The truth about cataloguing with RDA

By Audrey Driscoll.

On November 1st and 2nd, 2012, I attended the first "Cataloguing with RDA" workshop at the McPherson Library on the University of Victoria campus. The workshop was one of the two—held in Victoria and Vancouver—sponsored by BC Cataloguing and Technical Services (BCCATS) Interest Group. RDA (Resource Description and Access) is the cataloguing code that is to succeed the current AACR2 (Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, 2nd edition) early in 2013.

Presenters Sue Andrews (UBC), Nancy Stuart (UVic), Penny Swanson (SFU) and Linda Woodcock (Kwantlen) delivered a full and well-organized program.

About 30 people attended, representing academic, public, special and school libraries from Vancouver Island with a few from other parts of BC.
The program was fairly intense because of the breadth and depth of material to be covered in the nine modules. Participants arrived having already read the material for Module 1, which covered the meetings and reports leading to the development of FRBR (Functional Requirements for Description and Access) and RDA.

RDA trainers (left to right) May Chan (BPL), Linda Woodcock (KPU), Sue Andrews (UBC), and Penny Swanson (SFU).

Sue Andrews delivered an overview of FRBR, which is the theoretical foundation of RDA and necessary for a thorough understanding of the new code. Linda Woodcock eased us into the substance of RDA with an overview of its structure and terminology, as well as the main differences between RDA and AACR2.

Sue Andrews addresses RDA workshop participants.

Nancy Stuart introduced us to the RDA Toolkit, which was available at each workstation, describing useful features such as the expandable table of contents, bookmarking, creating workflows and the fact that one can find an RDA guideline from old familiar AACR2.

That was all before lunch on Day 1!

In the afternoon session, Penny Swanson walked us through using the Toolkit to record attributes of manifestations and items—what used to be called "description" in AACR2. We learned about preferred sources of information, the passing of the Rule of Three, the replacement of MARC field 260 with 264 for publication information, the "core if cascade" and providing content, media and carrier type information.

Day 2 began with what used to be called "providing access points." Nancy Stuart reviewed the guidelines for recording attributes of works and expressions, followed by Sue Andrews with attributes of persons, families and corporate bodies. Linda Woodcock concluded the day by reviewing the guidelines for recording relationships and presenting recommendations for copy cataloguing in an RDA environment. Because of the vast body of "legacy records" and differing rates of adoption of RDA, a mix of RDA, AACR2 and older records will constitute library databases for the foreseeable future.

A reassuring fact that emerged during the workshop is that RDA is a living resource that is still evolving,

along with supporting resources and "best practices" documents. The new 264 field for publication data is an example of a change since the initial release of RDA.

The presenters were well informed and the visuals clear and relevant. The pace was brisk but there was time for questions. We worked through a number of exercises that got us using the RDA Toolkit and seeing the effects of the new guidelines when applied to actual bibliographic situations. Breaks presented opportunities to talk with other cataloguers about their libraries' approach to RDA, a useful bonus.

Two more workshops are planned for Spring 2013 — stay tuned for details.

Before this workshop, I saw RDA as a sinister black cloud on the cataloguer's horizon and secretly hoped it would go away. Now that I am more informed about its theoretical foundations and the specifics of navigating the RDA toolkit, it is much less intimidating. I can't say I'm looking forward to March 31st, 2013, but at least I feel armed with some practical knowledge. And I can confidently throw around terms such as "attributes of manifestations" and "core if."

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