Book review: The DEI Metadata Handbook

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The DEI Metadata Handbook is a well-considered and practical guide to approaching issues of diversity, equality and inclusion in metadata. The book was authored by Harriet E. Wintermute, Heather M. Campbell, Christopher S. Dieckman, Nausicaa L. Rose and Hema Thulsidhos, all metadata librarians at Iowa State University at time of writing, with Harriet E. Wintermute now working as the Chair of Acquisitions, Cataloging, Metadata, and E-Resources at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Libraries. Whilst this book is aimed mostly at library metadata creators, it could also apply to any information professionals who may create resource descriptions in their work, and also be of interest to library and archive students. Because of this, the book feels like a great introduction to the subject for someone new to EDI in metadata. The handbook aims to help readers gain awareness of EDI related issues and learn new techniques to review both existing metadata and improve metadata for diverse ranges of resources going forward.

A point put across in this book multiple times that I really valued was that, while the initialism of DEI in metadata is relatively new, the goals of it, or in libraries in general, are grounded in historical origins. Looking at DEI in metadata aims to "enhanc[e] diverse representation in descriptive metadata; improv[e] discovery of diverse resources; and mitigat[e] negative effects of inaccurate, outdated, or offensive terminology" (p. 1). Alongside contemporary practice, the handbook gives multiple examples of historical approaches to presenting a diverse range of resources in the library from up to a hundred years ago. Knowing that this work has always been important for some cataloguers really gives it a historical grounding, which counters any ideas that EDI is just 'another trend' in the library world.

The first chapter covers inclusive description in free-text fields when cataloguing. It prompts the metadata creator to think about how and when you should refer to identity, looking at relevancy, users' needs, accuracy and respect, four considerations

which are listed multiple times through the book. The chapter helpfully looks at different aspects of identity such as ability, class, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, and religion. It gives useful and up-to-date pointers on what language may be harmful or outdated for different communities and what language to use instead. One main piece of advice is to not assume someone's identity based on images or names, this falling under their point about accuracy; for example, to not list someone's race or gender unless you are sure that is an identity they publicly hold. This chapter also gives examples of how different library collections have used content warnings in the form of harmful language statements to alert users of outdated or harmful language that may be in the collection, either in older library material or the library records themselves.

The second chapter looks at name authorities and how to use them ethically. It gives examples of where authors have used pseudonyms and anonymously authored texts. It also discuses married women's names and transgender creators where they do not wish to have their deadname (previous name) known publicly. A main point it adds is, where the author is still living, if there is uncertainty about a name, to try to contact them if possible. This chapter also gives useful examples of how to transcribe names written in non-Latin script.

The third chapter of the book focuses on descriptions of people and groups, including creators and contributors, audiences, depicted people, and others. As in previous chapters, it speaks about accuracy but also respect and privacy; it explains the importance of respecting a person's request that information about them be removed from a library record and how to approach that. This chapter also discusses Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) being problematic for not accounting for all possible groups. For example, it has many instances of markedness, where linguistically it marks something as other with language, like 'doctors' versus 'women doctors'. The authors of the handbook suggest a range of approaches to counter this, such as making full use of the Library of Congress Demographic Group Terms (LCDGT) and employing other controlled vocabularies such as Homosaurus, FAST and ERIC. The chapter gives examples of how one could use these. Whilst a lot of the book is based on MARC, it also gives examples of how to do so in BIBFRAME and the CIDOC Conceptual Reference Model.

Chapter four discusses classification and the biases that can be embedded within classification systems such as the Library of Congress Classification (LCC) or Dewey Decimal Classification. I really valued how the authors look at both working within DDC and LCC and also working with alternative classification systems. The chapter gives examples of how librarians in the past have created new classification systems that work better for their collection and their users, and also gives practical questions to ask yourself when looking into implementing a new classification scheme. This could be especially useful for librarians with small or specialist collections.

The fifth chapter explores DEI with regards to subject headings and how to improve the inclusivity of subject metadata. Similar to chapter three, it explores how to work within LCSH but also additional vocabularies you could use and how to implement them with helpful questions to ask yourself. It gives a helpful starting point for how to go about proposing a new LCSH heading through the Subject Authority Cooperative Program (SACO). It gives a timeline and an example of the high-profile case spanning 2013-2021 regarding the subject heading 'illegal aliens' and eventually getting this replaced. This chapter also includes a case study from the authors of the book, at Iowa State University itself, where they worked with Iowa Indigenous peoples to create vocabularies for Indigenous people that use terms used by the communities.

The last chapter looks at accessibility as it relates to metadata. It points out the importance of making note of accessibility features of physical library materials, despite it often being more common for digital materials. This would include adding accessibility content (341 in MARC) and accessibility notes (532) such as information about captions, audio descriptions, braille and more. The chapter also gives a substantial list of best practices and dos and don'ts for non-physical resources including alt text, extended descriptions, audio descriptions, captions, and transcripts for both MARC and Dublin Core. The chapter concludes with a powerful remark about the importance of making use of these features: "Besides improving accessibility, a meticulous approach to metadata serves as a powerful tool to promote inclusivity and foster an equitable and just information environment for diverse communities" (p.84).

The book opens with a quote from the Cataloguing Ethics Steering Committee's Cataloguing Code of Ethics that establishes the crucial role of cataloguers in deciding how information is represented, and ultimately I think that this book does well to show how we can all make considerations in our metadata work to improve representation and discovery of a diverse range of materials for our library users. Whilst a lot of the content in here may not be brand new information for anyone with some awareness of EDI in metadata, the handbook feels like a useful guide in that it has synthesised a lot of knowledge on the topic into a digestible, quick-to-read book with excellent starting points for anyone looking into making these changes in their library. Each chapter is full of citations, practical examples, case studies and concludes with a list of resources for further reading, and for this reason I think it would be a great addition to any metadata or cataloguing team's set of tools.