



# Ulwazi Programme Schools' Project Report

Menzi High School  
Elangeni College

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# Background and Introduction

The Ulwazi Programme is an initiative of the eThekweni Municipal Library to preserve the indigenous knowledge of local communities in the greater Durban area. This innovation is based on a bottom-up model through which online indigenous knowledge resources are established as an integral part of local Public Library and Information Services.

The main objective of the programme is the provision of a sustainable environment to enable ordinary members of Durban communities to preserve the knowledge about their culture, history and environment. The programme relies on community participation



for the collection of information and makes use of volunteer fieldworkers to drive the programme at ground level. Local indigenous knowledge is captured through the full spectrum of social media technologies and is made available online through the Ulwazi website [www.ulwazi.org](http://www.ulwazi.org).

Existing library infrastructure in the eThekweni Municipal area is used to carry the programme to local communities. The library acts as moderator and custodian of the online resource which forms the platform for a digital library of local indigenous knowledge.

A second objective of the programme focuses on transferring IT technologies and skills to local citizens. This allows the people of eThekweni to become part of the global information society; it benefits them through economic advantage and contributes to the building of a caring and empowering city.

The programme also celebrates our cultural diversity, arts and heritage and aims to promote Durban as an international tourist destination by profiling places of interest, local culture and history of the area and its people. Latest development on the programme sees the establishment of a mobile interface for easy access to the website by means of the omnipresent mobile phone, which is widely used in local communities.

# The Ulwazi Schools' Project

*"My fellow learners we are happy to have been part of this programme. We have learned a lot of skills."*  
- Ntobeko Cele addressing his peers.

Through funding assistance from the Goethe Institut the programme is being rolled out to township and rural schools in a bid to create opportunities to enhance ICT skills among the youth and generate interest in their own history and culture. The School's project will be run at four township and rural schools where there are computer laboratories, two schools during the 2nd semester 2011 and two schools during the 1st semester 2012. The pilot project will be run with a practical task-based section and an online e-learning component. This report looks at the first half of the project, recently completed.

## **Task-based section**

A mentor worked with a group of 10 students, from one school at a time. They introduced the programme, showed students how the website works, provided training on interviewing and story-writing and provided mentorship to the students with regards to their story writing. Working with the teacher responsible for this project, the mentor also set weekly themes for story collection (e.g. the story of my family, the area I grew up in, etc.) and helped mark the stories.



## **On-line e-learning section**

Students loaded their own stories and images onto the Ulwazi website and learnt to assign appropriate categories to them. They also completed an online test at the end of the eight weeks, with questions set that required the student to use the Ulwazi wiki to answer. There were also a number of questions on the ICT skills that students picked up through the programme.



## Mentors Report

### Overview

At Menzi High School we worked with sixteen Grade 10 pupils who are doing Computer Science as a subject, six boys and ten girls. The school is situated in one of the poorest sections of Umlazi Township south of Durban. In spite of the run down state of the school infrastructure the principal and his team of educators are committed to academic excellence of the pupils, boasting a matric pass rate of well over 90% for the last thirteen years.



At the Elangeni FET College in KwaMashu, ten final year students from the IT and Administration streams participated in the programme, eight girls and two boys. The KwaMashu Campus of this college is one of eight campuses around the Durban Metropolitan area, drawing students from the poor communities of another of the big townships in the eThekweni Municipal Area.

The first week of the eight-week programme was dedicated to an introduction to the programme, an overview of the Ulwazi website and memory database as well as the project outline and work plan. Email addresses and logins were created for participants. They were also introduced to the School's Project blog and taught how to post their own profiles. For more, see <http://ulwazi.org/school>.



For the following six weeks participants were allocated specific themes around which they had to conduct research, collect information, and then type up stories and post them to the memory database on the Ulwazi website, together with photographs. They were also taught how to use the mobile interface of a cell phone, how to submit stories to the website via a cellphone and how to operate a digital camera.



## Themes

Main themes centered around family history, school history, historic places and culture.

In writing up their own family histories, some participants at Menzi High School struggled or were not sure of what to write, because they only have one parent taking care of them. The mentor emphasized that it was still their history and they should be happy to write it down. When participants were asked what they have learnt from this activity all agreed that they learned more about each other and that some of them were related (sharing surnames) of which they were not aware of, because most of them were using their mothers' surnames.

For the popular school history theme students were divided into small groups and each group given a sub-theme to work on: Past Principals and Eminent Teachers; Past Pupils who have excelled in life; History of sports at the school; History of school grounds and buildings and Chronological History of how the school developed. Participants enjoyed working on this theme and interacted well with the teachers who encouraged them and assisted with information.

Students had some difficulty with the historic places and culture themes. Participants were divided into four small groups and each group was given two sub-themes to research: Farming Practices of the old; Games; Water supply, streams, rivers, dams; Plants, trees, fruits; Transport and traveling of the olden days; Education and Schooling; Stories and Legends; Historic Media-newspapers etc. It transpired that information was not readily available, so it was a challenge to complete research within the limited time; however, they all submitted their stories.

For the themes that required them to work in groups, students were encouraged to choose one person to post their stories to the wiki. Worksheets were developed to help with the running of the project. Each participant was handed activity worksheets. Participants were also encouraged to help each other. The students were given cameras for one afternoon to take photographs for their stories. The mentors had to keep a record of all their email addresses with logins, usernames and passwords





because they tended to forget them. Most participants were able to use the cellphone technology to email their stories to the blog. This activity was new to them and they could not quite believe it when their stories were published on the blog and they were able to view them.

### Online e-learning test

The test results below allude to the success of the students learning new ICT skills:

Elangeni FET College	Results	Menzi High School	Results
Nhlakanipho Majola	65%	Gugulethu Radebe	90%
Mbali Xulu	95%	Mandisa Ngubane	90%
Thandwayinkosi Myeza	95%	Nombuyiselo Mdlalose	100%
Nomkhosi Ngcobo	100%	Nomthandazo Mngadi	75%
Zamashenge Buthelezi	75%	Nokuphiwa Ndlovu	75%
Sinemnhlanhla Gumede	75%	Nonceba Jwara	85%
Slindile Majola	65%	Nondumiso Zindela	80%
Nozipho Ngxukumeshe	70%	Phindile Mchunu	75%
Nomthandazo Ngcobo	Sick	Slindile Khuzwayo	90%
Slindile Gcwabaza	95%	Yoliswa Danisa	80%
		Lindani Shange	90%
		Lwazi Mhlongo	90%
		Mpendulo Maphumulo	75%
		Mthobisi Nene	95%
		Ntobeko Cele	100%
		Sibusiso Mzimela	75%



## Challenges and Lessons learnt

At Menzi High School the computers are kept in a strong room because of the high rate of crime in the area. Setting up and dismantling of PCs before and after classes took up much teaching time. After liaising with the IT teacher it was arranged to set up the PCs during the lunch, which saved considerable time. The commitment of the participants to sacrifice their time to get things ready for the programme was much appreciated. Sharing computers because of the number of participants was also a challenge on the themes or activities that were done individually.

At Elangeni College the computer laboratory had to be shared with other students at times. It would help to arrange for a dedicated PC for the programme to allow participants to work on their stories in their free time. The provision of 3-G modems helped to overcome the bandwidth problems at this site.

From early on in the programme it became clear that the target of one story a week for each participant was unrealistic. We resolved to cut down on the number of themes, while ensuring that participants gain the full spectrum of skills. One-on-one assistance by mentors was time consuming; in this regard overhead projection facilities would save time. It is also possible that an incentive such as a small prize for the student who completes the set tasks first will encourage them to put in extra time.

## Technology Report

The Ulwazi Programme uses a combination of open-source frameworks to run our online components. These include MediaWiki and WordPress. Both are browser-based and work well on high and low-end computers. One of the criteria we set for schools participation in the project was the existence of a computer lab. However, what we didn't take into account was the fact that the computers could be slow or in need of maintenance. This was the case at Menzi High School, where the browsers were out of date and the computers ran quite slow. Lessons learnt for the next semester will be to spend some more time assessing the computer labs and possibly providing a maintenance service on the computers to ensure that they are functioning at their highest capacity for the duration of the course. With regards to internet access, one school was connected (although with very slow internet access) and the other school was not. For the school without internet access we provided 3G modems, which gave access through the cellular network. While being a viable and successful method, the cost of data was more than we had expected due to, we think, automatic software updates being set on the computers. This is something we will need to check before we potentially use them at one of the next schools.



## Response from the participating schools

### From the Students

"I would like to say thank you to the campus manager for accepting this opportunity so that we can participate. A big thank you to Mr Mchunu, Project Leader Mrs Greyling, our mentors Mr Zuma and Mabusi Kgwete, mentor for Menzi School, our technicians Mr Mathebula and Mr Niall McNulty for assisting us. To be honest this has been fun. We enjoyed participating in this project. We gained a lot, we have had huge excitement through this. We gained a variety of skills such as working in a team... we also gained more skills like creating Gmail accounts. We gained researching skills... how to use search engines like Google and how to write a query so that you can get the relevant information...



We also learnt more skills like how to interview people, how to use questionnaires to obtain more information and how to use libraries and so on. We gained communication skills like when you research and approach different people from different cultures, you cannot just say you are from Ulwazi, I want this information, because some people will think that you want to expose their personal lives or maybe you want to make or gain some profit out of them.

We had to be very polite, we had to respect. We knew how to greet, how to ask for something, how to introduce ourselves, how to make somebody understand what is it you want to talk about and how then it is important. After persuading them to feel that they are part of the programme is how we gained information.



We also learned how to use Ulwazi website, writing skills and so on. There is a lot, and I can assure everyone that we are ready for the industry, for working with other people using the skills that we gained. Thank you!" - *Thandwayinkosi Myeza at Elangeni College.*



“My fellow schoolmates, the problem is that I’m too excited, I don’t know where to start. On behalf of the CAT classmates we would like to thank the programme of Ulwazi, it’s been really a wonderful eight weeks. We learned a lot and some things that we never knew before. It’s like, for us we did know how to use internet. We really learned incredible skills and a big thank you to you all.” - *Ntobeko Cele at Menzi High School.*



**From the Principals**

“Words cannot be sufficient to express our appreciation of the project. What has been done by this project, you have assisted us because... this project has broken the boundaries of ignorance... we have learners who will understand that learning is not dependent on teaching. These are two different concepts - teaching and learning. You can be taught for 45 hours and at the end of the week when we check, there was no learning. But you can learn and without any teaching. With what they have taught you now, they have given you tools which must be used for you to learn.”

“You have assisted us because you have added value to what we are doing to ensure that we have learners that are empowered. Thank you very much for the project. As Mrs Ngema said, we have to take this project from this campus to other 7 campuses with +- 5000 learners. We can’t only benefit KwaMashu Campus. We need to steal this idea and see how do we take this idea to Ndwedwe Campus as a first priority because of their location. They need to be exposed to activities like this. I will appreciate it and then we can focus on Qadi campus and others can follow.”



“Really, I am excited. I will report this project to senior management. The head of your department Mr Thembinkosi Ngcobo is the college’s treasurer. I will also inform him about what you have done. I will give him feedback because he must know about what his soldiers are doing on the ground.”



Thank you very much [to the students] for being ambassadors of the college. Thank you to everyone, the municipality. The project should be the start of bigger things to come. Thank you!" - *Mr Mbili, Rector of Elangeni College.*

"We are here just to celebrate the work well done, mission accomplished. Ours is to receive our visitors and to listen to the message and make sure that what has been contributed to the school is really taken care of and becomes a lifetime investment. So I'm sure the few learners that have been trained will cascade this information to the majority of the school learners."



"Thank you! We thank the funders of the project for making a contribution to our school. We can only teach the few learning areas that we are teaching. The type of skill and the type of knowledge that have been given to our learners is really a lot and we are sure that the entire school will benefit from the few who have learned the skill. We really have to say thank you so much, I know you have so much patience and I know it has been taking more of the mentor's hours [than planned] because they used to remain even after four [in the afternoons] to continue finishing their work. It has proved to us that it is something they are passionate about. Finally I want to promise

the municipality, the funders and the facilitators of this programme that the seed that they have planted will really grow, it will blossom and I can assure as a school we are always thirsty for the knowledge. Intellectual development is our specialization. This special skill is also adding value to the work that we do as a school we are really grateful. We would like to say please keep it up, do it to others. And we promise you that you invested in a very fertile ground at Menzi High School." - *Mr Mshololo, Principal at Menzi High School.*

### Extracts from the project blog

"Most of the children did not know what an email address was and for some it was their first time to log in to the internet. You should have seen their faces. " - *from First Day of Ulwazi School's Project at Menzi High School.*

"Enthusiastic students couldn't wait to talk about Thursday, which is the day when everyone will be getting down with the project and our first activities." - *from Ulwazi Project Launch at Elangeni College*

"The first two weeks reminded us that the project is mainly about researching and this needs time to get the right information. " - *from Lessons Learned so far!*

"The team has been been diligently doing their research

on the two themes and have done well in them. The delays have come when the typing of the stories



had to be done with limited time access on the computers. " - *from Progress of the project.*

"They have been working in small groups to research their stories and I hope everybody is going to learn something about their area and about the learners who participated in

this project from their family histories." - *from Preparing for Ulwazi School's Test.*





## Conclusion

The Ulwazi Schools' Project was concluded on 22 September 2011 when delighted participants received certificates of competency at an award function at the respective institutions. Through this project twenty six young people from marginalized communities in the eThekweni area were afforded an opportunity which many of their peers only dream of. They learnt research skills, people skills, and ICT skills, all of which will stand them in good stead as they go into adult life. The outstanding results from all students bear testimony to their enthusiasm and dedication to the programme. During the project they have become real ambassadors for Ulwazi, spreading word of the programme far and wide into the communities. But not only has the programme touched their young lives, they have also touched the lives of the project team. How often do you find children insisting to walk their mentors to the taxi stand in the dusk of late afternoon to see them safely onto the taxi, and this in a crime-ridden area where they may be at risk themselves. The experience was truly enriching for all involved.

## Acknowledgements

The project team and the Municipality would like to thank the Goethe Institut without whose generous sponsorship the Ulwazi Schools' Project would not have been possible. They enabled us to make a difference in the lives of young people who are facing many challenges. The educators who supported the project throughout and sacrificed their time were indispensable and we are grateful to them. A special word of appreciation goes to the principal and rector of the institutions who allowed us to run the project and use institutional facilities. The mentors should be complimented for the excellent way they dealt with unforeseen difficulties, resolving problems as they occurred. And we thank the students for their enthusiasm, co-operation and eagerness with which they participated, you inspired us to carry this work further to other young people.



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