary, the needs and rights of adult learners are simply not being addressed. Consequently, possible positive effects for children of ABET learners are being lost, as the development of family literacy, modelling of literate practices, and the development of a reading culture – all vital in the maximising of children's educational achievements – are not supported.

At the same time as the dramatic drop in demand from the educational sector, the publishing industry suffered a further blow in the effects of the restructuring of the public library system, when libraries were restructured under new local government systems. In many regions this resulted in a significant drop in resources available to libraries and a consequent drop in the volume of books they bought. For instance, the New Readers Project reports a drop in direct sales of books to libraries from 3 915 books in 1996 to 52 in 2000 (Schaffer, 2002).

Finally, on a more positive note, a very favourable aspect of the development of educational books and learning materials that has taken place in recent years is the transformation of school textbooks from the previous dull compilations of information to cognitively engaging learning materials that can play a central role in education and the achievement of literacy by both children and adults. In the ABET sector, a few individual organisations have developed easy to read African language books designed for adult literacy learners. Probably the most coherent of these initiatives is one undertaken by the New Readers Project at the University of Natal, which has produced books in all eleven official languages. This project has sold almost120 000 books in the last ten years. Tellingly, 90% of total book sales since have been made up of English (60%) and Zulu (30%) titles, while Xhosa and Sotho titles accounted for 4% and 2% of sales respectively. All other languages together accounted for less than 3% of total sales (Schaffer, 2002). The very low sales in the languages where the dearth of reading material is the most severe underlines the need for state promotion of publishing and reading in these languages.

The private sector

The declaration of celebratory dates such as the celebration of the 23rd April (Shakespeare's birthday) as World Book Day are intended to arouse interest in reading. The Centre for the Book has made World Book Day a key feature of its calendar. It has designed a theme and an annual poster which reaches schools via SABC Education, and it has worked to suggest and support a wide range of celebratory activities in which people and organisations around the country can become involved. These include storytelling performances, readings by well-known writers, exhibitions, street performances, and programmes in schools and libraries where children and parents read and write together, and tell and listen to stories.

With regard to the state of the production of materials in African languages, recent developments include a proliferation of literary awards, offered in the hope that they will spur African writers into creating works and submitting them for publication. Among these awards are Bertram V/O Award, offered by Skotaville Publishers, the African Heritage Literacy Award offered by Maskew Miller Longman, the Kagiso-FNB award offered by Kagiso Publishers, and the Sanlam Prize for Young Literature award offered by Tafelberg. The M-Net book prize and the CNA Award, originally open only to works in English and Afrikaans, are now open to works in African languages (Maake, 2000, p. 151).

Another development has been the establishment of the Children's Literature Network, set up as a result of requests made at the Symposium on South African children's literature in Cape Town in 2001, and maintained by The Centre for the Book. The Children's Literature Network disseminates information about conferences, courses, new books, and so on, as well as general information about literature for children. It also provides a forum for teachers to share interests or problems (Centre for the Book, 2001).

Through the First Words in Print project, to be co-ordinated through The Centre for the Book, South African children under the age of five will be supplied with sets of picture books and story books in all the official languages. The project aims to give children the advantage of familiarity with books at an early age (Centre for the Book, 2001).

Initiated by Nasboek and managed by The Centre for the Book, the Community Publishing Project aims to make it possible for individuals, community groups and community-based organisations to publish books of interest to particular communities. The project aims to promote interest in books and publishing, and also to develop skills associated with publishing in individual people and in groups (Centre for the Book, 2001).

Maake notes that publishing in African languages suffered first from censorship from missionaries, who were the first to develop orthographies and to start publishing in African languages, and then from the *apartheid* government, whose ideologically-determined rules of acceptability were accepted by African writers as the cost of having their work prescribed for use in schools. Maake goes on to lament the fact that more recently this censoring has been replaced by what he terms 'embarrassing political

correctness' where as long as a piece of material relates to an issue that has high current status it will be published without consideration of its quality and worth (Maake, 2000, p. 151).

In considering work necessary in building readership for the future in African languages, Maake points out that a readership was built fairly rapidly in the early days of circulating newspapers in African languages, and notes that serialisation, in both early missionary newspapers and secular newspapers and, later, book reviews and information about writers and literary awards, was instrumental in developing reading habits (Maake, 2000, p. 152). This view is corroborated by information yielded in evaluations of *Learn with Echo*, a current Pietermaritzburg newspaper supplement produced specifically for adult beginner readers. The fictional serialised picture story (*Mkhize*) carried by this supplement has been extremely successful in securing regular readers for the supplement; it is by far the most popular part of the paper, and appeals to readers across race boundaries and educational levels (Harley *et al*, 2000).

Electronic publishing

African Journals Online (AJOL), a pilot project managed by the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications, was set up to promote the awareness and use of African-published journals, and to strengthen the African academic publishing sector (http://www.inasp.org.uk/ajol/index.html). It publicises approximately fifty journals published in Africa, and provides internet access to tables of contents, to full texts of some articles, and to information yielded by research. In addition, it attempts to encourage print or electronic subscription to journals, as well as the purchase of particular articles, thus attempting to enable writers and publishers to gain income from their work.

Masifunde Sonke

The most recent initiative that has the potential of making a positive impact on the state of book development and publishing in South Africa is the *Masifunde Sonke* project. The project represents a collaborative endeavour between the national Department of Education and independent organisations working in the fields of literacy, book development and publishing.

In his speech at the launch of *Masifunde Sonke* in 2001, the Minister of Education announced that the *Masifunde Sonke* campaign would operate in conjunction with the South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI), in that the aim of SANLI was to teach people to read, while the *Masifunde Sonke* campaign was aimed at people who already have the skill of reading. He stated its central objective as:

> to engage the whole nation in a culture of reading and writing that affirms South African languages, history, values and development. It aims to send the message that communities and children can enjoy reading, while it enriches their lives.
>
> (Asmal, 2001)

On its website, *Masifunde Sonke* is described as:

> a collaborative project of the reading civil society and the South African ministry of education to promote and encourage the values and importance of reading in schools, homes, libraries, and workplace, and relevance of reading skills in the modern society.
>
> (http://www.masifundesonke.org.za)

Five 'strategic objectives' published on the website are:

- to achieve a total national consciousness of the value and benefits of reading
- to engage all in the 'book and reading chain' – writers, illustrators, publishers, printers, booksellers, teachers and librarians
- to engage the corporate sector, civil society, religious and community-based organisations to support, and participate actively in, the campaign
- to mobilise investment into a reading promotion initiative of such value to all stakeholders that it will grow and continue to serve far beyond 2002
- to facilitate and monitor increase in the availability and accessibility of local writings in all South African languages.

(http://www.masifundesonke.org.za)

Planned support of reading development projects and programmes included:

- identifying all organisations, projects and programmes promoting reading in South Africa
- compiling a database of this information to guide investment
- evaluation and monitoring of reading promotion programmes
- guidance on formation of a National Book Policy
- convening conferences, seminars or workshops for all interested and identified parties to share knowledge.

(http://www.masifundesonke.org.za)

Measurable elements of impact envisioned for the project are:

- increases in the amount of editorial and programming content that the media, both print and electronic, focuses on reading-related content
- increases in reading and the consumption of reading materials, for pleasure and for learning, by South Africans of all ages and from all walks of life
- increases in the availability and accessibility of local writings in all South African languages
- increases in the familiarity of South Africans of all ages with their rich and diverse literary and storytelling heritage
- increases in government spending on the purchase of local writings in all South African languages for schools and public libraries, for clinics, for prisons, and for government workplaces.

(http://www.masifundesonke.org.za)

If even some of these objectives are met by 2004, by which time *Masifunde Sonke* will have completed the three years set for its duration, the declaration of 2001 as the Year of the Reader will have marked a moment of inspiration and enormously significant achievement. However, with such well intentioned and thoroughly thought through blueprints as the National multi-year implementation plan for Adult Education and Training (Department of Education, 1997) lying in tatters behind us[2], observers can be forgiven for welcoming the *Masifunde Sonke* project with somewhat jaded enthusiasm.

To take an optimistic view, it is true that the *Masifunde Sonke* project has a strong committee, and perhaps it harnesses forces whose synergy has the potential to set a new pattern for initiatives in the field.

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2 The National multi-year implementation plan set out detailed steps for reaching and enrolling 2.5-million adult learners by the year 2001, and halving the need for ABET provision by 2002. Almost none of its objectives were realised.

Key debates surrounding book and print media development aimed at achievement of literacy in South Africa

One of the central issues for book development centres around the importance of reading for its own sake, and the production of books designed simply to exercise reading skills – as opposed to textbooks, where the content of a book is designed to develop knowledge in a particular area. Since competence in reading is known to be essential for the effective use of textbooks, and for reading to learn, the development of this competence, as well as the fostering of pleasure in reading, should be of paramount importance. As Nadine Gordimer, in her message of support to the Children's Literature Symposium in 2001, warned: 'Without the opportunity and encouragement to read for pleasure rather than as a school task, South Africa's children will never become fully literate, but will grow up to join the vast section of our adult population shackled in illiteracy within our new found freedom' (Centre for the Book, 2001).

The importance of reading for personal pleasure and the pursuit of information should be reflected in investment in books in schools and in the emphasis put on the development of children's reading habits. However, there seems to be a trend for schools to invest the resources they have available for books in textbooks rather than in readers. This trend is also apparent in adult basic education where little is invested in books written to promote reading for enjoyment. There is a perception that this sort of book is of less value than a technical textbook, and that spending money on simple fiction is frivolous. As a result, valiant efforts like the current initiative of the New Readers Project[3] of producing easy-to-read books in all eleven South African indigenous languages get scant support from both state learning institutions and NGOs. In terms of the development of enjoyment of reading by the public, and of a reading culture in general, this undervaluing of material designed simply and specifically to foster reading for its own sake is dangerous.

Another issue relates to language. Publishers of school books do not believe they can influence people's attitudes towards language or their

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3 At the School for Community Development and Adult Learning at the University of Natal, Durban.

apparent preference for their children to be taught in English. At present, the tendency among African parents is to set more value on their children's competence in English than on their competence in indigenous languages, and there is therefore very little support from parents for books in indigenous languages. In spite of expanding empirical evidence that conceptual development and even competence in English as a second language is facilitated by the development of literacy and oral skills in the mother tongue, publishers are wary of producing books in indigenous languages when they know that the demand for these books will be low. Very unfortunately, there is a tendency in some quarters to associate the production of books in African languages with the *apartheid* regime, and therefore to regard it negatively. Parents argue for their children to be taught in English and, in ABE classes, many learners are attracted to straight-to-English programmes. In these programmes, learners attempt to become literate in English, which for most of them is an unknown language. Predictably, where learners start with no knowledge of print and its conventions, and also no understanding at all of the language they are trying to learn and simultaneously use as a medium of literacy, learning is usually a very slow and educationally painful process[4]. Straight-to-English programmes tend to be characterised by high dropout rates and, frequently, desperate or dishonest strategies by suppliers of programmes to disguise slow progress and present a fair-weather picture.

Dr Ben Ngubane, Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, in giving his support to the establishment of the Children's Literature Network (see page 113) at the Children's Literature Symposium in March 2001, noted the importance of making literature available in African languages: 'the writing and publication of children's books in our indigenous languages... would drastically improve reading skills. It is a well-known fact that children, especially those of a young age, fare best when using learning materials that are presented in a language that they can easily access. An increase in available titles in the various languages would also contribute to children's cultural enrichment and psychological and intellectual development' (Centre for the Book, 2001).

At the same symposium, Gcina Mhlophe, the well-known South African storyteller, stressed the importance of stories to any nation since they

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4 Straight-to-English programmes are more successful for learners who can speak and understand English when they embark on the programme.

connect the past with the future, and inculcate in children a sense of self through language, culture, songs, ceremonies and chants. She emphasised the need for this sense among South Africa's children, especially in view of the political freedom so recently achieved (Centre for the Book, 2001).

With the advent of the new OBE curriculum, publishers produced African-language versions of maths and life skills learning material for grades 1 to 3. Sales of this material were very low, especially in languages with relatively small speech communities, thus making it unlikely that publishers would continue to produce materials other than those that they expect to sell for use in language classes. What happens in class is that where books are supplied for learning areas such as life skills and maths, they are generally produced in English, and then mediated by teachers who translate them for their pupils as they go along (Inglis, 2001).

There is clearly, therefore, a gap between policies which should promote the use of indigenous languages, and action. Incentives are needed to encourage people to act in accordance with developed policies.

Conclusion

South Africa is in a state of suspension with regard to book development. It is possible that individuals and bodies in which power is invested will take decisions which could facilitate the development of an enabling and encouraging environment for ordinary people in South Africa to become literate or to improve their standard of literacy, or even to become active readers. Undoubtedly, increased levels of reading ability and reading activity amongst South Africa's people would be a vital asset in our development as a democratic nation. It is, however, at least equally possible at this stage that people with the power to facilitate increased reading and the development of a literate society will take no decisions at all.

It is to be hoped that at least some of those in power demonstrate the political will to bring about the first possibility. Factors that could contribute to positive development in this case currently include:

- the fact that education remains by far the largest category of spending in national and provincial budgets, with R70-billion projected for 2004/05 (Manuel, 2001)
- the possibility of accessing support from the National Skills Fund, which has available funds of about R3.4 billion (Manuel, 2001)
- the opportunity to recognise, capitalise on and support work currently in process through by various NGOs involved in the promotion of reading and book development.

As has been described in this article, the challenges that face any individual or body working towards the dual goals of promotion of reading and book development exist in the current infrastructure and mode of operation of the publishing sector and in people's attitudes towards books and publishing. Neither of these kinds of challenges is insurmountable.

The current infrastructure and mode of operation could be radically changed by implementing the suggestions made by people quoted in this article, for example, the bold and positive steps clearly spelled out by Wafawarowa (Wafawarowa, 2000).

In their attitudes towards books and publishing, people can be easily influenced by their leaders. A sustained effort – funded by the State and supported by prominent figures across the political spectrum to publicly support reading, the value of books, African languages as languages of learning, and the importance of the development of family literacy and literate habits in society – would contribute enormously towards the development of a reading nation. It would also serve to close the gaps between policy and practice presently so keenly felt.

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