

WHERE WE STILL NEED TO SUCCEED

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LIASA is preparing to celebrate its tenth anniversary in July 2007. As much, then, as this may be the time for some well-deserved congratulation – and this Colloquium theme is quite rightly about success stories – it is also time, however, to reflect on successes that still elude us. We need a list of what's been accomplished to inspire us but we also need a *to-do list* of what's still unfinished to spur us on to even greater success.

I was impressed recently by the success story of a joint-use school-community library established in the Mpumalanga Province that resulted from cooperation among several stakeholders. Francois Hendrikz and Sophia le Roux report their involvement in this project in a 2006 *Library Trends* article that I recommend you read. Another success story in the making is the government's intention to come up with a funding strategy to correct an anomaly in our constitution regarding the country's public libraries. This funding strategy will in all likelihood rehabilitate the former shared responsibility between Provincial and local governments, but it will probably be re-christened in new government-speak as 'cooperative governance'.

But the point is that it involves collaboration for success. Of course, I'm not surprised that this is happening under the leadership of Minister of Culture, Pallo Jordan, who is himself the result of a successful collaboration between literary giant A C Jordan and book lover Phyllis Ntantala. And, what's more, he had the benefit of his early education right here in Cape Town - at Athlone High School.

In this spirit of wider collaboration for greater success, I believe it's time for LIASA's interest groups to stop and look around, beyond their own group divisions and to survey the LIS sector as a whole. The kind of success we still need may ask for the kind of collaboration that puts common interests before sectional interests. So I have brought together for our consideration this morning a few of the areas where we still need to succeed, and where WCHELIG can contribute:

First, **Who sets our agenda?**

Who decides what constitutes success in the LIS or HEL sectors? Or who decides how, when and where we should collaborate? Who decides on what is up for discussion and debate and what is not - what is on the agenda and what is off? How far have we moved away from a time when such decisions were taken on our behalf and *towards* participating in them as directly as possible?

Central to the transformation struggle was a concern as much about process as about outcome. You will recall the heady days of NEPI, TRANSLIS, LISDESA and ULIS 1&2 in the months and years leading up to LIASA's birth. It was a difficult and slow process but by and large a successful one. Has that success and process been carried forward into the new dispensation and the way things are done now? In many ways – yes, but all is not sweetness and light. We cannot leave agenda-setting in the hands of the few remaining old guard who have neither the inclination nor the ability to act progressively.

At a LIASA conference a few years ago I said that those whose pensions were secured by the sunset clauses of the Kempton Park Codesa Agreements should now walk off into that sunset. It seems, however, that some have stopped off first for sundowners - and no-one's calling 'time' on them. We cannot forget a time when 'collaboration for success' meant seeking professional autonomy and official recognition from the apartheid government by racially segregating library associations – well before any other South African professional association or learned society and before threatened legislation, which in the end never came.

Or the time when banned books were being burned at state furnaces and incinerators around the country, and when liberal resistance became 'collaboration for success' for a group of 'young Turk' librarians in Cape Town who demanded that the Government's lists of banned books should be published in 'accepted bibliographical style'. In other words, they were really saying, 'if we are going to burn banned books then let's at least burn them in perfect alphabetical order'!

I was therefore not surprised when a senior librarian tarnished LIASA's image at an international conference last year in the presence of some young

visiting South African librarians. Neither am I surprised by a recent article on the history of South Africa's library associations, which enthuses about the old SALA and SAILIS, plays down the role of LIWO, and that completely overlooks the Cape Library Association (CLA).

The CLA existed from 1960 to 1975, and in difficult and controversial political circumstances oversaw the origin and growth of several library depots in the Cape Province. In dorpias as small as Kakamas, Riemvasmaak en Heuningvlei, young and old people first encountered the world of books and ideas at these rural library depots, and went on to further their education at UWC, the former PENTECH and elsewhere. Although not without blame either for a kind of 'collaboration for success' with a racist library order, the CLA certainly deserves mention in an account of our library heritage – but you won't find it in some stories of our professional past.

You also won't learn about the lunacy of those separate library associations, like when their annual conferences were held here in Cape Town often within days of each other. For example, In 1972 the SALA met in Sea Point for its annual conference from 11 to 16 September, and the CLA met in Kuilsrivier from 29 to 30 September. In 1974, the CLA met in Bellville from 30 to 31 August, and ALASA met in Lansdowne from 24 to 27 September. Another piece of madness is that the CLA considered the SALA as its sister association, and the SALA considered the CLA's father to be the Cape Provincial Library Service.

So the South African library community was not just a dysfunctional family but I'm not sure how they escaped the notice of apartheid's Immorality Act police. As long as the terms of debate remain in the hands of the old guard we will not get the full story of our past. There are many examples that I can add, like how information ethics courses in some LIS curricula still bear the lingering imprints of Christian Nationalist ideology, and so forth. My question is: 'In which other areas of LIS is the agenda established *for* us instead of *by* us?' This is the first area in which we still need to succeed.

Second, **Why do we still speak and think in terms of Historical Disadvantage?**

The recent institutional mergers and incorporations are transforming the HE landscape so that soon we will have moved well beyond a dispensation we had just a few years ago. These changes are about:

- ♣ Size and shape that resulted effectively in fewer HEIs;
- ♣ Public-private partnerships in the light of the growth of private HE providers;
- Student re-distribution across HEIs, in some instances radically changing the racial composition of student bodies. By 1999 already, for example, African student enrolments had increased by 100% in historically white English-medium universities, by 1120% in historically white Afrikaans-medium universities, and by 490% in historically white technikons;
- ♣ New forms of HE governance with an emphasis on managerialist styles:
- ♣ Alternative models of HE delivery as a result of new, especially Web-based teaching technologies;
- ♣ An emphasis on S&T at the expense of the Humanities: and,
- ♣ HE library consortia with the Coalition of South African Library Consortia (COSALC) that provides opportunities for enhanced access to information, national networking and increased negotiation and purchasing power.

In other words, we now have new institutions emerging with new institutional cultures and visions. But even as the new landscape will surely also bring its own divisions, I think the old HAI/HDI split is losing credibility and purchase and should be left behind with the old HE dispensation. And yet some wish to mummify and display it as if it can still serve any useful purpose - not least the government in whose tender documents, for example I noticed recently defined HD as a disabled woman who could not vote before 1994. There is therefore no analysis of past disadvantage in terms of class, which leaves room for continued racial manipulation and little room for redress of South Africa's rich/poor divide.

A few years ago I participated in the evaluation of a European Union project called *LIBRARY BOOKS AND TRAINING FOR HISTORICALLY DISADVANTAGED INSTITUTIONS* that ran from 15 June 1997 to 30 June 2003. It effectively involved the provision of books, computers and training to library staff at HDIs. The project components have already been absorbed into the now unitary HE sector. But far more importantly, I found out that library staff that participated in the project gained self-confidence simply from travelling for the first time by aeroplane to training venues across the country and staying at hotels, and in some cases at game lodges.

They claimed that they were then able to hold their own in the company of their counterparts at HAIs and could relate to them as equals and as genuine colleagues. This was probably the most positive outcome of the project and the staff advanced their own careers armed with this training and raised self-esteem, and were empowered to seek employment elsewhere both inside and outside the HE and LIS sectors.

What is more, some librarians at the HAIs felt somewhat aggrieved and discriminated against by this project. The early findings on pre-merger exercises, after all, showed surprising regional differences, and in some cases financially stronger and more academically resourceful HDIs than HAIs. In the 1980s already, I recall UWC for example experimented with alternative tuition models and study guides because of disruptions in the academic year, and with flexible admission policies because of prevailing myths about matriculation results.

A uniform application of the HDI/HAI labels across HE institutions has therefore always overlooked efforts to transcend prejudicial circumstances and stigmas, and should no longer be used as markers for different standards, lower expectations or for mediocre performance. This is the second area in which we still need to succeed.

Third, **What about VAT on Books?**

Every now and again there is a sudden eruption of interest in VAT on books – usually around the time of Trevor Manuel's announcement of the government's annual budget. And like most volcanic eruptions, what follows are periods of uncertain dormancy. What is more is that the arguments and

energy around this issue usually originate outside the LIS sector -Terry Bell's Campaign Against Reader Exploitation (CARE) being most conspicuous, with his reference to Pieter-Dirk Uys' observation that a second-hand AK-47 is still cheaper than a *Harry Potter* book.

As librarians we have done little to get involved beyond a few hysterical e-mails to each other or to the LIASA *listserv*, blaming the National Library of South Africa for inaction, and then resigning ourselves by adjusting our annual library book budgets to cope with VAT. Unisa currently budgets close to a million rand just for VAT – imagine how many more books that money can buy. My question: What are HE librarians doing about this – not just to broker a better deal for themselves but for all libraries and South Africa's reading public? The answer is *not much* for a group with such significant collective purchasing power.

I was always skeptical of the phrase 'thinking outside the box' bandied about in library circles a few years ago. Mostly because the way I know librarians, being one myself, is that they would want to take the new thoughts, put it back into the box, assign a Dewey number and a few indexing terms and file it away on a reserved or short loan shelf somewhere. The point is that we need, like the Terry Bells of this world, to be more 'in-your face' about this matter. One way, for example, may be to lobby book and library-loving ANC parliamentarians, and other party political heavyweights and struggle heroes.

And there are many – Denis Goldberg, Ahmed Kathrada, Sbu Ndebele, Dikgang Moseneke, Khela Subane, Sedick Isaacs, Stanley Mogoba, Louis Green, and others. All of them either worked as librarians or took degrees in librarianship while in prison or in exile. We underestimate, for example, the ANC reading and library culture that stretches back to its exile years in Tanzania when it established library facilities at the same that it started SOMAFCO, and its overseas missions.

And when many political prisoners of all stripes walked out of South African prisons they were some of the best-read men and women in the country despite prison censorship. We have, therefore, a sympathetic but still untapped leadership. My concern is not whether we are for or against VAT on books – there are good arguments on both sides of the debate – but we need

to follow through and secure the best possible arrangement for all libraries and readers.

Related to this is the need to get the Department of Education and/or the Council for Higher Education to seek affordable access to expensive databases through negotiations with national and international vendors, and with international bodies like IFLA, Unesco and others. Many of the HE libraries that benefited initially from the EU project could not subsequently sustain their subscriptions and as a result lost valuable ground in their services to staff and students.

One place through which to channel such concerns and from which to argue may be the Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) committee that Fatima Darries, Nohra Moerat, Ellen Tise and I are trying to set up within LIASA. As you may have seen on the LIASA website, the committee is there but is still vacant. When it gets going, it will connect with IFLA's own FAIFE committee and your voice could be heard in international circles on these and related matters. This is the third area in which we still need to succeed.

Fourth and finally, **What about Academic Collaboration?**

I have found, as chairperson of a university library committee, that there is sometimes a kind of disconnect between librarians and academics. Of course, in many instances they work well together and have achieved much for the benefit of students and to promote a research culture at HEIs. But this is not always the case, and often the source of the problem is that librarians do not feel that they enjoy the academic and collegial status to initiate new projects or sustain others.

As a service unit in the institution, librarians or AIS personnel except at the highest management levels sometimes feel marginal to the academic programme. Much of this can be addressed by seeking academic status based on improved qualifications and published research. HE librarians should see themselves as more than handmaidens to scholarship who are simply acknowledged, if at all, in an author's foreword or afterword as having found or located valuable research sources. Librarians are scholars in their

own right in that their expertise on information seeking, use and behaviour are areas of general academic interest and study in and of themselves.

At research committee meetings, I have often seen HE librarians' applications to attend conferences turned down because there is no promised research output from which the institution can benefit financially and keep its research fund financially viable. So I am glad to see that WCHELIG's chairperson expects to publish your papers and to use this forum as preparation for the IFLA/WLIC in Durban next year.

SAJLIS is an accredited journal with space for what it calls reflective practice and Robert Pearce who edits that section has been struggling to find practicing librarians to publish there. Joint articles with colleagues are one way to collaborate for success, to build your academic profile and earn your institution and yourself money to fund more research, attend conferences or even fund a holiday after your personal research output slice is taxed.

Last month, Unisa library hosted the first of a series of Research Seminars. HE librarians from neighbouring HEIs met to share information about their research projects. Teams of librarians managed the projects and their collaboration improved the quality of the findings. One concern of mine, though, was that several Information Literacy (IL) project presentations failed to connect with lecturers to find out whether student assignments, for example, had improved as a result of IL instruction offered by librarians.

If I had been asked, the answer would have been a little disappointing. Several years of compulsory credit-bearing IL modules for all first year UP students have little to show in the quality of student assignments – students are now obliged to avoid plagiarism but have simply progressed from a cut-and-paste plagiarism to a pastiche plagiarism – in other words, a more sophisticated hodgepodge of sources but still with little independent analysis and original insight.

IL librarians could improve their own performance by connecting with willing academics that are concerned about tuition and research excellence. Their results will be interesting to university management and will make a contribution to the rather dull and unimaginative IL literature that is still little more than a re-iteration of the need, location, evaluation and use of information. This kind of collaboration for success will be a real step forward

for student performance and for the LIS discipline. This is the fourth area in which we still need to succeed.

Conclusion

There are other areas where collaboration for success is necessary. I have simply lifted out a few for more particular consideration. But if the general point in my talk is taken then we should become sensitive to the way we think about collaboration and about success. The letter of invitation to this Colloquium itself calls for us to collaborate across borders and divisions of all types, and notes that the very essence of our work and profession is collaborative. Perhaps all I can add is that the very success of our work and profession is measured by how, how much, how well and in what ways we collaborate.