

RDA (Resource Description and Access) and school libraries – where are we going, and why can't we keep AACR2?

Much has been said about the long-awaited switch from AACR2 to RDA. For those "school library world" readers who may not know, AACR2 stands for the "Anglo-American Cataloging Rules, Second Edition. It is the cataloging code librarians across North America have been using since 1978. AACR2 is about to emerge with a new character as the *RDA (Resource Description and Access)* – scheduled to be tentatively introduced in 2010. This development is a major change for the library community in general (and the school library community in particular). In order to understand *RDA* and its development in context, a brief examination of the history of AACR2 followed by the development and philosophy behind *RDA* may be helpful.

The History of AACR2

AACR2 and the vision of RDA

In 1978, AACR2 was introduced, bringing together international cataloging rule development into one document. Unlike its predecessor, AACR2 originally contained only two parts:

- Description (now based on the *General International Standard Bibliographic Description: Annotated Text – or ISBD(G)*)
- Entry and heading

The Library of Congress, the National Library of Canada, the British Library, and the Australian National Library adopted AACR2 in 1981. The text was later revised in 1988, 1998, and 2002 to reflect changes in entry procedures and the development of new formats (particularly emerging formats such as "electronic resources").

While AACR2 was intended to address cataloging in all formats, this "comprehensive view" of AACR2 has been debated. Ann Huthwaite in her *AACR2 and Its Place in the Digital World: Near-Term Solutions and Long-Term Direction* discusses the fact that the cataloging rules for some formats – particularly those which are electronic-based – may contain similar descriptive characteristics and, thus, be assigned to multiple chapters in AACR2.

Additionally, these format similarities are appearing in ways never experienced before. For example, prior to 1997, most documents were reproduced in print. If another format happened to be generated for the document, it was usually reproduced in a micro-based format (microfilm, microfiche, etc.). Today, there are a number of “formats” for documents – including the portable document format (PDF), the extensible markup language (XML), and others. When catalogers are asked to catalog documents in these new formats, AACR2 rules are often specific and, thus, not easily adaptable to the changing cataloging requirements for these formats (Huthwaite, 2000).

It is both the content and format similarities as well as the strict interpretation of AACR2 content that led policy makers to look for ways to streamline AACR2 to dynamically address the ever-increasing access to materials in multiple formats and the need to look for more defined strategies for materials metadata creation and management.

RDA: From concept to reality

Resource Description and Access, or RDA, is the result of the work of the Committee of Principles, an international body of representatives from library/research institutions, and the Joint Steering Committee for the Revision of Anglo-American Cataloging Rules. The statement of purpose for *RDA* is as follows:

RDA - Resource Description and Access will be a new standard for resource description and access, designed for the digital world.

Built on foundations established by the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR), RDA will provide a comprehensive set of guidelines and instructions on resource description and access covering all types of content and media.

RDA will enable users of library catalogues and other systems of information organization to find, identify, select, and obtain resources appropriate

to their information needs (Joint Steering Committee for the Revision of Anglo-American Cataloging Rules, 2006)

Structurally, *RDA* is slated to contain the following parts:

- Introductions (general principles/ concepts)
- Part I - Description
- Part II - Relationships
- Part III – Authority control
- Appendices

An important part of *RDA* will be its direct alignment with the *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR)* and *Functional Requirements for Authority Records (FRAR)*. Other important features of *RDA* will be its attempt to address ambiguous terminology, resolve problems related to identifying material classes (i.e. terms describing GMDs – General Material Designators), eliminate inconsistencies in technical/content descriptions, and address the cataloging of digital resources, three-dimensional objects, visual materials, manuscripts, and archives more effectively.

Another highlight will be the development of an online tutorial which will review *RDA*'s specifications and use. This tool will be accompanied by the development and use of examples which will be written in English. Furthermore, a glossary and references to important *RDA*-related definitions will be added, and plans are underway to develop implementation activities. These activities will be developed in cooperation with educators and cataloging training professionals worldwide and intended to support the integration of *RDA* structure and content into the cataloging workflow (Joint Steering Committee for the Revision of Anglo-American Cataloging Rules, 2006).

Here's a sample of an *RDA* entry as taken from the scope and structural review of the document:

1.1.2. MODE OF ISSUANCE

Certain guidelines and instructions in part I refer specifically to resources issued in a particular manner.

- The term **resource issued as a single unit** refers to a resource that is issued either as a single physical unit (e.g., as a single-volume monograph) or, in the case of an intangible resource, as a single logical unit (e.g., as a PDF file mounted on the Web).
- The term **resource issued in two or more parts simultaneously** refers to a resource comprising two or more physical units (e.g., two videocassettes issued as a set) or, in the case of an intangible resource, two or more logical units (e.g., a Web site comprising two or more distinct sub-sites).

- The term **resource issued in successive parts** refers to a resource that is issued in a succession of discrete parts. The parts may be physically discrete (e.g., the issues of a printed magazine) or, in the case of an intangible resource, they may be logically discrete parts that are issued in succession and remain as discrete parts (e.g., the monthly issues of an electronic journal).
- The term **integrating resource** refers to a resource that is added to or changed by means of updates that do not remain discrete and are integrated into the whole. An integrating resource may be tangible (e.g., a loose-leaf manual that is updated by means of replacement pages) or intangible (e.g., a Web site that is updated either continuously or on a cyclical basis).

1.1.3. INTENDED TERMINATION

Resources issued in two or more parts (either simultaneously or successively) may also be referred to using terms that reflect a distinction between those that are to be completed within a finite number of parts and those that are to be issued over time with no predetermined conclusion.

- The term **multipart monograph** refers to a resource issued in two or more parts that is complete or intended to be completed within a finite number of parts.
- The term **serial** refers to a resource issued in successive parts that has no predetermined conclusion (e.g., a periodical, a series of annual reports, or a newspaper).

1.1.4. COMPREHENSIVE, ANALYTICAL, AND MULTILEVEL DESCRIPTION

A number of the guidelines and instructions in part I refer to specific ways of describing a resource.

- The term **comprehensive description** refers to a description that describes the resource as a whole (e.g., a kit comprising a filmstrip, an audiotape, and a teacher's manual, or a collection of posters assembled by a library).

1.4. MANDATORY ELEMENTS OF DESCRIPTION

Chapters 2–6 provide guidelines and instructions on a comprehensive set of elements covering the description of all types of resources. The following is a list of mandatory elements that reflect attributes of the entities *work*, *expression*, and *manifestation* designated in FRBR as basic requirements for the purposes of identifying those entities.¹ Title proper

Earlier/later variations in the title proper

Statement of responsibility (person, family, or corporate body with principal responsibility)²

Edition statement

Numbering

Publisher, distributor, etc. (if more than one then only the first recorded)³

Date of publication, distribution, etc.

Title proper of series

Numbering within series

Resource identifier

Form of carrier

Extent

Scale of cartographic content

Coordinates of cartographic content

- When describing a resource, include as a minimum all the elements listed above that are applicable to that resource.

- *Optionally*, provide a controlled access point (see chapters 11-16) in lieu of the mandatory statement of responsibility.

- Include any additional elements that are required to identify the resource (i.e., to differentiate the resource from one or more other resources bearing similar identifying information).

- When describing a resource more fully, include additional elements in accordance with the policy of the agency preparing the description, or as judged appropriate by the cataloguer.

RDA's Impact on Cataloging in School Libraries

For the school library community, *RDA* will have a limited impact on the daily cataloging and processing of materials entering school libraries, as, in most cases, teacher-librarians do not modify existing cataloging records created by bibliographic utilities, materials publishers, and other bibliographic record vendors.

However, the knowledge by the school library community that *RDA* is coming will be of great benefit to school librarians who interact directly with vendors in the acquisition of MARC records. It is at this vendor level that *RDA* will have the most direct impact. According to Barbara Schultz-Jones; Assistant Professor, School Library Program, Department of Library and Information Sciences - College of Information, University of North Texas; *RDA* will give online catalogs the potential for new displays of related resources. According to Ms. Schultz-Jones:

I think it's important for school librarians to realize there will be new MARC tags to enable these connections and also realize that the vendors must get going on enabling the displays. When the K-12 students get to college, they will encounter *RDA*-enabled catalogs, and that means they should be introduced to the potential [provided by *RDA* rules/processes] early in the K-12 years.

Furthermore, the connection of *RDA* to the *FRBR* model and its use of a hierarchical structure – using the “work” level (i.e. uniform titles) to link different “manifestations” (i.e. versions – print, electronic, etc.) – will also contribute to the smooth transition from AACR2 to *RDA*.

Another aspect in the effort to streamline the transition from AACR2 to *RDA* is to recognize the historical role of past transitions of cataloging standards and how standards-based instruction was/is viewed in the library community. According to Allyson Carlyle of the University of Washington School of Library/Information Science, writing on the eduCAT listserv, teaching an old cataloging standard (in this case, AACR2) is nothing new:

It reminded me again of the comparison between this and the switch from AACR1

to AACR2. AACR2 was published in 1978, but not implemented until 1981, after having been postponed at least once from the original projected date of implementation. It was necessary to continue to teach AACR1 for students even after 1981 because of the practice of considering some headings to be "AACR2 compatible" -- that is, the AACR1 heading was accepted and continued to be used in new records in instances where the entity in question was not well known (and a few other cases).

In addition, thousands of records created according to AACR1 and earlier rules continued to be in the majority in catalogs for many years (at least through the 1980s); so students who were going to be catalogers needed to have some understanding of the older rules. I believe this will also be the case when RDA is implemented.

A recent graduate, Jennifer Parsons (also writing on the eduCAT listerv and participating in the same message stream), reiterates the importance of AACR2/RDA transitional education from a student perspective. Her view is one of progressive exploration in understanding the role of cataloging standards as they relate to the "art" of cataloging itself:

The point I was trying to make was that RDA can be taught as a sort of criticism of AACR2-- that is, it provides format for how AACR2 comes up short in describing unusual items or sets of items. It also provides context for using any kind of metadata in a library system, period-- that is, why is data structured like this in an OPAC? Why is MARC used, instead of something else (the issue of legacies can be addressed here, too)?

Why was RDA created to begin with? My point was that RDA can be introduced into a course as a good way to provide a historical

perspective (i.e., how do new standards answer questions posed by old standards?).

I see LIS students-- or recent graduates like myself-- presented with these standards in library school and told to memorize them with no other explanation than "that's the way we've always done it." Memorization is a fine thing for cataloging, but that alone isn't good for encouraging experimentation and collaboration-- if that's the way we've always done it, why bother to reorganize, innovate, or at least modify the standard to best suit an unusual item? It gives the illusion that cataloging is a static discipline.

RDA and new formats/metadata standards – streaming media, PDF, XML, Dublin Core, etc. – the future looks bright!

Ultimately, the primary impact of *RDA* will be to clarify the cataloging rules associated with a new group of library resources, including streaming videos and the online document formats (PDF, XML, etc.) mentioned earlier in this article. While school libraries often feature new formats later than other institutions, the need for understanding how those formats should be displayed, to echo Barbara Schultz-Jones' earlier statement, will remain important.

Furthermore, school libraries will continue to use AACR2 for the foreseeable future. Much like has been the case with the continued use of the MARC bibliographic standard in school libraries (as opposed to the use of newer, more flexible bibliographic standards - including the Dublin Core and GEM metadata standards), *RDA*'s use will become more widespread as school libraries join other libraries worldwide in presenting new formats as well as the information describing those formats in places beyond the scope of the traditional library catalog – including websites, data records, and other documents.

Thus, just as AACR2 offered to school libraries over thirty years ago, *RDA* has a bright future in school libraries as well. At what point in that positive progression from old to new the brightness becomes clear is yet unknown.

Works cited:

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