

## The Salzburg Curriculum

Transcript: Asset Management video by R. David Lankes

<http://vimeo.com/50805010>

When you think of libraries, you think of books. There's just no way around it. We have lots of data to show that. Now, I'm not anti-book, as we'll talk elsewhere. But they certainly do many things other than books.

But let's talk about the collection. Because even if you opened up a brand new library tomorrow that had no books and materials, it would probably have a collection. There's a great library down in New York City which is a materials collection. What they've done is they work with building contractors and designers and architects, and their library collection is Formica, and the new tin treatment, and the new flooring, and the new wood, and etc., where their community can come into their library, see it, feel it, touch it, understand it, and then be able to put it into their different projects. Those building materials are assets.

So a lot of what we know is asset management is core to library science as we know it. But I would say that's its core both to new librarianship and to more traditional forms of librarianship as you go back through time. But in new librarianship, we need to talk more broadly about our assets than simply what it is that we put on a shelf.

For example, a lot of times what we talk about with books and materials is preservation. That is, taking something that may fall apart that has some shelf life to it and sustaining that or extending that shelf life over time.

Now, here's the bottom line: you can take any book you want, and you can preserve it so that it will last until the end of the universe. You put it into a nice case, you fill that case with some sort of inactive gas, you seal the case away from light, you put it into some place that can survive an earthquake, and go. But if you ever want to read the book, that kind of preservation doesn't work.

And so you find this kind of range in libraries and archives and museums, from things that we want to keep for a long time – so we rarely see them, we rarely expose them, we create digital surrogates, and that’s what we deal with – back to something that we want to be used every day. We talk about books in a circulating collection, but libraries around the world have realized that it’s more than just books and databases and articles and things you read that they need to safeguard and preserve over time, that they need manage, they need to collect, organize, and disseminate out. There are things they need to safeguard in a very different way.

For example, in Africa, they have a cultural museum, and within that they have traditional costumes and masks. These aren’t just sitting behind glass. They’re actually used for tribal events and cultural events. And so what they’re doing is they’re preserving them not in the sense that they’re locking them away. They’re loaning them out and getting plenty of use, but they need to make sure after each use that they’re clean, that they’re not broken, that in essence, they can keep them going.

In Wisconsin, there’s a public library in the fishing area near a couple of lakes, and they will loan out fishing reels and rods. So the idea is, once again, not to lock away a fishing rod, but to make sure that the reels work, to make sure that there’s plenty of string, to make sure that the reel is ready to go. So it’s not simply a matter of keeping things away from use, but in fact making sure that things are available for lots and lots of use.

And so that’s a core skill: collecting them together. And collecting doesn’t mean that we get anything we can, but being conscious about what it is that we’re collecting. Conversations and documentation of conversations that we want, be that in the form of books, be that in the form of DVDs, be that in the form of *anything*. Building materials. We need to figure out how to collect things. How to discern what’s important and what’s not important, and then important to whom and when.

So a collection is not simply a matter of a librarian sitting back and thinking of something brilliant and going, “Oh, that’s the stuff I want!” It’s a constant dialogue with the community about what do we find important, what do we find interesting, what do we

want to keep for a long term? What do we want to take from the marketplace and make available in the marketplace of ideas where we can build a common collection and share that, and build an information commons?

And then any collection, if you buy 500,000 books, is going to be useless unless you organize it in some way. I was part of a public library board, and that library had made its objective – and it was very proud of the fact – that every year since they started this initiative, they were able to raise the collection budget by ten percent. Tough economic times hit, and they looked at their budget, and they said, “We’re gonna have to lose a librarian or two to keep our ten percent raise in collections.” And I said, “You have to be insane.” I said, “You can collect more and more and more, but if there aren’t professionals to make it available, to find it, to shelve it, to put it in the catalog, to go out and evangelize why it’s important to build it as part of programming, then you might as well not have bought it to begin with.”

And so organization is more than simply “Stuff comes in. Put on shelves.” It is the idea of providing access, providing the necessary knowledge to get to that access, providing a scheme that’s familiar and fits into the aspirations and conversations of a community.

Finally, dissemination in the form of marketing to let you know it’s even there, to circulate it so people get access to those ideas. The makerspace in Fayetteville at one point didn’t have a physical space. They used the community room and brought the 3D printers and such out when they needed to. But what they were thinking at one point was making it mobile, which is, they could do that in their community room, but why not put it in the back of a van and take it to a school? That’s a dissemination activity, where the things – the artifacts that we’re entrusted with, that we are stewards of – how can we get the maximum benefits for our community out of those?