

## **Librarians and Lifelong Learning**

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### ***Abstract.***

*Librarians of Academic Libraries facilitate access to learning opportunities, enabling a learning culture and working partnership with students and researchers by providing information. By doing this they must understand the principles of lifelong learning. This paper explores the issues through literature review, of program outcomes through shared assessment of student and adult learning, the participation of the librarian and the mentor.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Information literacy has been a major concern of the library profession in South Africa and Africa over the past decade specifically in academic libraries. With the changing of literature from bibliographic reference to full text it seems that the role of the traditional librarian is changing so fast that it is hard to keep track of all the changes. This results in the librarian to change the way they are working. More and more clients are information literate and know in a certain degree how to help themselves. This doesn't mean that they know every thing about databases and how it works. In this situation librarians will have to change and adapt to new demands, professional tasks and working conditions. Libraries should always be directed towards the empowerment of the customer. More research and knowledge about how libraries and the professional profiles of librarians should be designed in order to improve their preparation to meet the new needs and demands directed towards them and provide the client with the most recent or most valuable information should be done.

What academics tend to forget is that librarians are active partners in the learning process. They are facilitating access to learning opportunities such as, databases and platforms. Librarians provide information and must try to give guidance and counselling and be a mentor. By being a mentor they can bring together learners and learning opportunities. By doing this librarians must understand the principles of lifelong learning and have specialist knowledge of information, resources, technology and library management. To understand the principles of lifelong learning they must be well informed about information literacy theory and practice, thoroughly understand how all learners develop and apply lifelong learning skills and strategies and comprehensively understand the role of information and communication technologies in lifelong learning. This paper explores the issues, which arise from effective measurement of program outcomes through shared assessment of student learning, and the participation of the librarian and the mentor/lecturer?

## 2 DEFINING LIFELONG LEARNING

Editor Peter Brophy (2000, p. 3) states, "Lifelong learning is among the most important policy issues across the world at the start of the twenty-first century." Brophy defines lifelong learning as: a deliberate progression throughout the life of an individual, where initial acquisition of knowledge and skills is reviewed and upgraded continuously, to meet the challenges set by an ever-changing society (Brophy et al. as quoted in Friedland, 2001, p. 49). The advent of globalization, the rise of multinational corporations, and the rapid development of digital networks that span continents challenge higher education systems everywhere. The definition of librarian, student and teacher are being transformed. Worldwide, political, social and economical structures are changing at an ever-increasing rate. These changes place an increasing strain on the educational systems that have to prepare learners for their roles in an ever-changing society. Companies need "employees who can take initiative, think critically and solve problems" (Reigeluth, 1999, p. 18).

James Burke, a science journalist as quoted by James Gleick (1999, p. 81), comments: “The rate of change will be so high that for humans to be qualified in a single discipline defining what they are and what they do throughout their life will be as outdated as quill and parchment. Knowledge will be changing too fast for that. We will need to re-skill ourselves constantly every decade just to keep a job.”

In response to this strain, the focus of education and training is changing from educator-centred or teacher-centred to learner-centred. Learners are expected to pace their own learning and to become lifelong learners. Lifelong Learning could be: The gathering of knowledge or information by reading, research and studying that could last or exist throughout your life (Malan, 2007). Librarians have to study, read or do research throughout their lives to know what the main focus of the subjects they are responsible for is. By doing this they can help the clients in research.

As scholarly and other types of information become increasingly available through digital networks, the more independent clients can be. But do they find the most relevant sources for their needs? How would they and how are librarians able to measure this? What programmatic and technological aids can contribute to the lifelong learner’s success? How do traditional attitudes and policies impede or contribute to new paradigms? Librarians can—and should—be an important part of future lifelong learning efforts, but with the assumption that librarians must “think out of the box” and approach their roles differently and creatively. During 2006 level 5 that I’m an Information Specialist on have done an extensive and detail strategic plan. Apart from the strategic plan we are developing a Marketing plan for level 5. One aspect that we as a service unit have very little experience off is lifelong learning. Part of the marketing plan and our operations strategy is to get more involve with our clients and work on a training program. By doing this the Information Specialist (Librarian) is getting more involved in the education and research of the client and in an unknowingly way, assist with lifelong learning.

### **3 LIFELONG LEARNING IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Education and training in South Africa is also undergoing major changes. In 1981 the National Training Board was established as the advisory board to the Minister of Labour to oversee the planned restructuring of education and training in the country. The National Qualification Framework was established in 1995 and is currently setting, a systemic framework for organising the education and training system around the notion of learning outcomes, from the end of compulsory schooling through to postdoctoral research in higher education and training. Additional priorities are systems and processes, which support the tenets of democracy and outcomes-based education as an approach to education (SAQA, 2001, online).

Not only is the education system changing towards an outcomes-based approach, but from the White Paper on Education and Training is it clear that South Africa is also striving to educate towards lifelong learning. Successful modern economics and

societies require the elimination of artificial hierarchies, in social organisation, in the organisation and management of work, and in the way in which learning is organised and certified. They require citizens with a strong foundation of general education, the desire and ability to continue to learn, to adapt to and develop new knowledge, skills and technologies, to move flexibly between occupations, to take responsibility for personal performance, to set and achieve high standards, and to work cooperatively (SAQA, 2001, online).

Highly developed information skills are becoming increasingly important in all aspects of modern life. The ability to identify, retrieve, store, analyse, re-format, and output forms of information are essential skills for all professional employment areas. Information is the foundation of research in all academic disciplinary areas and the development of high-level information skills is an essential component of an effective research training and management plan. Whilst career path and research interests may change, good information skills are an attribute with lifelong application and one that is readily transferable between different employment and research sectors (CAUL, 2000). Keeping this in mind, the way Librarians think and operate must be reconsidered.

Educational institutions have to think of ways and means to accommodate the needs and demands of the lifelong learner. These learners need flexible learning environments and because of this educational institutions are investigating the advantages technology may offer. Friedland (2001: 99-100) however warns of difficulties in the South African context: South Africa's e-readiness – the degree to which a country is ready or willing to integrate information and communication technologies in its society or economy – is poor in comparison with the rest of the world, but rates high in comparison with other countries in Africa.

The University of Pretoria is the largest residential university in South Africa and is committed to providing excellence in education. It is systematically establishing flexible learning environments to address the education needs of students who cannot be on campus. The Department of Telematic Learning and Education Innovation was established in 1997 to assist lecturers with the innovative integration of contact tuition, paper-based distance education and electronic education" (TLEI, 2002, online).

The Academic Information Service, of the University of Pretoria, has extended their electronic resources from 23 000 available electronic journals in 2002 to more than 163 000 in 2005. This is one of the main strategies of the University and the Academic Information Service to get more resources electronically. The Academic Information Service along with the Departments decides which academic journal can be ordered electronically and then cancel the paper version. Along with the Department of Telematic Learning and Education Innovation the Information Specialists design WebCT pages for the postgraduate students. We link articles to these pages for distant students to access. In this sense the Academic Information Service strive to get the learners to be lifelong learners. It is also one of the main strategies of the University of Pretoria and the Academic Information Service to get the students to be lifelong learners.

#### 4 THE ROLE OF THE LIBRARY

Key issues for library and information services emerge from lifelong learning. The library and information services must create a single, integrated delivery system by establishing closer links between libraries in further and higher education and education institutions. Like most other University libraries, the Academic Information Service belongs to a consortium that negotiates better prices on journals. Establishing links with organizations with power and influence at local, regional and national levels. The Academic Information Service is giving a service to external clients. A post at the Innovation Hub, which is a joint venture between the Government of South Africa, the CSIR and University of Pretoria, has been created.

The Library and Information Services must become learner-centered rather than institution-centered by encouraging wider participation, standardizing the concept of open learning, tailoring learning support to the learning style of the individual and exploiting the opportunities opened up by e-learning and electronic networks. By doing this the Library and Information Service offer accessibility, supportive environment, staff skilled in supporting learners and the learning process, resources in all formats; print, media, digital and space for individual and group study and partnership and co-operation between libraries and between libraries and other institutions. Libraries must assure quality by closer involvement in the inspection and quality assurance processes. This is bringing different challenges to the library.

One of the challenges is to design information skills programs for the continuously changing and complex information environment. The information explosion and the digital revolution are driving the ongoing upheaval in scholarly publishing that has increased the complexity of accessing information. In addition to the skills required in a more traditional information age, Christine Barry (1997) has identified a range of more advanced information skills required for academic researchers to operate effectively in this dynamic electronic information environment:

- The identification of information needs has to be more precise
- More advanced browsing skills are required; for example expertise in the use of search language to accommodate different search engines and electronic databases is needed
- Communication technologies must be used effectively to identify and communicate with subject experts and researchers around the world
- Critical evaluation of information is paramount when accessing information on the internet which may not be subject to a peer review process and is unregulated
- Information technology skills are required in managing, storing and presenting information

Another challenge in supporting research students is the increasing diversity in the profile of the research student population. University education is now far more accessible, and students entering university from diverse backgrounds may proceed to higher degree study.

Many students enrolling in research degree programs do not come directly from Honours or Masters Programs but may be returning to study after a period of time. Students will therefore vary greatly in their expertise in dealing with a complex and changing information environment. Many of these students will face an information gap which if not addressed may impede their progress in the crucial initial stages of defining their research topic and undertaking a literature review. Furthermore, unlike academics, commencing research students do not have established networks for identifying information and accessing the shared information resources of an established research culture. Information skills training designed to meet the needs of research postgraduate students must meet these challenges and take into consideration the student profile, the research environment both within universities and globally, the complex and changing information environment, and the social expectation for quality research outcomes that enrich the broader community (Hordhoff, 2002:3).

## **5 LIBRARIES, LIFELONG LEARNING AND PARTNERSHIPS**

Libraries are a unique resource for lifelong learning. They house learning content, provide environments for learning, act as gateways to the wider world of information and learning, and provide human support for learning individuals. Their historical roots lie in provision for learners and learning. They have tremendous potential for widening access, enhancing flexible delivery, achieving equality of access, and supporting culture change. This potential will be fully released only if libraries are connected, and are embraced by the strategic partnerships that will create the learning age. The skills of the librarian, the resources and services of libraries, do not need to be reinvented - they are already there and available to policy-makers who recognise their value. They are at the disposal of learners whoever they are, whatever their circumstances.

Libraries and learning resources services have a very important contribution to make to qualifications and recognising achievements. They provide for informal learning as well as support formal learning. They offer flexibility of access, a variety of modes of learning, support and confidence building for learners, and information and advice that can link informal to structured learning. Libraries are widely recognised as maintaining high standards in these areas by means of qualified staff organised into a profession, who maintain a strong service ethos.

Seek out those on campus whose values include concerns related to information literacy and lifelong learning. There are a lot of initiatives in higher education that have in common a commitment to more active learning environments which are necessary to preparing students for independent lifelong learning e.g. problem-based learning, undergraduate research, resource-based learning, and community service. Bringing leaders in such efforts together around common values, and building a shared vocabulary and vision can lay the groundwork for consolidating efforts and being more effective within limited campus resources. The Academic Information Service has build partnerships with the Department of Telematic Learning and Education Innovation, the Department of Architecture and Build Environment and the Department of Mining Engineering.

The Departments of Architecture and Build Environment and the Department of Mining Engineering have valuable information that can get lost. A digitising project has been launched to preserve this valuable information. A project in the Department of Informatics has been launched where the Information Specialist act as co-supervisor when the student starts his Master or Doctoral thesis. The Information Specialist helps the student to analyse his topic and formulate some key words. This is to help the student to do his research more effectively and teach him the different methods on how to use and search the databases. By doing this we hope to establish a support for lifelong learning.

## 6 CONCLUSION

In a keynote address that raised much discussion, Jarvis (2000) suggested that the way ahead required a discourse that is about:

- Lifelong learning, and not work life learning
- People and not profits
- Enriching people rather than utilizing human resources
- Responding to needs, not meeting targets

Given that we cannot know or predict some of the skills that we will require for future work it would benefit to focus on lifelong learning skills in higher education. Agreed that there are certain generic skills that would last into the future, for example, the way most search software makes use of Boolean operators, truncation symbols, that most databases offer help screens or tutorials that improve your search skills dramatically (including those of librarians), the conventional elements of a bibliography regardless of whether it includes print and or electronic publications, how a phrase search can help a search retrieve relevant material and so on? While students are encouraged to develop their information skills for independent lifelong learning, they are also expected to seek expert advice from an information specialist, librarian or supervisor when needed. Thus information literacy becomes the business of all stakeholders in the academic community (Moyo & Robinson, 2001).

Ultimately, the goal of the 'Information Skills Strategies for Research Postgraduate Students' project is to contribute to the creation of high-quality research training environment. This will succeed if students and academic staff perceive that the strategies developed play their part in enhancing the research experience. For their part, librarians are gaining from a greater exposure to the research culture and a more mainstream role in the University. The key element will be to find out what the benefits of lifelong learning skills are for graduates. How can we assist them after they have completed there studies? Graduates or the company that they work for can join the Academic Information Service on a yearly basis and then have access to information but what about the companies and graduates that do not join the library? Will they still be lifelong learners?

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