

Silverlea Primary School Container Library

impact
trust
Inform. Inspire. Ignite.



**Progress report
July 2021**

1. Background

Silverlea Primary School was established in 1948 as a government school. The school is located in what was under Apartheid designated Coloured township of Silvertown, and serviced the broader township areas of Athlone, Bridgetown, Kewtown and further afield, Bonteheuwel and Manenberg (Figure 1). More recently, learners from the (Apartheid-designated) African townships – Philippi, Langa, Crossroads, Gugulethu, Khayelitsha and the nearby informal settlement of Vygieskraal have also enrolled at Silverlea.

The communities served by the school suffer from a range of social deprivations and this is reflected in low levels of schooled literacy among parents and their children, constraints on parental involvement in the lives of their children and a difficult task facing the school's educators:

- Many children come from foster homes or are raised by a grandparent or relatives
- Over a quarter receive two meals a day from the feeding scheme we established in 2016
- More than 50% of families do not pay part or all of their school fees
- The Western Cape Education Department's systemic testing shows that a large percentage of learners are not achieving the required standards for language or mathematics in Grade 3 or Grade 6. For many, their only opportunity to access the knowledge economy is what is offered by formal schooling.



Figure 1. Location of Silverlea Primary School (blue outline), Zinnia Street Athlone. The new location of the container library complex is shown by the red rectangle.



The Library Project grew from small beginnings in 2018/19, as a passion project of then principal Sandy Daniels. A 6 x 2m container donated by Breadline Africa housed the books with outside library lessons, serving 850 learners from Grade 1 to 7.



We believe that having access to exciting reading material transforms the reading culture at our school (see the section on Impact in this report).

In our first annual report, June 2020, we honoured some 33 “founder donors” whose contributions – from R250 to R100 000 enabled the library

to operate. Key among these were the **Lipshitz Charitable Trust**, **Andrew Roberts Memorial Trust** and **Milagro Trust**.

2. Reflection on project achievements: 2020 – 2021

a) Infrastructure upgrade: a new container

A further donation received from the **Lipshitz Charitable Trust** in 2019 allowed us to leverage additional support from Breadline Africa for the purchase of a second container of sufficient size to hold library classes indoors. Breadline Africa managed the container works, costing a total of R279 840, which was completed just before the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa (26 March 2020).



b) Working under Covid-19

As is widely reported, covid has disproportionately affected poorly resourced communities, especially regarding access to education. After March 2020, and for most of 2021 to date, the library was not open to scholars. Undeterred, we managed the following:

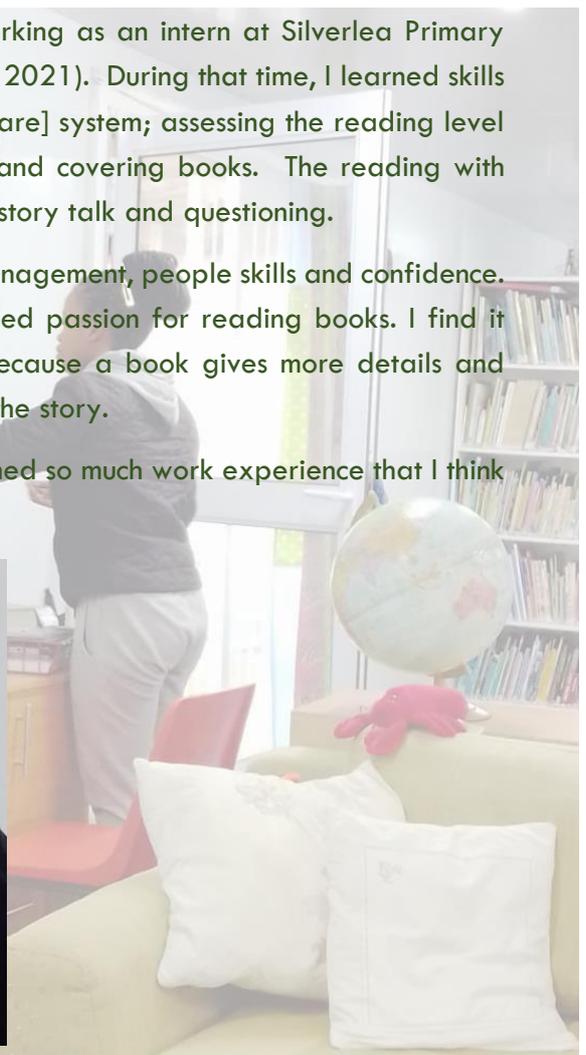
- our librarian Terri le Brasseur spent lockdown reading via Whatsapp recording to hundreds of young learners.
- Terri, along with our committed volunteers revise the full inventory of over 6000 titles, adding in keywords and summaries to enable searches, especially with a view to servicing teachers in their use of the library for teaching the curriculum
- We “weeded” our shelves and catalogued new books, mending and sorting our existing stock.

In August 2020 we were joined by an intern, Zimbini Lufutha (Zee), from the Resilient Futures Programme run by Routes to Resilience for Afrika Tikkun. She has been a valuable contributor alongside and learning from Terri – read her story below.

My name is Zimbini Lufutha and I have been working as an intern at Silverlea Primary School for the past ten months (August 2020-May 2021). During that time, I learned skills such as capturing Information in [the library software] system; assessing the reading level of books; the Dewey Decimal System; mending and covering books. The reading with children skills I developed include reading, focus, story talk and questioning.

I feel like I have developed responsibility, time management, people skills and confidence. Although I was not a bibliophile, I have developed passion for reading books. I find it more exciting to read than watching a movie because a book gives more details and portray the image of what’s really happening in the story.

I have enjoyed working in the library. I have gained so much work experience that I think will be beneficial for me in the future.



c) An inhabitable library

Our budget needs for the 18-month period January 2020-June 2021 was R476, 000. R200 000 was earmarked for the fitting- of the new library space and landscaping the surrounding “quad” and access path. Our total income from donors was some R400 000. Cutting our coat to suit the cloth, we have spent most of 2021 designing and commissioning library shelves, seating, worktables and cupboards to create a magical space. Our thanks goes to the Lipshitz Charitable Trust for their handsome contribution.

We owe so much to the creative and ever-energetic Amanda Twyman, a volunteer who came on board as a result of our 2019 Facebook open call and has given thousands of hours of her time since then, in the early establishment of our library operating systems. She has produced the most gorgeous cushions, curtains from fabric off-cuts, labelling, décor. And our favourite – little seats for little bums, using recycled poly-cardboard waste cyclinders from a guttering factory, a lick of paint and decoupage.



We could not have accomplished the work without the generous work done at near cost-price by our contractors Scotch Gibb (furniture) and Paula Cockburn (earthworks, stoep and access path). They allowed us to stretch every rand. A cash injection from Percipient helped with getting us over the line with the final fittings, enabling us to convert the small container from where we operated in 2019 into a games and reading room.



The Silverlea Library Committee, comprising teachers, volunteers, the librarian and the school Principal, are proud of what has been achieved against pretty tough odds. We can say that the library, along with other improvements at the school like the robotics lab, contribute to the worlds of wonder that should be the educational experience of every young child.



Silverlea Library

by Amanda Twyman, June 2021

*Silverlea Library is a wonderful place,
A slice of paradise in a magical space.*

*It's come to fruition through hard work and love,
With the help of our sponsors and the Good Lord above.*

*Our books were donated from homes near and far,
With fiction and reference, the wild, the bizarre.*

*We set up a system that enabled each child,
To experience the wonder and to be quite beguiled.*

*Books are quite magic, they open the mind
To places all over, new people to find.*

*It may be at Hogwarts with Hermione and Ron,
Or deep in the forest as mouse wanders on.*

*Up high in the sky with a witch on her broom,
Or squashing and squeezing into one tiny room.*

*A magical world of horses that fly,
Or a look at our universe and the stars in the sky.*

*You might like the pictures and learning to cook,
Or how to draw cartoons in your own sketching book.*

*Whatever your preference, we have something for all.
Animals, magic and books big and small.*

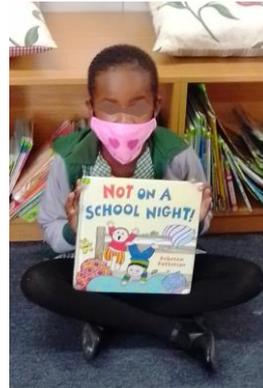
*We hope that our library will fill you with smiles,
And enable your imagination to take you for miles.*

*So let your mind wander, let it run loose,
And in the words of the author, the great Dr Seuss.*

*'You can really find magic wherever you look,
Sit back and relax, all you need is a book'*

(Above: library volunteers, monitors and users)

(Amanda (left) and Terri (right))



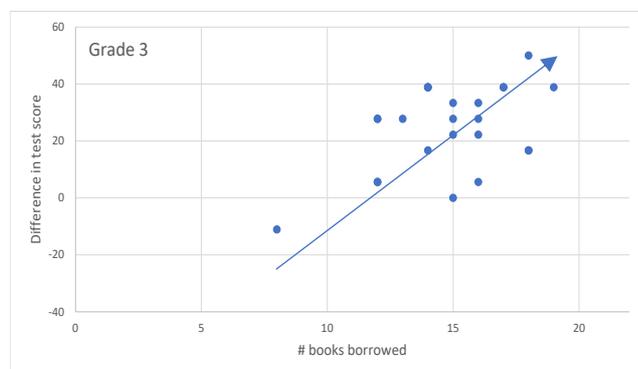
3. Impact

Worldwide, there is a great deal of evidence that access to quality reading material in spaces where these are engaged with creatively is hugely beneficial to children’s literacy practices.¹ However, comprehension tests that purport to measure literacy in fact measure a very narrow aspect of what literacy encompasses. They mostly do not measure enhanced creativity, more confident talk and opinion, imaginative thinking and expanding worldview, and because such tests privilege the narrower “skills”, they by omission do disservice to these less tangible but equally crucial literacy practices. For example, one of the most popular books from our library in 2019 was a recipe book *Cooking with Pilchards*. Successive young children were taking home a book that would likely be used in varied literacy practices involving the whole family, engaging with texts beyond the book (shopping perhaps, comparing and selecting ingredients by name), all of which shift a child’s relationship to texts.

In our first year of operation, around 9000 books were borrowed at an average of 15 books per student during the year, depending on the grade. We attempted to evaluate “successful” engagement with books (enjoyment, completion, reviews) through issuing reading records, hoping to learn from the narratives of borrowers something about the value of their experience. Sadly the process did not have sufficient support within the classroom – the locus of book retrieval and record completion – and thus the reading records were not successfully completed. In our plans for 2022, we intend to focus on a more qualitative process around finding out about reader experience and growing engagement with text.

We did measure comprehension in a grade-appropriate, before-after reading assessment, with an average improvement of between 5 and 11% (Table 1). One notable feature was that the improvement was greatest among Grade 2 and 3 learners. Also noteworthy is that Grade 5 learners achieved very poor results in the first writing of the test, despite it being aligned to Grade level assessment (PIRLS) standards. Without larger samples and outside “controls” we cannot draw useful conclusions from these data, or attribute improvement to the library.

Unsurprisingly given all the extraneous factors influencing literacy, no direct correlation was found between the number of books read and improvement in comprehension, except that the scores of Grade 3 learners who initially attained under 50% for the test showed a positive relationship with number of books borrowed.



¹ Farmer, L. 2017. Literacy matters: Using research to promote literacy and reading in libraries. International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. Professional Report No. X

Table 1. Median test score (%) for each class and per grade overall and average improvement in test score per grade. The percentage of learners who achieved 50% in each test period is also shown.

	Grade 2a	Grade 2b	Grade 2c	Grade 2d	Overall
median April	64	57	71	57	63
median Nov	71	71	79	71	73
percent of class>50% April	73	69	86	59	72
percent of class>50% Nov	90	90	82	78	85
%improvement	9% across grade 2				
	Grade 3a	Grade 3b	Grade 3c	Overall	
median April	72	72	72	72	
median Nov	83	83	81	82	
percent of class>50% April	82	77	89	83	
percent of class>50% Nov	97	97	93	96	
%improvement	11% across grade 3				
	Grade 4a	Grade 4b	Grade 4c	Overall	
median April	61	69	72	68	
median Nov	78	78	72	76	
percent of class>50% April	70	81	90	80	
percent of class>50% Nov	82	78	94	84	
%improvement	4,7% across grade 4				
	Grade 5a	Grade 5b	Grade 5c	Overall	
median April	33	25	31	30	
median Nov	44	31	39	38	
percent of class>50% April	31	3	23	19	
percent of class>50% Nov	47	20	30	32	
%improvement	7,5% across grade 5				
	Grade 6a	Grade 6b	Grade 6c	Overall	
median April	50	46	46	47	
median Nov	58	62	58	59	
percent of class>50% April	55	38	47	47	
percent of class>50% Nov	61	67	78	68	
%improvement	6,4% across grade 6				

4. Immediate future plans and needs

In 2020, Silverlea Primary School entered into an agreement with the Impact Trust to manage donor funds for the library. As a literacy project, the Silverlea Library project falls under the Impact Trust's ALERT programme (Accessing Learning through Responsive Teaching). We intend for the library and the school to benefit from this programme's search for ways in which to develop a classroom pedagogy that works in dialogue with the experience that learners bring with them to the teaching and learning relationship.

Whilst we have succeeded in completing the bulk of the work for the library quad, we will be working to achieve the following outcomes over the next 18 months:

- ~ complete the refurbishments to our container library to ensure functionality as a walk-in browsable community space to build a love of reading and literacy. This includes creating safe community access, supplying potable water and landscaping the outside space for reading and group use.

- ~ ensure the staffed operation of the library with adequate staff support and management
- ~ conduct an ongoing literacy campaign to promote and showcase reading and writing, storytelling, book clubs, read-a-thons, competitions and including opening up the library to after-school use for the community it lives within; build capacity of community literacy leaders who will also be advocates for reading and writing in the community
- ~ in tandem with the literacy campaign, identify, develop and train a librarian from the local community to replace the current librarian in due course (our Ms le Brasseur being a retired teacher in her seventies)
- ~ pilot a Grade 4 home-based literacy intervention for children with their parents, trialling the use of a digital reading platform alongside parental literacy development and training in effective engagement with their children for reading and writing at home.



Our total budget for the implementation of these plans is GBP 54,852.00, and the target for our Big Give (UK) and local fundraising campaigns.

5. Conclusion

The Silverlea Library is more than a transformative intervention into reading and comprehension in the school – which on its own is a desperately needed and worthy thing. We are transforming attitudes to reading, changing identities of learners as they engage with text and image, and as they speak about what books mean to them – a widening of learners' literacy practices.

Beyond this, the library represents a calm and quiet space in the school, away from the often-times relentless jostle and tension of a small sandy playground servicing a large number of children. This is a primary reason for our commitment to enhance the physical appearance of the library quad, so that it is a sanctuary for reading, thought and conversation.

We hope for your support to this end.

With love in our hearts for the joy of books, of words, of images and meanings

Geordie Ractliffe
On behalf of the Silverlea Primary Library Committee

School and details

Silverlea Primary is a Public (government) school under the Western Cape Education Department
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Mrs Colleen Rinquist (Silverlea Library Committee Chair)
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