

The Salzburg Curriculum

Transcript: Transformative Social Engagement video by R. David Lankes

<http://vimeo.com/50805045>

The first of the topical areas in the Salzburg Curriculum is transformative social engagement. Writ large, it's the fact that if you're part of an institution, or if you're a professional within an organization or setting, you should be actively trying to make that environment better. Now, "better" being defined by what the community aspires to, not by your imposing one view upon them. And so, transformative social engagement is the first set of skills that a librarian should have.

This includes things like activism. How can you get people engaged and active around a given topic? How can you identify topics within the community that can bring the community together, can lead to action, can lead to improvement within that community? How do you organize? How do you get that message across? How do you really bring action to a topic?

Social responsibility. Librarians need to understand that *they* have a social responsibility. Their actions, their privileged position, for example, within the community – their *trusted* position within a community – is a great responsibility. They have to understand that as role models in the information and knowledge world, they affect how people think about these things. But more than that, librarians can't simply be socially responsible. They must, in essence, prepare the community to be socially responsible, for members of that community to understand that they're coming together around some common variable, be that where they live, where they go to school, where they work, what have you. And so, social responsibility really tries to say that if we get to goal X, then each individual member of the community, or each group within the community must take on the following responsibilities.

Critical social analysis is a mechanism whereby you understand community needs. The critical social analysis means that we go into a community and we identify not what they think of the library, not how they use the library. No, we go into a community and say, "What are you trying to do? What are your problems, but also, what are your dreams?"

What are your aspirations?” And then, how that breaks down within a community. Is that a universal goal? Is that actually a very divisive goal? How do we balance these different objectives together? How does the community come to understand what’s important and what’s not important?

Public programming and fitting into a larger agenda. Librarians need to know how to put on a show. How to put together public programming, be it reading hours and story groups and all these things to talking about hosting political debates or watching political debates. The idea of, how can we reach out and go beyond collections and truly offer services to the public? And, doing that, we understand that it fits into a larger agenda. That larger agenda may be economic development, that larger agenda might be quality of life issues, it might be increase of reputation and ranking, that we understand that the programming offered at the library really fits into a larger context of what is the community trying to do? The library will often shape itself *around* aspirations of the community, not the other way around.

Advocacy, obviously related to activism. How can we organize a community to social action, to policy, to bring it together to promote a cause and to support that cause?

Sustainability of a societal mission. It’s not enough to want something. We have to figure out how to maintain. If we dream this dream, we have to understand that it has consequences to how we support it, how we allocate resources, how we talk about it, who we hire around it. The idea that it’s not simply enough to have the dream. You also have to have the plan to go with it.

Conflict management. Oftentimes, conflict management is seen as a rather simplistic thing of, “How do we throw people who are disruptive out of a building?” But that’s not conflict management, that’s conflict avoidance. Librarians and libraries need to understand how to truly be facilitators and moderators, to create a civic and civil environment. Where, when there is conflict, not to deny it, not to suppress it, not to ignore it, but to address it in a way that we bring those with conflicting views together and we find common ground where possible. And where not possible, that we find

means to accommodate these different views, or prioritize these different views, or figure out *how* we're going to prioritize within these different views.

And finally, as I said before, understanding that community need. What do they want to *be* as well as what do they need to fix? So, that really comes down to the idea of transformative social action, that having a library, or being a librarian in an institution, isn't enough to say, "I'm here and ready to help. But, that in fact, that community, that individual, that company, that business, that college, that school, gets better because we're here. It's a *proactive* view around service, not a passive view around service.