

Teaching RDA in 2013-14: Flipping the Cat Class

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Introduction

With not only the Library of Congress and British Library moving to RDA in 2013 (Wiggins, 2012; Danskin, 2013), but also major research libraries including Cambridge University Library, the Bodleian and Trinity College, Dublin (Carty, 2013; O'Reilly, 2013; McManus, 2013), while others are adopting a wait and see approach (Gryspeerdt, 2012), it is not only current cataloguing staff who are required to understand and be able to create records in both the old (AACR2) and the new (RDA) cataloguing standards; library school students must prepare for a working life in which their future employers may be looking for expertise in one standard, or the other, or both. With the same amount of class time available on the MA LIS for instruction (30 hours), this article suggests that the future of cataloguing education, like the future of catalogue records themselves, may be hybrid.

Cataloguing in the Curriculum

In the 21st century, there has been a move in the UK Higher Education curriculum away from teaching the specifics of cataloguing standards and formats towards a more general approach as part of wider modules such as Knowledge Organization, Information Retrieval or Information Architecture (Bowman, 2006; Whalen-Moss, 2007; Wiley, 2011). Some educators advance practical reasons for this – as M. Cristina Pattuelli puts it in an article surveying introductory Knowledge Organization courses in ALA accredited library schools, “Core competences need to evolve in response to the changes taking place in professional practices and the new areas of expertise needed for today’s library and information work environment” (2010). Describing the approach taken in the well-respected programme at City University, David Bawden asserts that “while it is essential that students gain an awareness of the principles of cataloguing and of resource description generally, it is not appropriate to include detailed instruction in any specific system or format” (2012). Building on Pattuelli’s pragmatic approach, he also puts forward an academic view that

also reflects that fact that the practical competences of traditional cataloguing, though still a relevant set of professional skills for some contexts and

circumstances, are not really the stuff of Masters level education: as Maurice Line put, in typically robust fashion, “Cataloguers would lose much of their status if it were shown that most cataloguing is a trivial job easily done by clerical staff”. (Bawden, 2012).

Whether we agree with Line quoted by Bawden (and it should be clear that I do not), there remains a demand in the UK for an education in cataloguing that encompasses both the theoretical and the practical (Carlton, 2011; Grim, 2011; Howard, 2011; Maule, 2011; Middleton, 2013). It is evident from the current job market that, notwithstanding the debates around recruiting for attitude rather than skills (Jardin, 2007; Armstrong-Viner, 2012), there are still plenty of roles advertised in which practical knowledge and experience are sought. A quick web search found these examples, amongst a dozen similar ones:

Library Assistant (Deputy Cataloguing and Metadata Manager) - SB937

University Library, Salary: £20,764 - £24,049 per annum

... You will be able to demonstrate experience of database work. A good working knowledge of cataloguing practice and standards is essential as well as experience of working in a library environment (University of St Andrews, 2013, my italics).

Arabic Cataloguer (Fixed-term) Salary: £24,000 per annum pro rata

... Applicant should have an extensive knowledge of ACR2/RDA and MARC21 cataloguing rules as well as LC classification/subject schemes and Name authorities. Successful candidate should readily adapt to the Library Management systems used by the Institute including WorldCat connexion client and Symphony. (Aga Khan University, 2013, my italics).

Part-time Library Assistant (Chinese Department)

... Familiarity with RDA/AACR2 and MARC 21 cataloguing rules and with the cataloguing and acquisitions modules of the Voyager library management

system is also desirable ... Salary £18,005-£20,764 pa, pro rata. (University of Cambridge, 2013, my italics).

Special Collections Librarian, Library Services – Brayford ... Salary: From £25,504 per annum

... This is a joint venture with Lincoln Cathedral Library

... In addition to the formal qualifications in the Person Specification, knowledge of cataloguing to ISAD standards and experience of either CALM or ADLIB cataloguing software would be an advantage, as would an interest in medieval history. (University of Lincoln, 2013, my italics).

Metadata and Systems Librarian ... Salary (£) 30424-36298

... Essential:

... In-depth knowledge and substantial practical experience of one or more of the library, museum, and archive cataloguing standards currently in use at Durham University (AACR2, RDA, MARC21, EAD, Dublin Core, and Spectrum), along with an ability to apply underlying theory to develop an understanding of all these areas to the extent required by the post. (Durham University, 2013, my italics).

With employers like these seeking a level of familiarity with standards that is more than theoretical, it is easy to see why some students should wish to take a core cataloguing module that means they

have an understanding of the general principles of bibliographic description and the history of the development of cataloguing in the UK and USA; know how to apply the main international cataloguing rules to books; are aware of the structure of AACR2 and can describe some of the key differences in cataloguing non-book formats; have practical experience cataloguing using

AACR2, RDA and the MARC21 cataloguing format; understand the basics of authority control and how it can be applied; are up-to-date with the latest developments in the new international standard, RDA; have written a cataloguing policy for a special library / subject area of their choice. (University College London Department of Information Studies, 2013).

As Bawden is kind enough to say in his overview of City's "principles and concepts" approach to instruction in Knowledge Organization, they "have another institution in London providing a very thorough treatment of these issues in its Masters courses" (Bawden, 2012). Indeed, as reflected in *Practical Cataloguing: AACR, RDA and MARC 21* (Welsh and Batley, 2012), at UCL I attempt to provide the conceptual knowledge one might expect of any Masters awarded from our institution as well as equipping students with the practical tools and training that the job market for cataloguers and bibliographic services managers requires. The MA LIS is, after all, a vocational Masters and cataloguing is, after all, a career choice that demands a long apprenticeship for which the Masters provides a firm foundation (Howard, 2011; Welsh, 2011).

The current challenge, therefore, is to provide students with the skills they need in the hybrid environment, during the transition from AACR2 to RDA and from MARC to the format proposed by the Bibliographic Frameworks Initiative (BIBFRAME) (Library of Congress, 2011-2013). Whereas in previous academic years it was appropriate to provide students with instruction in AACR2 in MARC and indicate where RDA differs, this year it is important to provide them with more hands-on learning about RDA.

The Flipped Classroom

As discussed elsewhere (Welsh, 2011), the preferred mode of learning is active, with three hour sessions split into a short plenary followed by practical activities. Whereas in previous years we have been constrained by being based in standard classrooms, for the session 2013-14 we were given priority for computer cluster bookings, justified by the need for regular use of the RDA Toolkit. Taking the practical classes into clusters has, in turn, enabled a variety of activities that were not possible before, and, in particular, it has allowed students to select from a range of activities, according to their level of previous experience, interests and learning objectives. In essence, it has been possible to flip the classroom, so that the learning

that takes place during lecturer-student contact time is more focused on the needs of the individual.

As a teaching and learning concept, the flipped classroom has been gaining coverage in the academic press both for secondary and tertiary education. In essence, the provision of video and other online content enables students to undertake the passive learning that normally occurs in a classroom at home and to complete activities in class-time that previously were undertaken as homework. Based on the well-established theories of John Dewey that experience is the mediator of knowledge (Dewey, 1929) and that we learn best not merely through the performance of an educator at the front of a room but by undertaking activities independently of the educator, although with their appropriate support (Dewey, 1897), the flipped classroom provides a student-centred approach as opposed to a “one size fits all” approach to teaching (Michael, 2006).

As Charlotte Middleton points out, one of the challenges of the module both for teachers and students in the core Cataloguing module is the range of experience with which students arrive (Middleton, 2013). Whereas in previous years, those with experience had to wait for less experienced colleagues to gain enough knowledge to undertake the shared classroom activities (usually cataloguing a range of books of varying degree of difficulty, focusing on one particular field each week), in the flipped classroom each student can start from where they are and move forward to their own end goals for the module.

Flipping the Cataloguing Class

Of course, all the students have at least one shared goal, which is to pass the module assessment. In order to do this, they must write a cataloguing policy, including example records varying from basic to more challenging (such as those containing conference headings and uniform titles):

With reference to AACR2 revised (2002 revision + amendments) and other appropriate standards (e.g. RDA, FRBR, standards for specific materials), create a cataloguing policy document for a library. (Welsh, 2013).

For a beginning cataloguer, who does not envision working in this area of the profession, passing the assignment may be their only stated learning objective. For someone who has, perhaps, chosen to attend UCL’s MA LIS course in order to increase their mastery of

cataloguing theory and extend their experience, the list of learning objectives may be considerably longer. Certainly this year it has included students who want to move on from monograph cataloguing to maps and a small cluster of students already proficient in copy cataloguing printed music who wish to deepen their understanding of the theories underpinning AACR2 and extend their cataloguing experience to RDA. As every year, there are also students who aim to become systems librarians and who are, therefore, keen to enhance their knowledge of discovery systems and, of course, the BIBFRAME Primer (Miller *et al.*, 2012).

The students have kindly agreed to help me evaluate the flipped activities and their experiences of flipped learning, and I will issue a survey questionnaire at the end of the term and request volunteers to be interviewed in order to add to the activities on offer and fine-tune any materials (videos, handouts, in-class instruction) ahead of the next academic year. However, from my own classroom observation and from verbal feedback from some members the class, I have seen several positive impacts from flipping the practical classes:

1. As I look round the cluster room, I can see students engaged in different activities – watching videos, reading the RDA Toolkit, studying the catalogues of other libraries.
2. In the first 5 weeks when new cataloguers were mastering basic fields (Author, Title, Publisher, Physical Description), experienced cataloguers were able to move into viewing material on RDA and forming their own opinions about it and about how it is being applied by different institutions. There was enough time in class for me to have meaningful discussions with the more experienced students as well as to assist the beginning cataloguers.
3. By the third week of class, students had formed loose groups of people at much the same stage who like learning in the same style. The majority still follow the approach I took in my “one size fits all” model – working in groups of two or three to go through and discuss examples and the rules pertaining to them. However, those few students who are purely conceptual learners are ‘freed’ from this model to engage in activities best suited to them – one student in particular has made tremendous progress simply by reading AACR2 and the RDA Toolkit and the handouts I prepare in support, and then, having done so, began cataloguing examples. Although I am sure he would have learned under the “one size fits all” approach, the amount of material

he could cover would have been restricted by waiting for the majority of the class to complete enough practice examples to understand concepts that he, clearly, can normally grasp through reading alone.

4. Questions brought to me outside class by individuals are, generally, more complex than in previous years. As the weeks have progressed, everyone's learning has accelerated. At the same time I have noticed that the couple of students who need to move through the fields more slowly also seem to me to be more confident. I presume this is because they are able to work at their own pace, trying as many examples as they need before moving onto the next field.
5. From week 6 of the course, one of the core activities in which students have been engaged is drafting their policy document for their assessment. Following my advice, this has meant their finding examples from the subject area they have chosen, bringing them to class and cataloguing them, while making note of issues that arise that they can discuss in their policy document. By cataloguing a range of items, they begin to develop a feel for the sort of issues that occur in, say, legal texts (lots of complex edition statements and added title entries, for example) while they are able to discuss with their neighbours the issues that are cropping up in their chosen area – perhaps art books (lots of physical description challenges, and perhaps, quite deliberate non-AACR2-compliant graphic design on the title page). I'm sure that this activity took place outside the classroom before, but by bringing it into the heart of our practical sessions, the students are able to involve me in the discussion, and, in turn, I am able to widen it out, where useful, to the class as a whole. On a more mundane level, students have gained 7.5 hours of time in class to work on something that previous years had to complete at home alone.
6. It is clear to me that my major objective – that students should be free to learn AACR2 in MARC but have the opportunity to engage with RDA at a level appropriate to them has been achieved. As one of the self-defined “absolute beginners” put it, “As long as I know the stuff is on Moodle and I can come and ask you questions once the course has finished, I know I can concentrate on my policy document and then really get to grips with RDA.” In this, she was doing herself a small disservice, as she is one of the students who, in general class feedback sessions,

seems most accurate in her observations of the specific differences between RDA and AACR2.

Picking up on this final point, this is the gain in teaching and learning that I did not predict when I decided to flip the class. I think we have, perhaps, been too hasty in assuming that having to learn two standards 'at once' will be too great a cognitive load for beginning cataloguers. At a field by field level, all of this year's students have been able to engage with RDA. As one of them put it to me when I asked her about this, "It's easy to understand from your videos 'At the moment we do this, but when we work in RDA we will do this other, different thing,' what's harder is to understand two different models, so I'm focusing on learning the AACR2 one and then I'll *really* get to grips with FRBR and RDA in the new year, in my own time, because I'm interested. For now, I'm just floating along with the FRBR and RDA basics you've covered in lectures."

One of the questions I have for the students in my survey and interviews will be about the utility of lectures. I'm keen to discover if their experience was similar to that of the students Strayer studied in his work, which looked at Statistics classes, and found that for introductory material, students actually preferred lectures to either sitting watching a video at home or engaging in interactive activities. For those students, if they were learning something entirely new, it was preferable to be led from the front of the classroom by an instructor who could not only assure them of the authority of the information but provide a subtle feedback loop in which the students felt confident that they had gained some knowledge of the subject at hand (Strayer, 2012).

In moving forward to the next academic year, I am extremely grateful to the class of 2013-14. As well as giving me suggestions for the topics for more videos that they would find useful, going through the process of delivering the flipped classroom with them is helping me to learn which aspects of RDA is proving most challenging to students at different levels of pre-library school cataloguing experience. This, in turn, is invaluable as I prepare for next year, in which, for the first time, I will teach RDA as the main standard and the standard on which students are assessed (although, of course, still covering AACR2, as a second standard it is important for students to learn). Employers can rest assured that UCL will continue to prepare students for the hybrid environment in which we all operate, and that students are not only capable of surviving in that environment, but keen and, in most cases, able to shape it. As a cataloguer of a certain age, who is herself learning to swim in the new waters of

BIBFRAME, I feel very reassured by the next generation with whom it is my great privilege to work.¹

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¹ Although most of the videos used in class are stored on UCL's Lecturecast system (available only to those registered on the module, some are available on Youtube at <http://www.youtube.com/user/AnneWelsh1>

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