

I have fond memories of teaching cataloguing and classification to postgraduate students a decade ago. We had multiple print copies of Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, Second Edition (AACR2), Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), and the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) manuals that we wheeled into the classroom on a trolley. Overhead projector notes illustrated how to follow International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD) guidelines. Printed worksheets led students through the process of filling in a Machine-Readable Cataloging (MARC) record with bibliographic data. We knew there was this mysterious new set of cataloguing rules coming out sometime in the next couple of years that would handle the description of electronic resources in a different way, but it seemed far off in the distance. Web-based interfaces were becoming available for cataloguing tools, but they remained novelties for the moment.

A decade later, what has changed (or not changed) in cataloguing education? LCSH is fully online, so students do not get the satisfaction of flipping through the Big Red Books to visualise its syndetic structure. WebDewey provides the only current version of DDC. Descriptive cataloguing rules are no longer based on relatively self-explanatory AACR2-based 'areas', but rather are beholden to complex conceptual and relational data models.

As lecturers, trainers, students, and practitioners venture into this 'brave new world' of cataloguing with the Resource Description & Access (RDA) standard (Lee, 2014, p. 166), our knowledge base seems even more uncertain than the chief source of information on a classical music compact disc. As a devoted cataloguing educator, what should I be doing as I prepare people for this uncertain RDA present and future filled with evolving definitions of Agents and Relationship Designators? This article explores teaching practices, research findings, and other inspiration to help us consider the who, what, when, where, why, and how of teaching RDA, although not necessarily in that order.

What should I teach?

At first glance, this seems like an easy question to answer: teach RDA. But as I learned the rules myself in the early 2010s, its complexity became apparent. As I reconstructed my approach to accommodate RDA, I had to keep room in the schedule for the usual introductory material such as the history of cataloguing and the International Cataloguing Principles (ICP). But now there was also the Entity-Relationship (E-R) Model on which Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR), Functional Requirements for Authority Data (FRAD), and Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRSAD) is based, to include. This would then lead to the FRBR family of models, which are highly conceptual and difficult to access at first. Next, students would need to learn ISBD rules and how they correspond to MARC fields. Breaking up RDA into manageable tasks would be another challenge; teaching Manifestations and Items in one week, and Works, Expressions, and Agents the following week seemed to work best. After the descriptive cataloguing, there was more to include: Access Points, RDA Relationships, subject analysis and LCSH (without the visual aid of the Big Red Books), authority work, DDC, Library of Congress Classification (LCC), and developing areas such as BIBFRAME if time allowed at the end – which it never does. And this is all in 11 weeks! Bertolini (2012) discussed the essential nature of understanding the intertwined relationship between FRBR, ICP, ISBD, and RDA; we cannot ignore it ethically, despite time pressures and intellectual demands, as well as the complexity of teaching it (Snow & Hoffman, 2015).

I mention AACR2 in passing when discussing the history of RDA to help students understand why the community needed this new set of rules. Because I am aware that not every library has implemented RDA, I worry that my students will miss out on learning AACR2 and will need it in a job. This may not be as concerning as it was earlier in the transition (see Lisius, 2015), but I asked my student Annick Stein, who just finished her excellent MSc dissertation on the comparative use of FRBR within AACR2 and RDA records, whether she thought I should teach AACR2 as well. Although Annick found it important for her work to learn AACR2, she feels it was best to not learn it in a class that is already overwhelming to new cataloguers. In her words:

'I personally think that it is best to start straightaway with teaching RDA and the related models. The reason why I think so is that teaching both AACR2 and RDA might be confusing especially for those who are new to cataloguing. RDA, the Toolkit and the models are quite complex by themselves and as RDA is now used in most libraries in the English-speaking countries it might not be necessary to go into too much AACR2 detail. In turn, what I noticed when I wrote my dissertation is that it is super interesting and also important to know where the rules come from, how they developed over time and how much influence AACR2 has on RDA. And also for me personally, studying AACR2 was important in order to better understand how much will change and what needs to be changed once Luxembourg decides to change their rules to RDA' (A. Stein, personal communication, August 2019).

[Note: Luxembourg, her native country, has not yet implemented RDA on a national level].

The coming changes to the RDA Toolkit interface, and the associated changes resulting from the 3R Project and the Library Reference Model (LRM) (Sprochi, 2016; Adamich, 2018; Žumer, 2018), will be the next 'what' to think about in my teaching. As noted in Dobreski's (2019) recent webinar 'Teaching RDA after 3R', some teaching materials, examples, and labs will need to change, especially in relation to the Toolkit's new interface, LRM, and the new Relationships. I am learning the changes myself, which obviously is necessary for me to then learn how to teach them; these are separate things (Lee, 2014).

How and where should I teach it?

Much has been published about cataloguing instruction, but also much of it does not apply to the new setting of RDA and the exclusively online cataloguers' tools. Lee (2014) emphasises the importance of considering pedagogical methods and instructional strategies in teaching cataloguing that goes beyond simply knowing the standards and rules. Dominican University ILS students participated in the RDA Test that occurred in the USA prior to RDA implementation by creating both AACR2 and RDA records and then making recommendations; although they found RDA to be unclear on many points, they realised the importance of adopting it due to its flexibility for digital materials (Bloss, 2011). Bloss said the students met weekly in class with additional online meetings if needed; she reflected on this as a major difference from cataloguing in a real work setting, where cataloguers collaborate much more closely on a daily basis and can meet whenever necessary.

Many of today's ILS programmes and CPD modules for working practitioners are delivered online, but some papers have published their experiences of teaching cataloguing online with mixed results. The importance of having technical support available for effective online instruction has been noted (Bloss, 2011; Salem & Peña, 2015). Regardless of delivery setting, there is a demonstrable need for a focus on the practical side of cataloguing: how does one actually use RDA for creating or editing a record? Snow and Hoffman (2015) found four elements to be important in learning cataloguing according to recent students: practice, instructor knowledge, a balance between theory and practice, and real-world contextualisation. Veitch, Greenberg, Keizer, and Gunther (2013) experienced some success with teaching students RDA in a concentrated 'boot camp' format, although students indicated a desire for more hands-on practice at the end of it.

My students create original cataloguing records in their own Koha Integrated Library System, which our department's systems staff administers and manages for myself and my students. The final assignment requires students to have 10 original bibliographic records of various materials and formats catalogued consistently and correctly, with at least the RDA Core Elements included, as well as 10 associated name authority records. The students value this real-world experience, especially when they go out on work placements or internships, where they are frequently required to create or edit MARC records in many settings and with many materials, from academic libraries to the NHS to archival collections.

To whom should I teach it?

There is ongoing debate regarding how much about cataloguing all information professionals should know. In my opinion, even if they never work in technical services or systems departments directly, they should know how records are structured in order to produce the best searches possible. The best way to learn this is to work with their structure hands-on. I have noticed a difference, of course, in learners who are completely new to cataloguing, who have had AACR2 cataloguing experience and who have worked with RDA records. Frequently, those with experience learn that their library's local practices are not as solid and reliable as they could be; they say things to me such as "We put everything in just the 600, so I never knew there were other 6xx fields to choose!" I also hear this from students who go to placements with ongoing cataloguing projects. I have taught workshops to librarians who need refresher training due to an impending Alma migration or an otherwise mandated switch to RDA. Unless they catalogue full-time, they are commonly unfamiliar with the very basics of descriptive cataloguing and MARC tags, which ties into concerns about the quality of our catalogues (Schultz-Jones, Snow, Miksa, & Hasenyager, 2012).

When should I teach it?

This question does not have anything to do with time of day or year, or how much coffee is needed in a 9am session on but it does relate to various stages of a cataloguer's professional development. In my course, I teach the general principles of the Organisation of Knowledge in Semester 1, which includes structures such as faceted analysis and classification, taxonomies, thesauri, social hashtags, linked data, and ontologies. I think this prepares them well for the more library-centric cataloguing and classification in Semester 2 (although RDA is not meant to be MARC-specific, I am struggling to find examples outside of library catalogues where it has been implemented). Students just learning the basics of the profession, or new cataloguers in entry level positions need more time spent with initial concepts and principles, although professionals who are transitioning from AACR2 to RDA – or migrating to new systems such as ExLibris' Alma that require the switch – require more time on practicalities than the theories and concepts (Tosaka & Park, 2014).

Why should I teach it?

RDA should be taught as a current or emerging professional standard, but this alone is an oversimplification. Employers expect students to know the 'cutting edge' topics when they are hired, because they may not have learned the latest standards whilst completing their MSc qualification or on the job. According to Schultz-Jones et al. (2012, p. 79):

'RDA represents a fundamental shift in how catalogues function and thus a shift in decisions cataloguers make about the kind of data that goes into a record and the level of detail or granularity of that data ... Cataloguers new to the profession ... will most likely be the ones driving these changes ... libraries ... must realize ... NGCs [next-generation catalogues] are heavily dependent on a strong generation of cataloguers.'

Employers who hire entry-level technical services librarians expect candidates to possess knowledge of metadata standards, particularly RDA. This is 'a trend that is likely to continue' (Hall-Ellis, 2015, p. 131). As someone who has a passion for teaching cataloguing, I realise I could sound biased on this point, but I have empirical reinforcement: 'LIS schools must continue teaching cataloguing and classification because the literature indicates that it is the core of librarianship and the results indicate that cataloguers are needed in the job market' (Sibiya & Shongwe, 2018, p. 485).

Looking further ahead, even beyond the official adoption of LRM and the newly designed RDA Toolkit, today's students (and current professionals) have a responsibility to continue developing and adapting the RDA standard. Even after several years of hard work, there is so much we have not resolved. For example, in Europe and in other parts of the non-Anglicised world, translation is in question: should the rules themselves be translated, and in what language(s) should the metadata appear in countries where English is not the primary language (Ducheva & Rasmussen Pennington, 2019)? Also, as Annick noted in her research, user studies into the FRBR model have not been particularly successful in demonstrating that there is a direct link between the four 'user tasks' (five in LRM), what users actually do, and whether MARC-based catalogues can accommodate these tasks at an acceptable level (Stein, 2019). Because, as our systems exist now, there is not that much substantial difference in an AACR2 and an RDA-formatted record, except for details only apparent to us cataloguers such as the 260/264, the 336/337/338, the Statement of Responsibility, position 18 of the Leader, and so on. Will users notice? Probably not until they can find every item of every Harry Potter-based work, manifestation, and item – all with a single-fingered swipe on their smartphone. That day will come next, hopefully. This is why I call myself a cataloguing educator: 'Training prepares for the current environment; education prepares for change' (Young, 1987, p. 149).

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