

MOUG 2014

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- As Mary, Hermine, and I were working on our approach to this session, we realized that our perceptions of all matters of etiquette involved with Enhancing bibliographic records in WorldCat (or, in more recent years, simply replacing them under the rubric of the Expert Community), were formed to some extent by our experiences in much smaller and more tightly-defined “expert communities,” that is, the institutional cultures of our places of employment.
- And I have no doubt that Jay can say the same thing, though of course his perspective is necessarily *somewhat* different—I can’t say “very”—from that of the rest of us here on the panel.
- So today I’d like to discuss just one or two aspects of institutional culture as it relates to the etiquette of master bibliographic record-replacement, from my vantage point as a front-line supervisor, in a fairly large cataloging department, in an ARL library.
- **Etiquette** is defined in Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary as “the conduct or procedure required by good breeding or prescribed by authority to be observed in social or official life.”
- We can disregard good breeding in my case, as my ancestors include a couple of music teachers, a fine arts librarian (though only by marriage), and at least one convicted sheep thief about four generations ago in Scotland. But I have struggled over the years to hew to OCLC’s guidelines for socially-acceptable Enhancing, as taught to me by the **august** gentleman sitting here to my _____.
- I have continued to apply those guidelines whenever I replace a record in WorldCat, and I don’t think I need to explain *why* to our audience here today. (Perhaps someone else on the panel will spend some time on the why of things.)
- But I’ve observed significant changes in attitudes toward those guidelines and the presumed impact that any breach of them might have, especially from my supervisors at the University of Georgia Libraries, in the twenty-eight years in which I’ve been cataloging in the OCLC database.
- I believe the cliché I’m looking for here is “sea change.”
- In the late 1980s at UGA, we focused our efforts mostly on **correcting** records input by other OCLC member libraries.
- Many of those institutions were small public libraries that lacked music expertise in their cataloging staff, and which also had an “absolutely **no** backlogs” mandate imposed by their administrations.

- Vendor records were pretty much non-existent then; a summary of related research that I found recently on the ALCTS website indicates that vendor records first began to appear in national bibliographic databases only in the mid-1990s.¹
- Notice that I used the word “correcting.” These libraries were **WRONG**, folks, and, by gar, we were **NOT** going to let them get away with it!
- We corrected their ISBD punctuation; we supplied the analytic added entries that they were clearly too ignorant to know should have been there in the first place; we changed the order of the 5xx fields to conform to the applicable code (yep—we really did that); and so on.
- Why? Well, not least because our department heads and administrators were very concerned that anything we touch demonstrate that we were, if not actually as good as LC’s catalogers, at least “LC-aspirational.”
- That keeping-up-with-the-Joneses tone in my department was such that original records had to be proof-read, proofed again, and then examined closely by at least one more pair of MLIS-degreed eyes before one could even *think* about adding them to WorldCat.
- Needless to say that attitude did not contribute to high cataloging productivity, and we had backlogs. Big backlogs.
- But don’t think that I’m being too hard on my department head at the time by this critique in hindsight—she’s someone who is now a good friend, and she always had my respect.
- She was quite typical of people in her position at the time, especially those who *did* take great pride in their department’s work and service goals.
- This was the norm, it’s what we all believed “good” catalogers should do, and that’s part of what I’d like to stress today.
- So this sea change about which I spoke a couple of minutes ago really has to do with the fact that now we spend more time beefing up or truly enhancing—with a lower-case “e”—vendor records in WorldCat, to make them useful to patrons, following the principles behind the FRBR user tasks: Search, Identify, Select, and Obtain ... particularly the last three, Identify, Select, and Obtain.
- That may not seem like much at first, but when you think about it, to change one’s view of database quality control from *correcting* to *completing and adding as much value as one has time for*—one hopes, always with a clear set of priorities in mind—is truly a positive development.

¹ “Vendor-Supplied Bibliographic Records, 2000–2007,” ALCTS WWW site, viewed February 7, 2014; URL http://www.ala.org/alcts/resources/org/cat/research/vend_bibrec07

- I think it shows a certain confidence among catalogers and heads of catalog departments that took some time to manifest itself fully in the early days of library automation, if not a maturing of the profession as a whole in a truly shared-cataloging environment.
- Of course the change was brought about in no small part simply because vendor records are almost the only records anymore that require our attention in WorldCat, as Enhance or Expert Community participants.
- But I think it was also brought about in part because of the tireless educating of Enhance participants that Jay has carried out over the years at ALA, OLAC, MOUG, and other venues. Jay has gently turned us away from the stick approach toward the carrot, and so I think we should pause now and just thank Jay for that!
- Before I yield the podium here I'd also like to comment on the influence that library administrative hierarchies have had on cataloging work, in particular on the Enhance and Expert Community programs.
- (The Expert Community "experiment," as it was originally called, has graduated now to be designated one of OCLC's external quality programs, so I'm not inflating its status here by referring to it as such, or at least no more so than OCLC is.)
- The paraprofessional copy-cataloger positions in my department are differentiated one from another largely by the degree to which each classification's specific job duties approach those of the faculty librarians.
- So if enjoying faculty privileges in terms of creating original records, creating or editing authority records, supervising other staff and faculty *and* Enhancing or upgrading master records in WorldCat may be defined for these purposes as infinity, then the degree to which one's classified staff rank may be regarded as high or exalted constitutes the degree to which one's specific duties approach infinity—or God, in some cosmologies.
- This means that relatively few people in my work milieu are permitted to edit the master records in WorldCat, for fear that we're not actually paying them sufficiently to do so.
- It also means that there isn't much time available for those of us who do occupy the godlike positions in the department to spend on Enhance or Expert Community activities either, so we end up picking and choosing, which raises another interesting etiquette question.
- I have been asked occasionally by colleagues at MOUG and MLA why I don't always fix entire records that I touch, instead changing perhaps only an analytical added-entry here and there, or supplying a contents note, but otherwise leaving the rest of the record in a pretty rough-&-ready state.
- The answer is simply "priorities." I have to balance those activities against too many others in my workday.

- Some of you may not have to make such choices, or perhaps examining and enhancing entire records may be a very high priority for you—all of which is fine, and believe me, my colleagues and I appreciate the records on which you perform such extensive edits.
- So I'm sorry if by indulging in such selective editing, I create the impression of not caring, or at least of not caring enough, through my approach.
- Leaving such an impression is poor etiquette, and perhaps goes back to the matter of good breeding. But many of us do have to make such choices, so we beg your indulgence.

That's all from me until the Q&A. Thank you.

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