Metadata & Discovery Group

Book review: Inclusive Cataloguing

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This book was first published by the American Library Association, with the UK edition published by Facet soon after, unsurprisingly therefore all the contributors are from the US, which often leads the way in cataloguing initiatives, but it would be interesting if Facet could also produce a complementary book featuring UK projects, or perhaps one with a more global approach. One of the editors, Amber Billey, notes that the murder of George Floyd in 2020 was a catalyst for many librarians to look at bias and oppression within their libraries, combined with the COVID 19 lockdowns which meant many were working from home and had the ability to shift their attention to diversity, equity and inclusion work. The book is divided into two sections – *History & Theory and Case Studies* – the first section putting the theme of inclusive cataloguing and metadata work into context, how and why it arose, and discussing the theories behind the work – with the practical examples in the second half.

There are some names which recur frequently in discussions about the history of inclusive cataloguing and classification – such as Dorothy Porter Wesley, Brian Deer, and Sandy Berman – and if these are unfamiliar to you, these introductory chapters will certainly enlighten you.

The chapter by Violet B. Fox & Tina Gross *This is the work: a short history of the long tradition of inclusive cataloguing – critiques and action* does exactly what it claims to do, and if anyone wanted to know a potted history of inclusive cataloguing work, this is an excellent piece that puts everything into context. From work in the 1930s and 1940s up to the 2020s, including the Cataloguing Code of Ethics (2021) we get an overview of library staff actively engaging in work against bias and prejudice. They also reflect on where we are now:

> "After an initial swell of interest in this work beginning in late 2020...cataloguing and metadata librarians are now at an inflection point, where we can choose to treat this work as a fad or a one-time task to

check off our to-do list, or we can choose to reinvest ourselves in the necessity of continuing this work." (p. 15)

I think the contributions to this current issue of Catalogue & Index certainly show that many of us are continuing to engage.

One chapter I found particularly interesting was Jill E. Baron, Violet B. Fox & Tina Gross – *Did libraries 'Change the Subject': What happened, what didn't, and what's ahead* as I think many of us were perhaps woken to the topic by the distribution of this film about students at Dartmouth College protesting the term 'illegal aliens', so finding out what the aftermath was proved to be educational.

Matthew Haugen and Michael L. Stewart's chapter *Gendered information and the Program for Cooperative Cataloguing* details the way gendered information has been dealt with by RDA and the PCC (Program for Cooperative Cataloging) over the last 10 years, including changes that have been mooted by practitioners wanting to move away from including gender information within catalogue records. They also note the issues that come with correcting data that may no longer sit in just one system, with the increasing use of linked data projects such as Wikidata.

Allison Bailund, Steven W. Holloway, Carole Sussman, & Deborah Tomaras - *From 'Afrofuturist comics' to 'Zombies in comics': inclusive comics cataloguing from A-Z* - note the problems inherent in cataloguing comics prior to recent years, with the lack of usable subject headings and restrictive rules. Even when improvements were made, they were often behind a paywall (such as the RDA Toolkit). This chapter details how the ALA Graphic Novels and Comics Round Table (GNCRT) Metadata and Cataloguing Committee created the *Best Practices for Cataloguing Comics and Graphic Novels using RDA and MARC21* documentation which is freely available and "...seeks to promote equity of description in comics metadata...providing guidance for cataloguing comics beyond American superhero titles." (p. 102) This includes advice on international and multilingual comics and assistance on locating metadata for different types of comics. With an increase in the breadth of subject headings for comics the Comics and Fiction Funnel was created in 2022.

B. M. Watson's chapter, *Critical cataloguing across GLAMS and beyond the Core: The Trans and Queer Metadata Collectives and the Name Change Policy Working Group*, moves away from celebrating the action of individuals and discusses three collectives which have advocated for change and developed best practices surrounding Trans and Queer metadata, and name-change procedures within publishing. They demonstrate that significant work can be done outside of the traditional institutions such as the ALA, highlighting: "...the importance of collective activism, cooperation, and ongoing efforts to challenge systemic barriers in technical services." (p.121)

Nineteen case studies are shared in the second half of the book, these range from descriptions of reparative subject heading projects undertaken at universities, to

creating a harmful language statement at a public library. From revisions of Library of Congress call numbers for Black People, to engaging with indigenous peoples to facilitate self-naming. There is a wide range of chapters detailing ways to make metadata more respectful and inclusive.

As Karl Pettitt states in the chapter, *A (Very) Select History of Inclusive Cataloguing*:

> "Sometimes inclusive cataloguing involves attempts to modify current structures, while at other times it has involved creating completely new structures. In either case, the goal remains to create descriptive metadata that centers the viewpoints of the people or topics being described." (p.42)

I can highly recommend this book, for providing context and history to inclusive cataloguing and for illustrating the many ways that work has so far been achieved. This really should be read by everyone who works with metadata. There are many inspirational projects and studies, and overall you are left with the feeling that it is possible to do something, whether that be individually or collectively, and now is the perfect time to do so.