

RDA for school libraries: the next generation in cataloguing



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The story of knowledge is a story of history, and one that directly relates to the way we have wanted to influence and educate the young members of our society. Recorded information, and the documents or carriers which carry information forward, has come a long way since the emergence of oral traditions and records on clay tablets and the like. The Library of Alexandria was in many ways the first grand repository of information, organised and made accessible as an official repository for scholars.

For hundreds of years libraries consisted mostly of printed books and journals, and so these were mostly what library catalogues described. As information technology developed, new kinds of information resources were produced, which information agencies such as libraries also started to collect, such as photographs, sound recordings (phonograph records, tapes, CDs), films and videos. School library collections were almost entirely books up until the 1970s when audiovisual resources along with the proliferation of educational print resources such as charts and 'big books' brought a wave of change. At about this time librarians started to talk about 'materials' or 'resources' as the generic name (rather than 'books' or 'volumes') for what they dealt with in their collections, and started to describe a much larger range of materials in their catalogues.

So from a school library point of view, library catalogues have been an important example of an information organisation and access tool, since a catalogue is essentially a database with a complex range of access points (metadata) to information resources using data elements in the record, such as *author* or *title*. Until recently this structured and consistent approach to cataloguing in our school libraries was built on the Anglo-American cataloguing rules (AACR2) ensuring uniform accessibility to information in whatever format was wanted, because of the resource description detail that is embedded in such a catalogue record.

However, these catalogues were stand-alone end points to what was in a particular

collection, and typically had to even be used within the walls of the library. We then moved on to at least putting these catalogues into union catalogues, or onto the Web so they could be searched, and OCLC (@OCLC on Twitter) took it one step further to create a **WorldCat** (world catalogue <http://worldcat.org/>) to offer users a way to search the holdings of all the OCLC member libraries at once. But, in fact, all of that bibliographic data from any source can now be integrated into the wider Internet environment. New kinds of links can be made; new displays can be generated for users from data packaged in new ways — all of it on a global scale in multiple languages and scripts.

Fast-forward to the digital era, and the rapidly changing information environment that it has brought. We see that we have reached a period of time where information has never been more abundant and accessible, and conversely the need for efficient management of that information more critical than ever in the history of human information and knowledge endeavours. We now have the technology to provide global connection anywhere on computers — that also includes the digital capabilities of mobile and tablet devices.

This change in the information environment has generated a significant shift in our understanding of shared information resource description and access across connected systems, organisations, and in Web environments outside of the catalogue. The traditional cataloguing standards were not designed for an information organisation within Web environments, nor for *federated retrieval systems* (information retrieval technology that allows the simultaneous search of multiple searchable resources) which rely on inter-operability to share and transfer information from one platform, database, or catalogue to another. (However, the Z39.50 protocol has been used for quite some time to make information exchange possible between catalogues.)

Another feature of our hyper-connected systems is the democratisation of information organisation and access. The

emergence of next-generation catalogues or data sets includes new forms of user-generated information organisation. Public and national library collections actively seek user input, content or descriptive data, for example, Trove: Australia in Pictures http://www.flickr.com/groups/pictureaustralia_ppe/ Think of this dynamic interaction as an example of the new Web 2.0 features, which allow user tagging and user rating where this metadata becomes part of the record set. More importantly, the range of metadata elements — *the facets of information organisation* — provides a unique new way to interface with information records.

So what is RDA?

Librarians and other information professionals were among the first to realise the importance of the Internet in the provision of information services, and it is also they who have understood the impact of digital environments on the production, distribution, storage and consumption of information. Information agencies have worked hard to provide the cataloguing details required to ensure that information *can* be retrieved, and it is because of this that the **Resource Description and Access** (RDA) and its specific 'vocabularies' were developed and implemented around the world.

In fact, it was June 2010 that AACR2, the cataloguing standard in use for the last 30 years, was challenged with something new — the publication of RDA as a replacement cataloguing standard. As the biggest change in bibliographic standards since the adoption of MARC21 10 years ago (coming from USMARC), the new rules have inspired much discussion in the cataloguing community and beyond. RDA is a new standard for metadata description of resources held in the collections of libraries, archives, museums, and other information management organisations. Building on AACR2, it aims to provide a comprehensive set of textual guidelines and instructions for creating metadata covering all types of resource content and media. RDA focuses on the data elements needed to meet the user tasks specified

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in the FRBR (Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records) and FRAD (Functional Requirements for Authority Records) conceptual models. The use of FRBR concepts allows the relationships between multiple versions of a resource to be presented to users in a meaningful way, including being displayed in a simpler, clustered format, making it easier for the user to locate the item required.

RDA essentially standardises **how metadata content** is identified, transcribed and generally structured, although it is independent of any specific metadata encoding. RDA also identifies a general set of metadata *elements*, and can provide a controlled vocabulary for use as the content of an element. Although RDA is being developed primarily for use with resources curated in a library environment, consultations have been undertaken with other information management communities, including publishers and those operating in the digital world, to try to ensure effective alignment with the metadata standards used in those communities.

RDA is proving to be an important building block in the creation of better catalogues and resource discovery systems. It provides for the creation of *metadata*, which meets users' needs for data content and also facilitates machine manipulation of that data for searching and display.

RDA in Australia

Metadata standards relating to elements, format and transmission used for descriptive cataloguing in RDA have gradually been adopted around the world, including Australia and New Zealand during 2013. So once the National Library of Australia announced that it would implement RDA in early 2013 it became

important for all people working in the library and information industry to have some understanding of the purpose of RDA and its implications for the library catalogue.

RDA is designed to help us transition to the technological capabilities of the Internet, today and into the future by having us identify the entities and relationships at the element level that machines can use better than they have been able to in the past in our MARC records. RDA will also work when we package the elements in MARC records as we will have to do for some transitional period. RDA is not an encoding system or a presentation standard for displays, but instead specifies how to describe the things in our bibliographic universe — resources, persons, corporate bodies, and so on, and the relationships among those things.

The RDA Toolkit provides instructions necessary for implementing RDA in libraries. Although the preferred way to access RDA is online via the RDA Toolkit, print copies of the RDA instructions are also available for purchase. <http://www.rdatoolkit.org/>

RDA is not *completely* different from AACR2, but it is more than just a new edition. Some of the most notable differences include:

- Fewer abbreviations
- Allowance for local cataloguing standards to meet the needs of the community
- Specific format descriptors for non-book and electronic resources
- Record information as it is presented on the item
- Explicit identification of each possible element for inclusion
- Records all authors and contributors

- Dropping of the rules to do with the (ISBD) arrangement of elements, making the new code 'format neutral'
- Elements covering both the attributes of the library resource and the attributes of the people and organisations associated with the resource (so that it covers the creation of authority as well as bibliographic records)
- These elements are based on the FRBR user tasks (finding, identifying, selecting and obtaining), and, in the case of the attributes of people and organisations, the FRAD user tasks
- Covers the construction of records for abstract 'works' that an item might be a manifestation of, as well as for the manifestation itself
- More international in outlook (for example, doesn't prefer English names)

Whether RDA will give rise to a 'cataloguing revolution' is as yet unclear, as it will be possible to continue producing records using it that look remarkably similar to those based on AACR2. The question is whether libraries will implement it more fully, and use it as an opportunity to integrate their cataloguing data with other metadata elsewhere across the Web!

The real power of RDA is derived from the implementation of the new conceptual models for catalogues:

- Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records focuses on what the user needs to find, identify, select and obtain.
- Functional Requirements for Authority Data focuses on what the user needs to find, identify, contextualise and justify.

A library management system that embeds RDA, along with FRBR and FRAD, can provide a very rewarding search experience for the user. Once library management systems embrace these concepts and fully implement RDA, catalogues will truly be there for the convenience of the user! We will have complementary ways of organising things to open up more pathways for users to find what we have in our library collections and related resources beyond our libraries.



Access the National Library of Australia information about RDA at <http://www.nla.gov.au/acoc/resource-description-and-access-rda-in-australia>

RDA and SCIS

While teacher librarians may not often create metadata, such as catalogue records, they still need to understand and manage information environments with a thorough knowledge of 21st century information resource description as now applies with RDA. The Schools Cataloguing Information Service (SCIS) began implementing RDA cataloguing standards from 1 July 2013. SCIS has started a blog in which they will provide ongoing information about RDA for school libraries: see <http://scis.edublogs.org/tag/rda/>.

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SCIS has used AACR and AACR2 as its standard for descriptive cataloguing since its inception. SCIS made clarifications, amendments and additions to AACR2 to better modify it to the needs of Australian and New Zealand school libraries and recorded these in its SCIS Standards documentation. From 1 July 2013 the descriptive cataloguing on SCIS catalogue records created from that date is based primarily on RDA with some aspects of AACR continuing to be used during a transitional period. According to the SCIS blog (dated 24 June <http://scis.edublogs.org/2013/06/24/rda-update/>) the school community has a clear roadmap for changes in the catalogue records available through SCIS:

SCIS has consulted with library system providers in Australian and New Zealand school libraries and has decided to move slowly towards full RDA implementation. From 1 July 2013 – 1 July 2014 SCIS will produce hybrid RDA records which continue to use the GMD from AACR2, and which will also retain the 260 Publication field rather than the new 264 field: Production, Publication, Distribution, Manufacture, and Copyright Notice, used by most systems using RDA.

Access SCIS standards for cataloguing and data entry at: http://www2.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/SCIS_standards_2014.pdf

Old questions, new answers

Perhaps one of the most challenging conversations to have in libraries and learning communities as we move forward in 2013 is the arrival of **RDA**. Yes, here is a new acronym that needs to be embedded in our thinking. It's 2013: don't know about RDA yet? Then it's time to get excited, and up-to-date!

It's where the need for qualified information professionals in schools becomes more important than ever. Here we have innovation happening under our

very (information professional) noses — yet we have staff in school libraries who have no qualifications in the field or who have done little further academic training to keep up with the changes needed to manage collections in the digital century. The next few years are going to be very exciting and challenging, making it doubly vital that school leadership understands the importance of having well-qualified teacher librarians and library support staff leading and managing information services in schools.

Support for the new Australian Curriculum makes it imperative that we include emerging technologies and global understanding of information organisation in the knowledge matrix that we support. It's no longer just about organising catalogues of resources that's important — it's the connections and access pathways and interpersonal learning experiences that a good school library can facilitate. It is a teacher librarian's job to empower students' and teachers' information access needs, and to manage systems that support this.

We are very lucky in Australia and New Zealand that Education Services Australia,

our globally unique Schools Catalogue Information Service, has their eye on this for us.

School library systems, media systems, LMS systems and so on need to become the 24/7 structured access point for information and knowledge connections. Our multiple systems need to draw on, as well as contribute to, a knowledge matrix — one that connects to the various information repositories beyond our schools as well. The point of it all is to provide a consistent, flexible and extensible framework for both the technical and content description of all types of resources and all types of content — everywhere, anywhere, always!

Get up-to-date. Attend some quality TAFE professional development sessions, or take a postgraduate degree or refresher program to 'get up to speed'. Charles Sturt University provides postgraduate training for Teacher Librarianship, and as part of this has available single subject study of **ETL505 Describing and Analysing Education Resources**, developed by Dr Ashley Freeman, which examines traditional and emerging means of providing access to learning resources, and the application of metadata standards to ensure effective information organisation in school information environments. <http://www.csu.edu.au/handbook/handbook14/subjects/ETL505.html>

RDA for school libraries is indeed the next generation in information resource description, organisation and access. The 'new black' in cataloguing is here!

Recommended resources

Australian Teacher Librarian Network
Google+ Discussion Community
<https://plus.google.com/u/0/communities/107958450937249776334>

Hider, P 2012, *Information resource description: creating and managing metadata*, Facet, London.

RDA Café on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/groups/RDACafe/>

RDA Cataloging Google+ Community
<https://plus.google.com/communities/114381713914946747854>

SCIS News, Updates and Issues in School Libraries <http://scis.edublogs.org/>