Participatory and Transformative Engagement in Libraries and Museums: Exploring and Expanding the Salzburg Curriculum

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During a program titled "Libraries and Museums in an Era of Participatory Culture," co-sponsored by the Salzburg Global Seminar (SGS) and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), one of the discussion groups developed recommendations for skills needed by librarians and museum professionals in today's connected and participatory world. The group focused on the concepts, knowledge, and processes that both librarians and museum professionals need to understand and know, realizing that participatory culture has ramifications both for traditional functions and emerging skills. The initial framework was an overview. This paper expands on the work started in Salzburg and calls for further discussion. By opening the conversation to the library and museum worlds, it is proposed that the two systems of education and continuing education will experience positive and possibly unexpected synergistic benefits.

Introduction

In 2011 library and museum professionals from more than 31 countries came together in Salzburg, Austria to share ideas in a program titled "Libraries and Museums in an Era of Participatory Culture." During the event, co-sponsored by the Salzburg Global Seminar (SGS) and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), one of the discussion groups developed recommendations for skills needed by librarians and museum professionals in today's connected and participatory world.

The working group identified the isolation of library skills from museum and other professional skill sets as a weakness, and developed a framework for a comprehensive and joint library/museum curriculum. The group focused on the concepts, knowledge, and processes that both librarians and museum professionals need to understand and know, realizing that participatory culture has ramifications both for traditional functions and emerging skills. The initial framework was an overview because of limited time, but many seminar participants, including major library science programs and museum continuing education coordinators pledged to use it. The next step is extending the discussion. By opening the conversation to the library and museum worlds, it is proposed that the two systems of education and continuing education will experience positive and possibly unexpected synergistic benefits.

Background

The Salzburg Global Seminar is described as "a place dedicated to candid dialogue, fresh thinking, and the search for innovative but practical solutions" (Mack, 2012). During the Salzburg program, "Libraries and Museums in an Era of Participatory Culture," seminar fellows discussed ideas and insights about the potential and future of libraries and museums in a time when consumers have become participants. Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, and Weigel (2006) defined participatory culture as such:

> A participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created). (p. 3)

Applying the affordances of participatory culture to libraries has occurred mainly in libraries through technology initiatives and user-focused services, highlighted in practice-based articles in the professional literature, via conference presentations on topics such as "Library 2.0," and in work being done in other regions (Nguyen, Partridge, Edwards, 2012).

Imperatives for the Future

As an outcome of the session, participants identified several "Imperatives for the Future." These concepts were synthesized in the report *Libraries and Museums in an Era of Participatory Culture* (Mack, 2012) to provide a future framework for libraries and museums. An era of participatory culture demands that we:

- Recognize the importance of cultural, economic, and social diversity in our communities.
- Accept the principle of democratic access.
- Acknowledge the need for new language and vocabulary to describe our work, reflecting the changing realities and expectations for our institutions.
- Create innovative partnerships with the community and community organizations.
- Accept new obligations, accountability, and responsibilities within our institutions.
- Place a major emphasis on public value and impact.
- Embrace the changing nature of authority, allowing for co-creation of content and input from both on-site and virtual visitors as an accepted part of our work.
- Recognize the blurring of distinctions between in-school and out-of-school learning.
- Embrace early and lifelong learning as key to our mission.
- Accept the need for changes in the internal culture of our organizations and practice participatory culture internally as well as externally.
- Recognize that technology is a tool and that authentic participation depends upon people, not merely upon technology.
- Incorporate social media into our mission and strategic thinking.
- Join a new wave of collaboration with other cultural institutions via sharing of staff and collections and other means.
- Open our walls, break down boundaries, and orient ourselves outwardly, becoming the modern equivalent of the agora as a hub of communication.
- Change the curriculum for the training of museum and library professionals in order to address the demands and realities of participatory culture.
- Act with passion and creativity as agents of permanent change. (Mack, 2012, p. 30)

Mack (2012) also noted in the report from the SGS session: "During the ensuing discussion, participants recognized that increased collaboration between cultural institutions and linkages with both cultural and civic partners remain a strong model for enhanced effectiveness" (p. 7).

With this in mind, the participants divided into working groups to investigate and propose solutions related to the seminar topic. The working group charged with visioning the future of professional education for librarians and museum workers was lead by Dr. R. David Lankes from Syracuse University. The group created a draft curriculum that would span both LIS and museum education aligning with Lankes's premise (2011a) that the two professions would benefit from a shared model emphasizing proactive service and transformation.

Statement of the Problem

The defining questions that lead the deliberations and discussions of the library and museum education working group included:

- What skills are required as essential for librarians and museum professionals in a participatory culture?
- What might constitute a combined curriculum for both LIS and museum professionals?

Methodology

The group of experts aligned with the education focus met over the course of two days. Discussions, debate and deliberation were all part of the data collection strategy. Facilitated by Lankes, the working group started with a mission statement: "The mission of librarians and museum professionals is to foster conversations that improve society through knowledge exchange and social action" (Mack, 2012, p. 13). This mission was adapted from the mission for librarians presented at the

seminar from Lankes' *The Atlas of New Librarianship* (2011) and was expanded to include museum professionals.

The group started the work by identifying values that should permeate library and museum education and then identified a series of curricular topics that would become the Curriculum document. The values inform the topics and should be part of the "soft skills" taught in graduate professional education for these groups. What follows is the results of the working group's efforts. Also informing this presentation of the curriculum are transcriptions of a series of videos recorded by Lankes exploring the working group's ideas for each area covered.

The Salzburg Curriculum

Values

The following values permeate the topics reviewed in the working group:

- Openness and Transparency
- Self-Reflection
- Collaboration
- Service
- Empathy and Respect
- Continuous Learning/Striving for Excellence (which requires lifelong learning)
- Creativity and Imagination

Information and museum professionals should strive for *openness and transparency* because these facilitate intellectual honesty and peer evaluation of programs. *Self-reflection* insures that professionals should also be aware of what they're doing; constantly evaluate how their values align with their actions; and evaluate the impact both values and actions have on the communities of which they are a part. Library and museum professionals work in a field where *collaboration* is critical; they work with colleagues and their organizations, but they must seek ways to reach out and collaborate with their community

and experts in different fields. The relationships library and museum professionals build relates directly to the quality and variety of service delivered to members of their community; how can libraries and museums become better places and build better services for existing needs? *Empathy and respect* considers others' needs and points of view, which builds trust between the institution and the communities they serve. *Continuous learning and striving for excellence* are other important characteristics that professionals should foster. Because of new technology, shifting community values and demographics, libraries and museums must find ways to adapt to their patrons' constantly changing needs (Lankes, 2011d).

While the other core values in the above list are fairly self-explanatory, the last item—*creativity and imagination*—bears some elaboration. Developing new ideas and being able to adapt to new circumstances should be expected of all librarians and museum professionals. In a video created for The Salzburg Curriculum website, Stephens (2012b) elaborates on the necessity of cultivating creativity and imagination, stressing the growing demand for these skills in today's libraries and museums:

> How do we teach creativity, and how do we get someone in the door of library school who really wants to work in libraries, who might not feel they're creative, and sort of bring that out of them? . . . [Some common questions that professionals frequently ask me are] how do I hire people that are creative? What are the questions I ask to make sure that I'm getting those people into my library? How do I find the people that actually have the imaginations and the innovation to do some of the things that people are talking about out in the library blogs and in the social areas that we move in?

Creativity and imagination are both values (and behaviors) that are foundational in The Salzburg Curriculum's curricular topics. In participatory libraries and museums, innovation is imperative and plays an important role in the curricular topics.

Curricular Topics & Discussion

The Salzburg Curriculum developed in the working group included a focus on these curricular topics focused on key core skills:

- Transformative Social Engagement
- Technology
- Management for Participation
- Asset Management
- Cultural Skills
- Knowledge/Learning/Innovation

The group spent significant time discussing the curricular topic *Transformative Social Engagement* and outlined the following areas of emphasis: activism, social responsibility, critical social analysis, advocacy, and understanding community needs. These areas comprise the first set of skills that a library or museum professional should have.

Activism, advocacy, and social responsibility are all interrelated. Library and museum professionals have a privileged position within their community. Not only are they in the position to facilitate changes and engage their community around issues of common concern (activism and advocacy), they also serve as role models with regards to the areas of knowledge and information (social responsibility). Because library and museum professionals can affect the way people see things, it is not enough to be socially responsible; they must prepare their communities to be socially responsible as well (Lankes, 2012b).

Critical social analysis, public programming, and understanding community needs are the three additional key areas of *Transformative Social Engagement* because they go beyond an examination of how a community uses the services provided by libraries or museums. Instead,

these areas of the curriculum look at a much larger picture:

> 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? (Lankes, 2012b, 0:45)

In a participatory culture, information and museum professionals must find ways to shape their goals and services to respond to the needs of the communities, not the other way around. In an interview between Lankes and Stephens, Stephens adds, "[Innovation is] what this area of the curriculum speaks to: being out, being visible, and then looking for ways to advocate for what the library does and what the library can do in people's lives" (Stephens, 2012b, 1:05).

Technology skills is the second curricular topic, but because of the rapidly changing nature of technology, the components of this skill focus on larger ideas. The four components are as follows: crowdsourcing/outreach; the ability to engage and evolve with technology; ability to impart technology skills to community across generations; and creating and maintaining an effective virtual presence. While learning specific types of technology is important, professionals should also look at the bigger picture and figure out ways to engage the community; this core skill calls for participatory action from all angles. If a professional learns about "Technology A," how can he or she then share that knowledge with their community? Better yet, how can information and museum professionals learn new things alongside their community? It is a skill set that requires lifelong learning (Lankes, 2012c, 0:45).

The Management for Participation skill set highlights professional competencies and focuses on the interaction between library and museum professionals and the organizations they work for. There are seven competencies: institutional sustainability; advocacy for the institution; economics; ethics and values; understanding the benefits and barriers of sharing; collaborating with peers and within interdisciplinary teams; and assessment, analytics, and impact. Because collaboration is central to the success of libraries and museums meeting their missions, professionals must know how to appropriately interact with each other and their communities.

On an institutional level, this requires an understanding of resource management and taking into account factors such as human resources, training, basic principles of finance and budgeting. It also means planning programs and events that not only meet the needs of the community served but are also synchronous with the vision and goals of the organization (institutional sustainability).

It is important to have systems in place that provide qualitative and quantitative data for the assessment and analysis of programming. For instance, a program might be "nice," but what value does it create for the institution and how does that contrast with the investment it represents to the institution, financial and otherwise? It is necessary for information and museum professionals in management positions to critically assess the impact of an institution's programming on a variety of levels:

> [O]ne of the problems that many, *many* organizations not limited to libraries have . . . is killing projects. We're great at starting them, we're great at creating ideas for them and having these aspirational dreams. We start them and someone falls in love with them, and when do we know it's time to pull the plug? . . . [L]ibrarians need to be able to assess these services, see from the data whether they're working, and ultimately assess their impact. (Lankes, 2012d)

Asset management is the fourth core skill of the curriculum. It pertains to collection development and collection management and has three components: the preservation and safeguarding, collection, and organization of materials. Most libraries and museums already do some type of preservation, such as removing a damaged book from circulation so that it can be mended, or restoring and protecting a delicate artifact in a museum. The Salzburg Curriculum calls for a greater awareness in how libraries and museums can also provide materials for their communities to use. These materials must not only be organized, but information professionals must also find a way to make their availability known to the community so that the materials can then be used (Lankes, 2012e).

When it comes to the curricular topic of *Cultural Skills*, the Salzburg Curriculum focuses on four areas: communication; intercultural skills that happen at both the micro and macro level; languages and terminology; and support for multiple types of literacies. Libraries and museums need to look at the demographics of the areas they serve. This can mean taking steps to ensure that the library or museum is doing everything it can to bridge ethnic- or language-related barriers and that library and museum professionals have cross-cultural competencies. However, "culture" encompasses an array of different groups, including age, gender, and skill level, to name a few dimensions. Libraries and museums trying to develop participatory programming must be aware that people have different backgrounds and learning styles:

[Professionals] must be out in the community, learning from the community, working with the community to build, which means that they must understand the community at a much deeper level than their demographics. They must understand how they speak. They must understand what they need. They must understand the limitations and the opportunities afforded

to them by a given culture, whether that's an ethnic culture, or a religious culture, or simply where they live. This idea of culture becomes very, very important when you talk about being community-centric (Lankes, 2012f, 03:40).

The final core skill of the Salzburg Curriculum is *Knowledge, Learning, and Innovation*. This skill stresses the importance of library and museum professionals being always being open to learning new things, and also stresses five key areas: the construction of knowledge; improvisation or innovation; interpretation; dissemination; and information seeking. Knowledge itself is constantly in flux with new concepts, discoveries, and knowledge emerging every day. Information and museum professionals must be innovative in the ways that they acquire, interpret, and disseminate all knowledge, whether deeply rooted or emerging.

Additionally, participants in the working group reviewed and questioned the current state of LIS and museum education. How many of the values and topics identified as relevant are currently taught in academic programs? How might these values and topics be taught?

Going Forward

The work did not stop after the session ended in Salzburg. Further refinements and revisions, presented in this paper culled from recording transcripts and interviews with key constituents, have enhanced the curricular framework. Sharing and disseminating the work is important for the evolution of these ideas.

Sharing the Curriculum

Lankes (2011c) highlights the curriculum in an international webcast sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Rome, noting that the "mission of transformative social action is to help improve society, not simply document it. (19:50)" He also highlights

the broad concepts of the Curriculum in a presentation for the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI), calling for librarians to share and collaborate within their communities: "We must share our services and expertise with each other. Ultimately we must become a truly open market of ideas" (Lankes, 2011b, 18:45). Stephens (2012) notes the curriculum has inspired revisions of San Jose State's SLIS core courses.

In order to further refine the curriculum design framework outlined in Lankes' (2012) prospectus for IMLS, "Developing the Salzburg Curriculum," a participatory, social media-enabled Web presence now acts as a shared, open space for discussion about the curriculum with a wider library and museum community. The material is available at https://salzburg.hyperlib.sjsu.edu.

Conclusion

The curricular framework presented in this paper is meant to advance the work that library and museum professionals already do into the realm of participatory culture. It involves engaging with our constituents as never before via active participation. The framework signifies an unparalleled level of engagement with our constituents by creating innovative partnerships with the community and with community organizations. As Lankes (2011b) noted in the working group and throughout this project, it is imperative that we take a proactive rather than reactive view around services.

While joint projects and partnerships have shown powerful associations, it is not until the preparation and mission of these two groups align, that true, sustained, and meaningful cooperation will be possible. The Salzburg Global Seminar showed that unified mission and preparation is possible. The curricular framework shared online and in this paper is one of the first steps in bringing these cooperative possibilities to reality.

Across all types of libraries and museums, engaged professionals can serve as community learning connectors to support our constituents on platforms that offer endless opportunities. We believe that incorporating these values, teaching these topics, and fostering new skill development will enable library and museum professionals to in turn empower their users—guests—constituents—to learn, create social change, and improve their lives.

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