

## Teaching RDA in 2010-11

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### Background

At last year's CILIP Executive Briefing I highlighted the challenges ahead for teaching *Resource Description and Access* (RDA) (American Library Association *et al*, 2010- ) to the next generation of cataloguers. In brief, these can be summed up as:

1. The new code is incomplete
2. The UK cataloguing community is itself full of uncertainty.
3. Libraries do not yet know if they will adopt RDA. We await the results of the US National Test (Library of Congress Bibliographic Control Working Group, forthcoming 2011).
4. RDA contains many different options from which libraries and other cataloguing agencies may choose. Educators need to prepare students for an environment in which each of their future employers may expect different levels and styles of cataloguing.
5. RDA represents the first major change in our cataloguing code since the introduction of the *Anglo American Cataloguing Rules* themselves in 1967.
6. The language of RDA is different from the language of AACR. New cataloguers entering the workplace during the transition from AACR2 to RDA effectively need to be bilingual in order to understand the professional vocabulary of both cataloguing codes.
7. Employer expectations are unclear.

I followed this list of issues with a plea for libraries and other cataloguing agencies to keep me up-to-date with their own situations, and, to meet the challenges of points 5 and 6 above, to begin making their staff aware of RDA, its different structure and language. As well as assisting in their own transition from the old code to the new, this would help to avoid inter-generational confusion between cataloguers trained solely under AACR and those trained in the interregnum between AACR2 and RDA (Welsh, 2010).

### Current situation

As we now know, the interregnum has continued. The Library of Congress expects to report on the US Test Process in June 2011 (Wiggins, 2011), and the British Library on its decisions some time after that (Danskin, 2011). RDA has been late at every stage, and now we face a major shift that must be funded in an 'age of austerity'. Shortly ahead of the RDA test report, the Library of Congress has

announced a review of the MARC format (Library of Congress Bibliographic Framework Transition Initiative, 2011).

If the earliest that the LOC and BL could possibly implement is 2012, (Wiggins, 2011), then best practice for other UK libraries must be to wait until 2012 or later. But that doesn't mean that cataloguers can avoid all knowledge of RDA until then.

The latest OCLC policy statement on RDA covers the US National Test period, and is dated June 2010 (OCLC, 2010). OCLC has contributed to the test data, as have several members of major consortia (including the LOC, of course) (Library of Congress Bibliographic Control Working Group, [2009]). This means that, as libraries@cambridge pointed out to its staff, "It's likely that most of you will, by now, have encountered the odd RDA record when carrying out searches or downloading data from external sources such as LC, OCLC or RLUK. There aren't many in the [local] databases as yet, but we can expect them to crop up more and more frequently as the number in circulation expands (particularly likely for the most recent publications, of course)." (libraries@cambridge, 2011).

As Celine Carty exemplified at the CILIP Executive Briefing on RDA 2011 (London), prudent libraries are maintaining 'a watching brief' on RDA, and keeping their staff up-to-date. At Cambridge, Celine has held a series of "Open talks for staff to raise general awareness [on topics including] FRBR [and] linked data." (Carty, 2011). The need for these talks is not purely informational. Staff experience anxiety at times of change, and wise libraries keep uncertainty to a minimum (Goulding, 1996). At Cambridge, Celine expected only those directly involved in cataloguing to sign up for a talk on RDA, but had to rerun the event twice to satisfy staff demand (Carty, 2011).

### **Impact on new professionals**

What does this mean for new entrants to the profession? *Catalogue & Index* 162 included accounts from several new cataloguers on their experiences at library school. Sarah Maule and Genny Grim present a positive outlook: Sarah has found a range of interesting cataloguing jobs in different kinds of library (Maule, 2011). Genny managed to leverage theoretical knowledge and experience from the core cataloguing module and her specialist language skills to gain a post 'acting up' as Cataloguer at the UCL School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies (Grim, 2011).

Steve Carlton paints a different picture. His three years at Manchester Metropolitan University covered theory, but, he feels that "Overall, the course did not give us many opportunities to put the theory we had learnt into practice." (Carlton, 2011).

Herein lies the dichotomy for all library schools offering cataloguing instruction. As Kathleen Whalen Moss discovered when she surveyed UK library schools, "the way cat & class is taught [is affected by] the debate on theory versus practice. At its most

basic, this question raises an issue that dogs LIS education as a whole: whether 'training' has a place, particularly at the postgraduate level." (Whalen Moss, 2007).

The verb "dogs" presents the situation in a negative light. In fact, educationalists from John Dewey in the 1930s onwards have advocated the importance of experience within learning, in theoretical as well as applied disciplines (Dewey, 1938 ; Kolb, 1984).

### **The UCL experience**

At UCL, we aim to teach general cataloguing principles as exemplified by the major cataloguing code(s) of the day. A more detailed list of aims and objectives includes statements that by the end of the course students both "know how to apply the main international cataloguing rules, currently AACR2, to books" and "are up-to-date with the latest developments in the new international standard, RDA." (Welsh, last updated 2011). In the cataloguing component of optional module Cataloguing and Classification 2 we focus on non-book formats.

The specific RDA element has risen from one guest lecture in 2009 by Ann Chapman to students in Cat & Class 2, to two sessions in Cat & Class 1 in 2010-11. These sessions included looking at the *RDA Toolkit*, including viewing parts of Troy Linker's webcasts about it (Linker, 2010a; 2010b; 2010c); considering the structure of RDA in comparison to AACR2; walking through one complete example of a record in AACR2 and RDA (Welsh and Batley, forthcoming 2011); and a lecture on RDA's development and the test process, incorporating material from the European RDA Interest Group seminar in 2010 (European RDA Interest Group, 2010).

However, it would be wrong to give the impression that RDA is corralled into only these sessions. Because it represents not an update to AACR2 but a fundamental shift in cataloguing principles, and because on certain specific points it differs from AACR2 rules substantially, RDA now permeates most sessions in the module.

From our first practical session, on title and statement of responsibility, students are asked to learn AACR2 practices that may cease in an RDA environment. Whereas AACR2 1.1F5 tells us to contract statements naming more than three people with the same responsibility to only the first named person followed by "... [et al]", RDA 2.4.5 makes this rule of three an option, and the Library of Congress Policy Statement states "Generally do not omit names in a statement of responsibility." (Library of Congress, 2010).

This is also our first encounter with RDA's dislike of Latin: cataloguing agencies that do continue to follow the rule of three under the option in RDA 2.4.5 are instructed to "indicate the omission by summarising what has been omitted in the language and script preferred by the agency preparing the description" with the example "Roger Colbourne [and six others]"

This pattern continues throughout our practicals: also in the title area we see the alteration of practices around capitalization; in considering personal and corporate bodies for main or added entry students are relieved, but sometimes a little confused, that the concept of entry points will change; publication area sees them learning more Latin abbreviations (“[S.I.]” and “[s.n.]”) that will disappear under RDA; edition area again sees abbreviations (including “ed.” itself) expanded; physical description loses “ill.,” “port.,” “facsim.” and so on.

In general, students seem confident enough in learning AACR2 as a more or less temporary stage in their cataloguing lives. Most annotate their practical handouts assiduously to indicate the parts of learning that they will need to update if and when they begin work in an RDA compliant library.

The areas that students, traditionally, find challenging are a bit of a harder sell. It is enough of a struggle for some students to grasp the Uniform Title in AACR2 that the thought of RDA’s “preferred or variant titles” can be one stage too far. Following experience of this in 2009-10, this year I opted for the somewhat fuzzy “RDA takes a very different view of what to do here. If you’re a beginning cataloguer, just focus on AACR2 for now, but be aware RDA is different. If you’re more experienced and would like to know more, come and see me in office hour.”

In 2010-11 a great reassurance for students has been the stability provided by the MARC format. A lecture towards the start of the course is followed by references in every practical session, and each of the handouts ends with the questions “What does MARC do?” followed by the link to the relevant section(s) on the MARC21 website (Library of Congress Network Development and MARC Standards Office, last updated 2010). When we talk about FRBR and RDA, we finish by looking at RDA in MARC, and consider the new fields for Media, Content and Carrier Type (Library of Congress Network Development and MARC Standards Office, last updated 2011). “Sensible practice,” I conclude, “must be to wait and see what MARBI does to implement RDA through MARC.”

We pick up the theme when we look at authority data. This is where we encounter the US RDA test data most frequently at library school. Rather than ‘weed out’ RDA examples, I think it’s an important learning experience for students to see both AACR2 and RDA style entries in authority files and online catalogues. The cataloguing buzzword of the moment seems to be “hybrid catalogue” and it’s healthy for students to encounter it in an academic environment, where they can ask any questions they like, since the focus is entirely on their learning and not on the production of records in a busy workflow.

Our final session has, so far, always been a practical in which we catalogue online in a MARC environment. This brings students’ learning throughout the course together and they can see how their own records would look in a real-world situation. For those with no previous experience, this is quite reassuring, and for those with

experience it is an easy wind-down. Either way, a nice end to the course. I usually ask a colleague from practice to come in for the last half hour and speak about what it's like to work as a cataloguer, and everyone departs feeling up to the task of cataloguing if they are ever asked to do it again.

For 2011-12, this final session will change. Following the Library of Congress announcement about MARC, I think it will be more useful for students to be aware of a wider picture of the bibliographic universe. This is something normally covered in the cataloguing element of the optional advanced course. I don't think it's good enough, now, for students not taking the optional module to depart from cataloguing feeling confident they know the basics only to encounter something radically different in five years' time when they find themselves asked to catalogue, or to manage a cataloguing team within a wider middle management profile. This coming year, students need to feel confident not solely in their learning, but in their ability to learn and adapt.

I am optimistic about this. As Jennifer Howard points out, our attitude at UCL is that cataloguing is an apprenticeship (Howard, this issue). Students learn theory and put that theory into practice in our classes, but we do not tell them the lie that "that's all there is." We trust in student placement hosts and current and future employers to reinforce and expand our students' experiential learning. And this year, I trust that the Library of Congress, British Library and Cataloguing and Index Group will produce materials and examples that aid new professionals in seeing that cataloguing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not a *Cage aux Folles*, but a practical environment in which the blue sky thinking of linked data can reach some safe harbour. Because, as we tell our students, even in these austerity times, information wants to be free.

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