



RDA – HOW USEFUL?

Dear Editor,

I read Renate Beilharz's article on FBBR and RDA in the December 2013 issue of INCITE, and I enjoyed her attempt to explain the world of the semantic web in simple terms.

Librarians have been trying to connect users with information for a long time, and it would be difficult to argue against the integration of catalogue searching with digital resources inside and outside the library.

Recognising that the article is not mainly about RDA, I would question whether RDA is a useful vehicle for this task. We are in a time of economic cutbacks, yet libraries seem to be adopting a cataloguing code that not only slows down the cataloguing process, but provides less precise information to the user, and information that is more confusing.

How is the cataloguing process slowed down? Firstly, in searching for records, there is a proliferation of different records for the same item. The number of choices, and lack of precise detail in rules, mean that automatic duplicate removal systems cannot match duplicates well. The increased number of elements (264s and 300s) mean more checking for errors. This means that cataloguers are less sure of a bibliographic match than with AACR2.

Secondly, in original cataloguing more time is spent in judgement calls on how to express publication details, statements of responsibility, descriptors for the role of authors, editors, translators, illustrators, sponsoring bodies, etc. This latter category has already been spelled out in the bibliographic record anyway. For those who can find the relevant section of the rules, there is no guarantee of an answer to a particular problem.

We end up with a record that lacks clarity, has a number of confusing and unnecessary elements, is less likely to be catalogued in the same way by different agencies, and which insists on spelling out all abbreviations in full – unless RDA (an abbreviation in itself) has decreed that the abbreviation is not really an abbreviation ("cm"). I note that Medline citations merely provide page numbers without "p." or "pages", so I think we can assume that anyone who reads far enough into a catalogue record to get to the pagination can figure out that "p." means "pages". As for "ill." for "illustrations", I suspect we would have been better off discarding this element of description completely. The records have also done away with features that many libraries actively want, for example GMDs in the 245 field.

Librarians are good at describing bibliographic entities, and they are done in such a standardised fashion that people who design search engines can surely create algorithms that don't require cataloguers to indulge in RDA bibliographic gymnastics. Let's leave that to the designers of search engines – who already seem to be able to link requests to bibliographic records anyway.

I think the real challenge for librarians is to approach their managers and explain that they want more money for a cataloguing code that is more costly and less efficient, that the cataloguing code MAY help some possible library systems to link into the internet, and that this exercise is probably for the general good rather than the institution's actual users. I think underlying entities and relationships would certainly be shaken up with that sort of request.

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NOT CONVINCED

Dear Editor,

Erica Cooke wrote about patron-driven acquisition in the Energise, Enthuse & Inspire column in the December 2013 issue of INCITE. What kind of libraries will our users inherit if they are mainly based on what patrons want? How much more dumbing down can we expect from enthusiastic young professionals with apparently little knowledge of the philosophy of public libraries and of the benefits of values-based collection development, which ensure collections will be relevant to users in the future as well as those interested in the past, not just those of today?

Good collection development professionals should be scouring literature and reviews not usually accessible to the average reader to ensure a balanced collection is available. What the author discusses regarding "suggestions for purchase" has been standard practice in all the libraries I have worked in for years; nothing new there!

"Speculative collection development" is an insult to many dedicated collection development professionals with years of experience, who have built up balanced collections of significance and value to their users. "Silent storehouses of books" – all the libraries I have worked in have been vibrant community hubs with excellent balanced collections, managed by patron-focused librarians who know their job and their users, as opposed to being driven by the latest fad.

Sorry Erica, you have not convinced me.

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