

Using the *Framework* to Frame:

Cataloging Policy and Practice as Seen through the Lens of *The Framework For Information Literacy For Higher Education*

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While the goals of information literacy and cataloging are not explicitly at cross-purposes, they seem to operate independently of one another. The *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* has much to teach the cataloging community about the disposition and needs of information literate people as well as how community members could respond to the needs of people who are engaged in information literacy work as both students and teachers. In the article “Turning inward: reading the Framework through the six frames,” Emily Drabinski uses the *Framework* as a lens through which to view itself, writing “stepping back from the question of whether the Framework is true or right, we might ask instead how and whether it can be useful for understanding information generally as well as the Framework itself.”¹ In the spirit of Drabinski’s analysis, this paper seeks to view goals and currently accepted practices of cataloging through the six frames of the *Framework*.

Putting Current Information Literacy Practice and Current Cataloging Practice in Context

Adopted in January 2016 by the ACRL Board, the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* builds upon ideas outlined in the final report of the Presidential Committee on Information Literacy and on the standards enumerated in the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*. The *Framework* positions information literacy education within an increasingly complex higher education information landscape where students, faculty, and librarians have new roles and responsibilities. The document suggests that “the rapidly changing higher education environment, along with the dynamic and often uncertain information ecosystem in which all of us work and live, require new attention to be focused on foundational ideas about that ecosystem.”² By orienting the *Framework* away from competencies to be mastered and toward ideas to be understood, the document widens both its understanding of what it means to be information literate and the definition of information literacy itself. The *Framework* defines information literacy as “the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is processed and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning.” Through engagement with the ideas outlined in the *Framework*’s six frames, information literate people not only become thoughtful consumers of information, but also become part of the knowledge production lifestyle. And as the boundaries of information literacy are redrawn to reflect the changing landscape of higher education, it is clear that the task of information literacy instruction is meant to encompass the entirety of a student’s time in a higher education institution.

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Much like the information literacy community, the cataloging community has had to come to terms with the adoption of a standard for descriptive cataloging. In 2010, *Resource Description and Access* was widely adopted as the descriptive cataloging standard to replace the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules*. Originally conceptualized as an update to the 2nd revision of the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules*, the development of *RDA* took a different direction when the Joint Steering Committee decided to incorporate elements of the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records, or FRBR, into the standard it was building. The introduction to *Resource Description and Access* enumerates the objectives of the standard. First among them is responsiveness to user needs. Rule 0.4.2.1 states that data created using *RDA* as a standard should enable users to find, identify, select and obtain resources that meet a user's search criteria and which are appropriate for a user's needs.³ These criteria mirror the FRBR user tasks, though *RDA* adds an additional criterion—understand—which addresses how users comprehend both the relationships between resources and the reason that the cataloger chose to describe the resource in the way that they did. While responsiveness to user needs is listed first among the various objectives of the standards, the other objectives are worth considering as well. The second stated objective of *RDA* is cost efficiency. Rule 0.4.2.2 states, “the data should meet functional requirements for the support of user tasks in a cost-efficient manner.”⁴ The third (Rule 0.4.2.3) and fourth (Rule 0.4.2.4) objectives are flexibility and continuity.⁵ While *RDA*'s stated goals are not immediately at odds with each other, catalogers are acquainted with the difficulty in providing records that both center the needs of the user and are created in a cost-efficient manner.

Viewing Cataloging Policy and Practice Through the Lens of *The Framework*

Authority is Constructed and Contextual

The idea that authority is a construct that exists within a context works to decenter the library catalog and its records as a universally accepted, authoritative source of knowledge. While the catalog and its records may be seen as both authoritative and credible by those within the library, said authority and credibility do not automatically extend to those in other user communities in the higher education ecosystem. This decentering provides the cataloging community with the opportunity to consider both the purpose of the catalog and its records and the role of the cataloger in the knowledge creation process. In the article “The ethics and integrity of cataloging,” Anna M. Ferris provides one possible purpose of the catalog and its records, writing that a catalog whose integrity has been preserved is “a reliable source of current, coherent, and objective information that is appropriate to the needs of the catalog's users.”⁶ It is important for the cataloging community as a whole to acknowledge that what it means to be reliable, coherent, and objective will vary based on the local user community that a cataloger serves.

In a world where the catalog must be evaluated for authority and credibility, the work of making it a reliable source of information is in alignment with this frame. However, the cataloging community should work against the impulse to conflate the idea of the local catalog and the idea of the catalog as a monolithic concept. This frame invites catalogers to ask “Who am I? How does my work best serve the context in which I work?” and to apply what is learned during that self-reflection to build systems and structures to provide a local library catalog that can be deemed authoritative. Because authority is contextual, it is important to acknowledge that the answers to these questions, and the practices created from self-reflection, may vary significantly between campus communities.

Information Creation as a Process

Because the process of creating information is iterative, the local library catalog may be seen as a series of choices made over time by the catalogers who have worked in that catalog rather than as a fixed source of knowledge.

The cataloging community has long accepted the notion of cataloger's judgement, which suggests that while a set of cataloging rules exists, each individual cataloger may interpret them in a slightly different way. While the idea of cataloger's judgement has been universally accepted as a cataloging principle, the cataloging community also promulgates the idea that the catalog is somehow an unbiased and neutral place. In fact, the division of the American Library Association that supports the collections and technical services community codified neutrality in the 1994 document, *Guidelines for ALCTS members to supplement the American Library Association Code of Ethics*. This document asserts "that an ALCTS member strives to provide broad and unbiased access to information."⁷ Because individual catalogers with different lived experiences and biases are creating the records that reside in the library catalog, the notion that cataloging is a neutral act is simply not supported by this frame.

Instead of focusing on the impossible task of creating a neutral local library catalog, the cataloging community should take seriously the ways in which people's lived experiences guide their cataloging choices and its members should ensure that their local policies and procedures documentation enumerates the rationale behind those choices. While the creation and maintenance of documentation may not seem like the most likely solution to addressing the ways in which the lived experience of a cataloger impacts local cataloging policy, accurate documentation has the capacity to illuminate past decisions and influence future ones. Because each generation of catalogers within a local library shapes cataloging policy, generational turnover in staff means an establishment of new policies written by catalogers with a different set of lived experiences. The process of increasing access to local cataloging policies should include not only keeping local cataloging workflows in step with actual current practices, but also archiving policies as a process is revised or a workflow is eliminated. By acknowledging that cataloger's bias is as invasive as cataloger's judgement, the cataloging community will be better positioned to address how our practices and our records have changed through the years.

Information Has Value

Because information has value, certain voices are privileged over others in any given conversation. When looking inward at cataloging policy and practice, one may consider which voices are privileged in the conversation around getting subject headings and classification numbers added to the Library of Congress Subject Headings and Library of Congress Classification schemes. Because both schemes are managed by the Library of Congress' Cooperative Programs Section, all proposed headings must go through an approval process that culminates with the proposal being reviewed at the Policy and Standards Division's editorial meeting. The Policy and Standards Division's site describes the editorial meeting process this way: "at the meeting, proposals are either approved, changed according to the subject heading policies, not approved, withdrawn or marked resubmit."⁸ Because the justification for approval is based on existing subject heading policies, well-considered subject headings with reasoned proposals that include literary warrant are not necessarily approved and while a heading may be resubmitted, there is no formal appeals process for an editorial decision.

While a variety of thesauri exist, Library of Congress Subject Headings and Library of Congress Classification are the most widely used schemes for subject cataloging. So those who control the process and those with the means to contribute to the proposal process have the greatest voices in the conversation regarding subject cataloging policy. The proposal process is technically open to anyone who wishes to propose a heading, but a proposer must have the technical ability to propose a heading—both in terms of access to the submission form and in terms of understanding how subject headings are formulated. As a result, a person who feels that the subject cataloging schemes would benefit from an additional heading or classification number is required either to submit the information themselves or to find a cataloger with subject cataloging expertise with whom to partner. While the proposal process does not explicitly exclude libraries with fewer resources or the voice of the public,

it does not make them equal partners in the process. This frame not only challenges the cataloging community to consider which voices are privileged but also challenges its members to invite other voices into the conversation. The cataloging community should investigate ways in which libraries with a large number of resources can partner with libraries with an interest in proposing headings, but without the resources to do so. By expanding the proposal process through strategic partnerships, the cataloging community can intentionally bring a larger number of voices into the conversation.

Research as Inquiry

In order both to find existing knowledge and to identify gaps in that knowledge, library users rely upon the fact that library resources within a particular discipline, or on a given topic, have been collocated within the local library catalog by consistent application of subject heading and classification numbers. Hope Olson points out in chapter five of her book, *The Power to Name*, that it can be quite difficult to provide consistent subject access to resources whose subject is intersectional. In this chapter, Olson provides eleven examples of resources where the application of subject language or classification number—sometimes both—is inadequate for describing the topic. In the case of Angela Y. Davis' *Women, Race, & Class*, Olson points out that the intersection of these ideas cannot be adequately described by a single subject heading. She writes, “covering the three facets of gender, race, and class through separate headings is not acceptable for users seeking their interrelationship.”⁹ While library users can use Boolean operators to pull together material on this intersection, Olson points out that “many users have limited success with Boolean searching. Therefore, to rely on Boolean logic for access to complex topics is a disservice to users.”¹⁰ Later in the chapter, Olson goes on to critique one possible solution for exposing the places where ideas intersect: using a multitude of imprecise headings to cover the gaps where existing language fails. Olson posits that “the more times that a subject heading is used in a particular catalogue, the less precise it is in separating similar works from different ones.” In 2002, when this book was published, Olson reports that a search for “American literature—Women authors—History and criticism” returned 238 results. When performed in January 2017, this same search returned 2,602 results. It seems difficult to conceive of a way in which a library user would, after sifting through the contents of such a results set, be able to make meaning of its contents.

If success in the research process depends to some degree on the consistent application of subject headings and classification numbers, members of the cataloging community should take seriously the need to ensure that resources within a particular discipline, or on a particular topic, are assigned the same subject headings and classification numbers within their local library catalogs so that those resources may be found together when a member of the local user community looks for information in the physical and virtual environments. During the cataloging process, members of the cataloging community should prioritize researching which subject headings and classification numbers have been assigned to material already in the catalog on the topic of the resource being described. This may require coordinating with subject liaison librarians to identify additional information that may be added to the record depending on the needs of a particular user community, including recataloging and reclassifying resources as needed. Consistent subject cataloging also requires that members of the cataloging community commit to more closely examining records downloaded from a bibliographic utility or purchased from a vendor and remediating that metadata as well.

Scholarship as Conversation

In much the same way that scholarship can be a conversation between producers and consumers of knowledge, the library catalog and its records are in conversation with library users. In addition to providing access to library resources, the library catalog and its records tell a story about what the library values and which systems it

chooses to uphold. Catalog records tell the story of how both descriptive cataloging and subject cataloging have changed over time, and library users can see themselves reflected or excluded in the library catalog and its records. In “Queering the catalog: queer theory and the politics of correction,” Emily Drabinski uses queer theory to explore the tension inherent in the desire of critical catalogers to repair the language of subject cataloging, most often by lobbying for the retiring of subject headings that utilize damaging language. Drabinski argues that this disposition toward repairing subject headings “erases the evidence of a dominant ideology and resistance to it that are essential components of the classification and cataloging project. An emphasis on correctness and revision precludes interventions that acknowledge and strategically deploy this analysis, an analysis that might productively engage users in their own critical engagement with OPACs and, by extension, other systems of linguistic discipline.”¹¹ While the library catalog and its records have challenging truths to offer our users, inviting the library users into conversation with the library catalog and its records make clear the systems and structures through and around which it organizes itself.

While the local library catalog and its records are in conversation with library users, members of the cataloging community are rarely present with local user community members to explain their decisions. Therefore, it is incumbent upon catalogers to build fruitful relationships with information literacy and reference librarians at their local libraries. These information literacy and reference librarians are in direct contact with user community members in classrooms and at service points and are often charged with explaining cataloging policy and practice decisions. Fruitful relationships between catalogers and front-line librarians provide a venue for discourse around local cataloging policies and decisions and how they impact library user communities. Whether these relationships are an outgrowth through regular meetings between departments or through the development of individual working relationships, the result of such relationships is better cataloging policies and more productive conversations between front-line librarians and library user community members.

Searching as Strategic Exploration

This frame invites scholars to change course at various points in their research, utilizing a variety of search techniques and search language. The ability to make use of the library catalog in this way requires that catalog records be full of rich, well-formed metadata. After the adoption of *RDA* as a content standard, the Program for Cooperative Cataloging created standard records for a variety of resources. These standard records build on the idea in *RDA* that certain elements are core to the description of a resource. The *PCC RDA BIBCO Standard Record (BSR) Metadata Application Profile* takes the elements from *RDA* that are considered core and puts them together into a single metadata application profile for archival material, audio recordings, cartographic resources, electronic material, graphic materials moving images, notated music, rare materials, and textual monographs. A separate document, *RDA CONSER Standard Record (CSR) Metadata Application Profile*, does the same thing for continuing and integrating resources. While the *BSR* and *CSR* are the floor for bibliographic description, cataloging agencies are free to add additional elements and the *BSR* states, “the standard also does not preclude the use of any data in a bibliographic description representing more extensive cataloging treatment.”¹² While there is nothing inherently damaging about creating a framework for a core-level description of library resources, it is unclear how consistently libraries choose to go beyond a floor-level description of resources and for what materials.

Given the current cataloging paradigm of record creation and reuse, having a guide for what constitutes a minimal level record is useful. However, there is nothing that binds members of the cataloging community to using this standard except participation in the Program for Cooperative Cataloging, so record quality within a bibliographic utility is still variable. Additionally, this frame suggests that what members of a library user com-

munity require for successful research far outpaces the floor outlined in both the *BSR* and *CSR*. Members of the cataloging community should consider how local user needs might require significant deviations from minimal-level cataloging standards and create local cataloging policies that put more value on local user communities than on how a record might be reused.

Re-Envisioning the Cataloging Paradigm with Information Literate Users in Mind

Each of the six frames offers the cataloging community valuable insight into where members should focus their efforts, both locally and collectively. And when insight from each frame is pulled together, what can be gleaned is that because the information creation and consumption processes are happening within a particular, local context that catalog records should reflect that local context. The emphasis the *Framework* places on how contextual the knowledge acquisition and production processes are makes clear that decisions made by libraries about creating catalog records should center the local user community. This includes policies related to records downloaded from a bibliographic utility or purchased from a vendor.

When viewing cataloging policy and practice through the lens of the *Framework*, it is clear that the cataloging community must interrogate the idea that cataloging is a process that has at its core the needs of users. While cataloging efficiency is listed second in the stated goals of *Resource Description and Access*, the currently accepted model for catalog record creation and reuse seemingly places cataloging efficiency ahead of the primary goal, responsiveness to user needs. In the article “Meeting users’ needs in cataloging: what is right thing to do?” Gretchen L. Hoffman calls into the question how this currently accepted model of record creation and use can be truly user centric, writing “On the surface, this model seems appropriate. It allows standards to be universal and gives catalogers and cataloging departments the power to customize bibliographic records to meet local users’ needs.”¹³ Hoffman goes on to say that “catalogers cannot effectively customize bibliographic records, because they do not know who their specific users are (beyond faculty, students, and staff) and cannot articulate their users’ needs (beyond finding things).”¹⁴ Members of the cataloging community believe in the value of meeting the user’s needs and have gone so far as to codify it as part of their descriptive standard, so it can be assumed that the disconnect between what users need and what is documented in the cataloging record is not a result of disinterest or something more malicious. Instead, it can be attributed to the myth that is perpetuated in the cataloging community that our standards and models are user-centric simply because we say they are.

Creating catalog records that truly center library user communities and their needs will require a shift in focus from the generic, reusable record to the highly localized record, and there is a way in both which existing national-level best practices and localized user needs can be served. In the article “Domain analytic, and domain analytic-like, studies of catalog needs,” Maurine W. McCourry provides a blueprint for identifying user needs within a particular discipline and mapping them to elements in existing content standards. This article outlines the process that McCourry followed when identifying the information consumption habits and information needs of student enrolled in applied music classes. Her goal in using questionnaires, focus groups and individual interviews to obtain information was “leading the students as little as possible to a particular answer while still prompting them to describe the elements of bibliographic information by which the needed to search a library catalog.”¹⁵ McCourry then pulled all of the various information sources together to identify a list of 96 elements needed to support the research of music students. According to McCourry, 28 of the 96 elements mapped to core elements in RDA, 32 mapped to elements in RDA not considered core, and 14 could not be mapped to any RDA element.¹⁶ While creating core-level records will certainly meet some of the needs of various user constituencies, it is clear from McCourry’s analysis that only using core elements would fall short of meeting the needs of user communities.

While additional research would need to be done to expand McCourry's domain analytic model into disciplines other than music, it seems possible to incorporate the model into the existing record creation and reuse paradigm. With the help of subject librarians, catalogers could conduct domain-like analysis within various disciplines and map the information gathered during that analysis to specific *RDA* elements. Local libraries could create cross-discipline standard records from elements common to all of the disciplines analyzed by a local library. This cross-discipline standard record would mirror the standard records created by the Program for Cooperative cataloging in that they would serve as the floor for cataloging done by the local library. Original records created using the cross-discipline standard record would be sufficient for reuse by other libraries and could be uploaded to a bibliographic utility. In addition to the cross-discipline standard record, discipline-specific standard records could be developed by adding discipline-specific core elements to the cross-discipline standard record. In some cases, the cross-discipline standard record will be sufficient either because the resource being described is cross-disciplinary, too general to be considered discipline specific, or because some disciplines rely more heavily on article-level knowledge to do their work than on resources describe in the library catalog.

Placing local context at the center of cataloging policy and practice and spending more time identifying and meeting user needs has the potential to be an expensive proposition. And the process of creating discipline-specific element sets from information gathered about user needs may seem like a hard sell for catalogers whose administrators have fewer resources at their disposal to allocate toward metadata creation and remediation. As Gretchen L. Hoffman points out, "catalogers are discouraged from customizing bibliographic records by cataloging administrators who are pressured to push for more production, efficiency, and quick cataloging. Customization is expensive."¹⁷ However, the frames enumerated in the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* justify the expense. As a higher value is placed on knowledge acquisition and creation within a local context, catalog records created within the current record creation and reuse paradigm do not reflect this local context are of little value to the user. Instead, catalog records created with local user needs in mind give the catalog and the records it holds authority within the context of any given user community.

Notes

1. Emily Drabinski, "Turning inward: reading the Framework through the six frames," *C&RL News*, September 2016: 382.
2. "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education," accessed January 12, 2017, <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/il-framework>
3. "Resource description and access," accessed January 12, 2017, Cataloger's Desktop.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. Ferris, "Ethics and integrity of cataloging," 185.
7. Association for Library Collections and Technical Services, "Guidelines for ALCTS Members to Supplement the American Library Association Code of Ethics, 1994," accessed January 13, 2017, <http://www.ala.org/alcts/resources/alaethics>
8. "SACO proposal workflow process," accessed January 13, 2017, <http://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/saco/SACOWorkflow.html>
9. Hope Olson, *The Power to Name* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002): 188
10. *Ibid.*, 188.
11. Emily Drabinski, "Queering the catalog: queer theory and the politics of correction," *The Library Quarterly*, 83 (2013): 104–105.
12. Program for Cooperative Cataloging, *PCC RDA BIBCO Standard Record (BSR) Metadata Application Profile*, accessed January 17, 2017, <http://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/bibco/documents/PCC-RDA-BSR.pdf>
13. Gretchen L. Hoffman, "Meeting users' needs in cataloging: what is the right thing to do?," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, 47 (2009): 635.
14. Hoffman, "Meeting users' needs in cataloging," 635.
15. Maureen McCourry, "Domain analytic, and domain analytic-like, studies of catalog needs: addressing the ethical dilemma of catalog codes developed with inadequate knowledge of user needs," *Knowledge Organization*, 42 (2015): 341.
16. McCourry, "Studies of catalog needs," 342.
17. Hoffman, "Meeting users' needs in cataloging," 636.