The Salzburg Curriculum

Transcript: Knowledge, Learning, and Innovation video by R. David Lankes

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Libraries are not about books and things and materials. Libraries are not about what we can put inside of walls. Libraries are a mission. Librarianship is a quest for communities to improve through knowledge, and that means that we must understand what knowledge is. And I know it might sound sort of self-explanatory, but there's a lot of discussion around what does it mean to know something? Is knowledge something that we can put in a book? So, this is full of knowledge, look at all the books. Yet, if they're all in Mandarin Chinese and you can't speak Mandarin Chinese, is it full of knowledge? Or is it full of really interesting characters that you'll never make sense of?

We've talked about libraries as learning spaces, where we come together not simply to read or get materials, but we come to learn and expand our worldview and move to our dreams. And we've talked about changing someone's worldview, whether it's just a little bit – what was Britney Spears's birthday? – or *huge* – that's a new career I never knew about? – we change people's views of the world. In that case, when you talk about positive change, you talk about innovation. You talk about new ways of doing that, faster ways of doing that, more efficient. Librarians must not only understand knowledge, but how to impart it, or at least how to facilitate it in the form of learning, and understand that it is an ongoing changing process, and so librarians must *constantly* find new and better ways to do that.

Here, we have core skills such as we understand that knowledge itself is constructed. Now, this is a debate. There are some out there that will say, "No, no, no. You don't *create* knowledge, you *discover* knowledge. 2+2=4 no matter what. If you say 2+2=5, you're wrong. But even more than that, if you say 2+2=4, you didn't invent that, you *learned* that." But when someone learns it for the first time, didn't they just create that for themselves?

This is the knowledge module – we'll go much deeper into this – but the idea that librarians must understand, and what knowledge is is a deeper level than simply stuff we put in books. If we're going to look at libraries changing, communities begin to engage it. Example: Fairfield Free Library put together a makerspace. They went out to the community and said, "hey! We have 3D printers and a makerspace in our library." Their overwhelming response was, "Great!" with a healthy dose of many people replying, "Why is that at a public library?"

This idea that when you go to the library, you learn. I think we're comfortable with that. When you go to the library to learn through reading, we're *very* comfortable with that. But when you talk about going to the library and learning through building, that's a new concept. The idea that I went to the library and I built something out of wood and nails, or I did a 3D printer, or I built this game, or did a podcast, or wrote my own book, or did this painting, or did this drawing…that's a new sense of where we're going. It can be uncomfortable. But what you have to realize is it's still learning. Right? Just because you didn't read it, but you did it, you still learned. And if the mission of a library is to be a learning space, that makes perfect sense. We construct that, we put it together, we add it in our head, we have conversations, we make sense of these things. That's important to know.

What we also realize is knowledge itself is dynamic. It changes day by day, test by test. Right? You try something new, you learn something new. You read something new, you learn something new. And that means that we must constantly be understanding that it's in flux. To be in flux, you have to understand *we* need to be in flux as well. No library can anticipate radical physical change within their community if they themselves are an organization that resists change. How in the world can an organization that's conservative and unerring and unchanging somehow magically lead to people willing to experiment and try new things, which is the heart of entrepreneurship, which is the heart of people moving ahead out of whatever status that they're stuck in. Libraries themselves must be innovative places to help that happen, and librarians must themselves be willing to take on that notion.

Interpretation. Librarians must be able to interpret what things mean. In other words, I have a pen. Yay! Now, what does that pen *mean*? We can both agree it's a pen, but what does that pen mean to me? I happen to like it because I bought it in Scottsdale, Arizona when I was on a great vacation with my wife, *and* it's a fountain pen which I find cooler than regular ballpoint pens even though it drips on your hand most of the time. All of that I brought to this pen, all of this is my interpretation of this pen. You have, "it's a pen," or maybe your own views on these things. A librarian needs to be able to understand that you have these deeper connections and then bring them together to bridge with other people's interpretations to make sense.

Information seeking. Librarians must understand that they help people find information. Finding information sounds easy. We've made it easy, right? You type it into Google, type it into Bing, you type it into a search engine…boom, you found it. In fact, David Weinberger talks about the idea that the room's smarter than you. In essence, information's become a commodity. You can sit, not understand something, look it up on Wikipedia, ah, I got it, and move on. Therefore, they just plugged a piece of knowledge in to help them learn on a regular basis. The problem is it doesn't work that way. You had to know Wikipedia was there, you had be able to read English, you had to even understand what English they were even using when you got there. How did you know it was in Wikipedia? How did you know you could trust Wikipedia vs. this resource vs. that resource?

This whole idea of navigating not a scarce information environment where most libraries grew up, but a really rich, pluralistic, diverse, crazy, and let's face it, often chaotic information universe. How to make sense and move through all those varying streams? That's a core skill of librarianship.