

South Africa:
A Case Study in Development Through Information Literacy

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Abstract

The opportunities for the people of South Africa are manifestly great, with the development of a democratic society founded on a belief in equity and upliftment. To build the degree of social engagement that a participatory democracy needs, it is vital that citizens are able to make effective use of information. This case study will review the strategies and progress towards achieving this goal.

1. INTRODUCTION: PROFILE OF SOUTH AFRICA

A major problem in discussing any aspect of the development of South Africa is whether to treat the country as “developed” or as “developing.” There is also a sense in which the first democratic elections, in 1994, ushered in major shifts in social and economic development, instigated by social movements and a complete shift of government policy towards upliftment of formerly oppressed population groups¹ and equitable distribution of resources.

1.1. Demographics and Living Standards

In some respects, South Africa has characteristics of a “first-world” culture, with a highly literate group of its population making use of a comprehensive system of telecommunications, information and consumer services. Although the adult illiteracy rate (based on the population aged fifteen and above) is 15.1% (United Nations Development Programme, 2002), this figure may conceal vast differences between rural and metropolitan areas. An earlier study indicates rates of illiteracy varying from between 27% in metropolitan areas to 50% in rural areas (South Africa. Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997). Judgements about levels of literacy also have to take into account the diverse language groupings within the country: eleven languages² are officially recognised but their use is unevenly distributed. Many people can speak several languages but reading proficiency may be low. In addition, many dwellers in the rural areas can make little direct use of documentary information sources and have little possibility of using information or consumer services because none are available in their locality. The introduction of democratic structures to replace the apartheid state and the need to redress injustices of the past poses a set of stimulating and exciting challenges and opportunities. The development of an “Information Society” could serve to uplift a large segment of the population of South Africa. Such development is increasingly viewed as desirable: however, the design and implementation of appropriate and sustainable systems is problematic within such a damaged culture.

Some 42.8 million people (1999 figures) live in South Africa, with half the population living in the urban areas (United Nations Development Programme, 2002). South Africa is classified as an upper-middle income country of medium level human development. The human development of the majority, however, is low because the pre-1994 regime favoured and implemented policies that privileged whites, who enjoyed high levels of education, consumption, income and access to resources. The majority of citizens were poor in comparison, and had minimal access to basic social and economic services. The Human Development Index (HDI) level of development of the country’s population based on life expectancy, education and income was 0.702 in 1999 (United Nations Development Programme, 2002). Even indicators such as these have to be interpreted with great care: the collection of demographic data by the former regime was often inconsistent and inaccurate, so comparison with earlier values for the HDI, in attempt to determine whether life is “better,” can be

¹ Although non-racialism is enshrined in the new Constitution, because of the imperative for redress, it is sometimes necessary to refer to the former categorisation of people according to “population group.”

² Provincial statistics for 1995 list the dominant languages and their degree of use: Zulu (22.4%), Xhosa (17.5%), Afrikaans (15.1%), Northern Sotho (9.8%), English (9.1%), Tswana (7.2%), Southern Sotho (6.9%), Tsonga (4.2%), Swazi (2.6%), Venda (1.7%) Ndebele (1.6%) (Davenport and Saunders, 2000:574).

misleading.

What is apparent is that, despite the efforts of the 1994 Government of National Unity and the present Government, there are substantial differences between the population groups when access to the basics of life is considered. In addition, there are differences between the Provinces³, with the Northern Province being the poorest province, and the Western Cape the richest. The huge backlog in human resource development, one of the most striking legacies of the apartheid years, is reflected in the Human Development Index rankings, which place South Africa as 94th out of the 126 countries included in the survey, and also highlight the large gap between its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) position and its HDI ranking – a difference of 49 places (United Nations Development Programme, 2002). The gap between rich and poor in South Africa remains one of the largest in the world; it is also apparent that the gap between South Africa and other African countries in terms of access to resources is very substantial.

1.2. Connectivity

The development of an Information Society depends critically on access to information resources, the capacity to use them responsibly, and the will to shape life through the use of information. Connectivity is one of the keys to the development of access to information resources: a year-by-year comparison of connectivity published by the Internet Software Consortium (Internet Software Consortium, 2001) shows the gradual spread of the Internet across Africa. However, this apparent spread of connectivity masks startling differences in provision, with South Africa being considerably advantaged. The number of Internet hosts in South Africa placed it as thirty-second in the world in July 2001 but within the African continent it ranks as first, with 82.3% of Africa's hosts. Something of the scale of the disparity can be appreciated by comparing this with the second rank: Egypt occupies this place, with 2.7% of the hosts in Africa. Access to telecommunications within South Africa is also very uneven, reflecting the gross inequities inherited from the apartheid state. Although government ministers have given clear commitments to massive expansion of the infrastructure of the telecommunications system in political manifestos and addresses, such changes will take a considerable time to have an impact. The major growth has been in the number of cell phone subscribers rather than the "landline" telephone system. For the meantime, access to the Internet and many other features of the "wired" environment can only be available to the majority of the population through institutional access in schools, colleges and tertiary-level education, business and other ventures, rather than in their homes.

1.3. Library and Information Services (LIS)

The library and information service sector is characterised by small pockets of excellence, and technological sophistication; while the majority of citizens "do not have access to even the most rudimentary library and information services" (South Africa, Arts and Culture Task Group (ACTAG) Library and Information Services Subcommittee, 1995). South Africa's library and information development has been

³ The 1994 Interim Constitution and the Constitution of 1996 defined nine Provinces: Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, Kwazulu Natal, Mpumalanga (formerly known as Eastern Transvaal), North West, Northern Cape, Northern Province, Western Cape.

haphazard and uncoordinated because the apartheid-state government abrogated its responsibilities for the provision of library and information services, which it declared would develop adequately in response to market forces. No clear pattern of responsibility replaced the former system, resulting in uneven development and local interpretations of the adequacy of “levels of service.” Progressive information workers adopted vigorous protest and lobby actions against the approaches to the conceptualisation and practice of library and information work informed by rigidity, conservatism and alignment with government policies of the period. When it became evident that liberation was imminent, these efforts coalesced into concerted initiatives, in the early 1990s, to start a process of restructuring and transformation in library and information services. This process developed according to an agenda which espoused the principles of non-racialism, non-sexism and redress, promoted by the liberation movement and which began to move from the mode of critique and opposition to one of engagement with the development of policy options for the new state (National Education Coordinating Committee, National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI), 1992). For the first time, lobbying was widely recognised as being an important avenue for influencing the debate about policy development in South Africa.

The restructuring of library and information services in the country is premised on a number of universal values enshrined in the Constitution of 1996, and also particular problems of a nascent democracy with a need for “fast tracking” of human resource development and economic growth. Demographic, and other characteristics of the country which impact on the provision of library and information services include rapid population growth, a youthful population, low education levels and high illiteracy rates.

The themes of the Information Society and information literacy resonate in the National Commission on Higher Education Working Group on Libraries and Information Technology (WGLIT) report (1996) which considers policy implications of the role of libraries and information technology in higher education. The WGLIT investigation was framed by a vision of a new national information system capable of integrating its component parts into a seamless whole, rather than one in which individuality is highlighted, and of a transformed higher education system responsive to both the national agenda of reconstruction, and also the demands of globalisation and the new knowledge economy. Graduates of the new system should exit with skills which are attributes of this new information age: the skills to gain access to appropriate information, the ability to evaluate and discriminate between sources, lifelong learning skills, and social skills which promote cooperative work. If adequate levels of information technology and connectivity are available, the library, including those in the public domain as well as those in educational institutions, is ideally placed through information literacy programmes to participate in preparing graduates and those in the wider society to meet the challenges of the knowledge economy. Library and information services must be seen as embodying and promoting information literacy and the values of a culture of learning and purposive information use.

At the same time, it is widely acknowledged that rural and remote communities suffered the most savage effects under the previous apartheid regime, including extreme poverty (South Africa, Office of the State President, 1995). These marginalised communities are the most starved of education, information, employment and other resources. The physical and security needs of all members of a community must be addressed as a matter of priority, but alleviating the distress at

these levels must also be supported by facilitating ways in which communities can grow. Strategies need to be devised to eliminate the tyranny of distance—thus avoiding the danger that a two-tier society, determined by geography, will manifest itself in the rural / urban divide.

2. INFORMATION LITERACY: ORIGINS

The formation of the 1994 Government of National Unity heralded major changes to the pattern of educational provision. The inheritance was a fractured and partly dysfunctional education system, with severe inequities in funding. Replacing, or even fixing, such a system was never going to be easy, especially given the expectations of a transformed and improved quality of life by the majority of the inhabitants of South Africa.

One of the major impetuses behind the recognition of the importance of information literacy in South Africa has been the report, “The Western Cape Library Cooperative Project” (1992), usually known as the “Senn Breivik Report” (Senn Breivik, Pitkin, & Tyson, 1992). It addressed the need for the facilitation of cooperative academic planning within the tertiary education institutions of the Western Cape of South Africa in order to achieve transformation with limited economic resources.

Weaknesses in the access to information and the management of information resources were identified as problems for which a cooperative solution would be viable. Information literacy was identified as key part of the solution. The report also indicated that information literacy is inherent in the service role played by higher education to the regional community, including the granting of access to its resources by the community.

Another early worker in information literacy in South Africa was Sandra Olen, who considered the role of the school library and media centre (Olen and Kruger, 1995). Thus, active consideration was given, almost as soon as the Government of National Unity was installed, to ways in which information literacy could begin to influence community development.

3. PROJECTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In its recommendations, the Senn Breivik Report included the establishment of a pilot project in information literacy, with staff and faculty development activities. A specific point was made: “Only access to a rich base of information resources in many formats can allow a move away from the traditional lecture/textbook/short loan/reserve teaching approach that currently characterizes the great majority of course delivery styles. A rich base of information resources is necessary to design assessments that develop students’ information accessing and evaluative skills . . .” (Senn Breivik, Pitkin & Tyson 1992, pp. 21-22).

A grant of \$1 million (US) (3.6 million Rand at 1995 rates of exchange), to be paid out in tranches over a five-year period, from the Reader’s Digest SA allowed the establishment in 1995 of the INFOLIT Project. The primary objectives, listed in the five-year plan included:

- promoting the concept, value and importance of information literacy in the context of globalisation and redress to key players in the region,

- launching a series of pilot projects which explore and establish various means of spreading information literacy education in the region,
- investigating information literacy models, programmes and initiatives in other countries that could be adapted to local conditions.

These objectives have remained the guiding framework for activity for the INFOLIT Project.

There is considerable evidence that the INFOLIT Project has achieved several of its objectives. There has been the development of products and approaches, most of which are still in use, though often in a modified form. The greatest impact has been the creation of awareness of the potential of information literacy amongst librarians and faculty. This has been achieved by holding workshops around the region, often involving a mix of faculty and library staff, to discuss educational transformation, the issues of redress and the impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on the 'learning space.' 'Capacity development' amongst faculty and library staff has been the principal method of working, guided by the belief that development of the curriculum is best undertaken with the specific needs of each discipline in mind.

A set of pilot projects undertaken by academics in the five institutions was funded. These were aimed at improving undergraduate teaching and learning with an implicit design requirement of generating greater inter-institutional and intra-institutional cooperation.

- Access course to promote visual literacy (Cape Technikon); funding was provided to develop a peer counselling approach to learning information literacy skills.
- Accessing the INSPEC database to improve information literacy (University of Cape Town); this concentrated on the provision of access to the INSPEC database at each of the five institutions together with appropriate training.
- Arts information literacy package (University of the Western Cape), aimed at students of the Faculty of Arts but intended to be of use to students of the Humanities in all five institutions.
- Building Web-based resources to improve biological information literacy (University of the Western Cape). This project had two approaches: determination of the needs of teachers and students of biology for appropriate information literacy learning materials and the promotion of the use of the Web for distribution and use of information on biology.
- Development of Africa: 1300 AD (University of Cape Town); this project was undertaken by the Research Unit for the Archaeology of Cape Town (RESUNACT) in partnership with the Mayibuye Centre of the University of the Western Cape and the African Studies Library of the University of Cape Town. The core product is a multi-media presentation on CD-ROM with accompanying booklets.
- Development of an information laboratory for Electrical Engineering (Peninsula Technikon); the aim was to produce a Web-based information source for students, using multi-media facilities.

- INFOLEX: an undergraduate law information literacy course (University of Stellenbosch); the aim being to integrate information literacy training into a revised law course.
- Information society: tools and skills course (University of Cape Town); the development of a single-semester course for first year students in the Social Sciences, consisting of an introduction to the 'information age' and its impact upon society. A Web-based version of this course was also developed and used in association with the University of the Western Cape.
- Integrated academic literacy programme (Peninsula Technikon); the aim was to integrate information literacy education with an introductory exposition of engineering.
- Integrated first-year experience (Cape Technikon); an assessment of the effectiveness of a component on information literacy, which was introduced at the Cape Technikon in 1996.
- Search engines of the Internet (University of the Western Cape); a set of hypermedia courseware simulations to familiarise students with the critical use of search engines.

As may be seen from this list, the focus of activity embraced the technological and the conceptual aspects of information literacy. It was recognised that competence in the "electronic culture" is one aspect of the development of the information literate individual and that developing this aspect in isolation from a consideration of the print and other media as information carriers would be mistaken.

A "needs assessment and audit" for the Western Cape was undertaken by a team headed by Dr Yusuf Sayed, which resulted in the publication of *The Segregated Information Highway: Information Literacy in Higher Education* (University of Cape Town Press, 1998). Excerpts from this publication have been published in the *Black Business Quarterly* (Sayed, 2000a, 2000b).

A group of academic staff from the University of Cape Town and Peninsula Technikon developed the Yenza! Subject Based Information Gateway (SBIG) for the Centre for Science Development (now subsumed in the National Research Foundation), where it is now actively maintained (Yenza!, 2000). This site is not primarily a Subject Based Information Gateway although part of it does lead the user to peer-reviewed Internet resources; it is not solely a teaching site aimed at unmediated use by students and others, although another part supports teaching; it is not just an explanatory site, although the overall intent is to provide information that can be used in teaching and research. Rather, it is an attempt at producing an integration of activity, aimed at developing young researchers as information literate individuals.

A series of discipline-specific workshops on Web searching has been developed, using a template. These workshops have been delivered, on request, to academic and library staff and students at each of the five institutions. The template is sufficiently flexible that it can be adapted to suit most disciplines. Workshops based on the template have also been developed around the needs of school teachers.

As part of its regional endeavour, the INFOLIT Project sponsored the development of a Web-based information literacy course, developed by a team led by Adriaan Coetzee and Janine Lockhart of the Cape Technikon Library Services. The site

explores how to find, evaluate, use and communicate information. It is available at all five of the tertiary institutions in the Western Cape Province (e.g. <http://www.lib.uct.ac.za/infolit/index.html>) but each is also making its own decision about in what context and how it should be used in teaching.

The intangible outcomes of the INFOLIT Project are also evident in that there is a recognition of the importance of information literacy at each of the five institutions at the level of senior management. Information literacy has been properly recognised as of strategic significance in the development of the “transferable skills” which each institution should include in marketing its programmes. There is also broad awareness of information literacy as an essential part of the bundle of transferable skills with which students graduate.

It is arguable that the University of Cape Town has gone furthest in recognising the key role of information literacy. The school has established the Centre for Information Literacy as part of its Centre for Higher Education Development. The members of staff are responsible for working with the academic staff of all faculties in order to develop appropriate strategies for the inculcation of information literacy, this being done wherever possible within the existing curriculum framework. What was realised early on was that students (and academic staff) would resist the addition of another learning element to already crowded syllabuses and, therefore, the better strategy was to consider how existing teaching commitments could have their information literacy components enhanced. What was also recognised was that much of the material that had traditionally been taught to students studying to become professional librarians and information workers was now of significance to students of every discipline. Just as the importance of the library has been recognised, so too has its enabling core of professional studies.

In 2001, Nassimbeni and de Jager launched a study aimed at determining measurable competencies in information literacy of students in tertiary education in South Africa. The results (recently submitted for publication) indicate very patchy provision of courses or modules in information literacy and a general lack of recognition by educational institutions of its importance in mission statements and strategic plans.

4. PROJECTS IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

The primary and secondary school system has also made progress with the inculcation of information literacy into the curriculum. Since 1994, the education system has undergone radical reconstruction, affecting its structure, curriculum and administration (Zinn, 2000). Of particular significance has been discussion about the role of teacher in society:

As a learning mediator, the teacher has to show understanding of the learning assumptions that underpin key teaching strategies and that inform the use of media to support teaching (resource-based teaching). As lifelong learners, teachers have to be numerically, technologically, and media literate. They have to understand how to access and use common information sources like libraries, community resource centres and the Internet (information literacy) (Zinn, 2000, Improving the quality of teacher training).

In 1994, the development of a core programme for teaching for information skills (Olen, 1995) should have had a significant effect. However, it was released just

before radical reorganisation of the administration of education and received little attention, except in the Western Cape Province. There, an interim policy on information skills as a compulsory subject in schools was introduced, supported by the appointment to the Western Cape Department of Education of subject advisors for Information Skills. Part of the strategy was an expectation that the school library would form the essential platform for launching information literacy in a school. This expectation was confounded by the dearth of school libraries and the lack of recognition of the post of school librarian; alternative means were employed to foster the development of competence amongst teaching staff.

In 1999, the INFOLIT Project, of what was then known as the Adamastor Trust, launched a study of information literacy in Western Cape schools. The report identified active support for the ideas of information literacy and significant activity but concluded that provision was very patchy (Czerniewicz, 1999).

The Western Cape Education Department has also developed a project to assist teachers in recognising aspects of cognitive education (Zinn, 2000, Cognition in curriculum project). By understanding more about the process of cognition, teachers would be able better to assist in promoting cognition in the classroom. The critical outcomes embody cognitive concepts like critical thinking, problem-solving, analyzing, evaluating and strategizing. This approach is now being developed into an online Web-based training programme.

Also in the Western Cape, the Khanya Technology in Education project aims to deliver curriculum materials and improve communication about administrative matters by using ICT and Audio-Visual Technology (AVT). Zinn comments: “The project can be considered unique in the world because it attempts an approach to curriculum delivery in a context of overwhelming economic and social disadvantage” (Zinn, 2000, The Khanya technology in education project).

The software developer Microsoft has offered to supply free computer software to government schools in South Africa and give private schools and universities 90 percent discounts on purchase of Microsoft products (Carew, 2002).

5. PROJECTS IN THE COMMUNITY

There are several other information literacy initiatives in South Africa. In Gauteng Province, the LINK Centre at the University of the Witwatersrand is working with sites in the community, such as Multi-Purpose Community Centres (MPCCs) to offer certified courses. The courses have been developed for people who have never used a computer, particularly community activists. The concentration is on becoming skilled in the use of computers to find community information and, as such, the focus on only one aspect of information literacy—albeit one that has become a dominant theme in development.

The University of South Africa, which specialises in distance education, has developed a course for its students based upon distance education delivery (Machet, 2000). The purpose of the course is for students to gain insight into the information phenomenon and elements of information literacy (planning an information task, retrieving, organising, analysing and evaluating information; expository writing), and to apply this knowledge and skills in completing information tasks.

Some information literacy initiatives have been designed to concentrate on the outcomes of the development of ICTs. The LINK Centre (mentioned above) ran information literacy courses at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1998 and 1999 for the local community, following which the course provision was considerably expanded. The focus of interest is to encourage and develop the small business sector. In a similar vein, the Foundation for Economic and Business Development in the Western Cape has fostered the development of “Library Business Corners,” which uses public libraries as a vehicle for the dissemination of information to small businesses and entrepreneurs, arguing that the library is well-placed within the community to act both as a source of information and as a source of training (Brown, 2001).

6. POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The recent promulgation of the National Plan for Higher Education (South Africa Ministry of Education, 2001) has provided further evidence that the Government of South Africa has recognised the central place that the “Information economy” must occupy in its strategic plans. Outcomes-based education is to form a significant part of the Curriculum 2005 initiatives, aimed at transforming primary and secondary education. In both, although information literacy is not explicitly discussed, its role in curriculum development has been recognised (James, 2001). Within local government, also, there is a growing awareness that information will play a vital role: the document on the Western Cape economy (South Africa, Provincial Administration of the Western Cape, Department of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Tourism, 2001) is but one example.

Thus, at both national and local levels, frameworks that depend, explicitly, on the social and economic uses of information for building communities and the fabric of a just and equitable society are being established. Within such frameworks, the development of an information literate community is an important strategic move. However, one must realise that the purpose of frameworks is to provide a space for development, where the role of those who are professionally concerned with social and economic development can debate and develop what seem to be the most appropriate approaches.

A consequence of a networked society is the recognition that members of all communities need to be “information literate.” Within South Africa, that recognition is only beginning to dawn and the debate about how this should be accomplished has just begun. What is clear is that simple reliance on the schooling or post-secondary education will be insufficient to introduce the necessary competencies into the community except in the longer term. The provision of basic and continuing education as a formal process within many communities is poor or non-existent and it would be optimistic to expect that this will change in the short term. Even then, there will be a need to reinforce and encourage the use of information: without this any skill or competency already acquired will, for many, become atrophied. Added to this is the growing recognition that, for a democracy to function, there needs to be a populace which is able to respond to policy proposals and actions of government. The formation of the Constitution of 1996 was based, for example, on a broad consultation process which both presented and received information through public participation.

This implies the public's awareness and the ability to find and use information—it also implies that information is accessible and affordable.

In other words, there needs to be an engagement with the user of information that goes beyond that of provision. Although emphasis has gradually shifted towards the need for “proactive” rather than “reactive” modes of operation, it is still largely the case that the library or information service serving a community is perceived as a source to be used rather than as driving force, or animateur, for community engagement and upliftment. However well organised and extensive our resources may be, however carefully configured our communication technology may be, our services can fail because engagement with the user and the user’s needs is lacking.

South Africa provides an especially sharp contrast. The public library movement during the era of apartheid provided services that were used predominantly by the white middle-class of the suburbs; the provision of services to other communities was almost completely neglected. The model of service was to respond to demands, rather than to anticipate needs or to encourage use. This lack of engagement is in striking contrast to the ethos of the resource centre movement, which has emphasised strong community involvement as a basic principle or work and as a means of affirming a role within the community. The resource centre movement developed as a parallel community information service during the apartheid era, aiming to serve those communities and population groups for which use of a public library was made difficult and unattractive. Fundamental to this approach is the recognition that the use of information can be seen as part of the development of the “worldview” of an individual and, thus, of communities. It can be argued that the integration of information, education and development is important for the realisation of lifelong and resource-based learning (Karelse and Nassimbeni, 1997). Resource centres developed as a parallel, independent, community-based and community-financed movement with little points of contact with the public library service and, until recently, little official recognition.

The use of “open source” materials – software programs, applications, documents and other media – which are made available without restrictive licensing – offers an important alternative path of gaining access to Information and Communication Technology for the developing world. During October 2001, experts on Open Source Software, under the leadership of Dr. Sibusiso Sibisi, the Chairman of the National Advisory Council on Innovation (NACI) met to prepare recommendations on the Open Source Software and Open Standards Strategy for South Africa (National Advisory Council on Innovation, 2002). As part of its discussions, the importance of information literacy as the “key enabling factor” was recognised: the technology is of little use without the educational support for aspiring users.

7. CONCLUSION

“Critical awareness” of information is a keynote theme of information literacy but one that is often overlooked or to which mere lip service is paid. In the excitement of finding information, the need to be aware of the currency, provenance and reputation of a source can be forgotten. “Let the buyer beware” is good advice in the commercial world but, now that the World Wide Web has made publication an uncomplicated task for anyone with access to a network, the need for this cautionary approach needs to be more widely recognised. This is not to argue that freedom of

access to a publishing system is undesirable, or that a process of peer review is a necessary protection for society, but it is to argue the need for searchers and users of information to understand something of the nature of publication and the validation of information. Yet, so much of this is new to the South African community and even sophisticated people can be unaware of the need for critical scrutiny.

Elements of information literacy have always been evident in the best scholarship and implicit in good teaching or the design of learning materials: the range of information sources used and the critical selection of information have been the foundation of good writing and problem-solving. Librarians, in addition, have long seen it as their task to introduce students and other users to the proper use of materials in an academic or community library, resource centre or information service. It is the development of Information and Communication Technologies which has moved the spotlight firmly on to a skill, information literacy, which has rarely been considered a formal part of the education curriculum. In particular, the delivery of information over networks has raised the need for quite refined skills (such as familiarity with keyboard and mouse) for successful searching and the development of critical approaches to information selection and use. This, in turn, has raised the need for more structured approaches to facilitating the acquisition of information literacy within the curriculum.

In South Africa, as elsewhere, the concept of lifelong education and a recognition that one of the functions of education at any level is to allow people to develop and practice skills that can be used beyond a particular discipline has begun to shape institutional recognition of the need for everyone to acquire an understanding of how information is used. Recognition of the need for “information literacy,” sometimes fails to be translated into resources. Reasons that are advanced for this are the present lack of clear evidence to show what the effect of information literacy skill development is on the development of the individual and the difficulty of establishing clear guidelines for the assessment of information literacy. The “managerial model” (which is driving the development of many institutions associated, in the broadest sense, with education) demands clear and measurable outcomes. Yet the fruits of information literacy and user education may only be fully perceived for an individual or community well in the future. A strategic framework, which is necessary in order to understand what is to be achieved and how, also needs to accommodate the view that both are “investments” of time and resources for the long term. Such a framework would begin to identify the many points in life and a career where the opportunities for information literacy development can be most fruitful; it would also identify the agencies that could be most appropriate at those points, taking account of social development.

What has become clear is the need for information literacy to move from being an ideal, to be mentioned in mission statements and high-level plans, to being incorporated into the daily practice of educational institutions, libraries and information services. It needs “champions” and benchmarks by which its effectiveness can be gauged and demonstrated. It needs recognition at national, provincial and local levels of government – and it needs resources.

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