Module 10 Discussion Questions

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1 Discuss the different ways we can assess the quality of cataloging.

Any discussion of the quality of cataloging needs to begin with a definition of quality cataloging. Snow states that

In cataloging literature, "quality cataloging" has been defined in the following ways:

- Accurate bibliographic information that meets users' needs and provides appropriate access in a timely fashion.

- What library users say it is.

- Level of content (AACR2 level of description, inclusion of subject classification or subject headings, authority control of headings, etc.)... accuracy of content (in transcription from the item, in conformity with the standards applied)... fitness for purpose.

- We define quality for support staff by percentage error rate in the following: selection or suitability of OCLC record as a match for item cataloged; correcting typographical errors in the following fields: 100, 245, 260, 300, 5xx; making appropriate edits to bibliographic and holdings records; accurate creation of item and holdings records; recognizing cataloging problems and bringing them to the attention of a supervisor. For cataloging librarians: quality is defined by excellent original cataloging based on AACR2 full-level standards; name authority records created to standards set by NACO; effective supervision of support staff, including timely resolution of questions and problems; a reasonable turnaround time for

materials so that a backlog is not created or growing; responsiveness to needs of internal and external patrons; completeness, efficiency, responsive to queries and complaints. (Snow, 2017, pp. 438-439)

Keeping in mind that data quality and quality cataloging are separate but perhaps overlapping concepts, the definition of data quality presented in Badovinac (2021) in the context of evaluating quality of cataloging in the Slovenian union bibliographic database is applicable to multiple contexts:

Quality data is present in a unique bibliographic or authority record and it is not redundant. It is structurally consistent, structurally complete, semantically accurate, syntactically accurate, value complete, semantically coherent, representationally consistent, current, and may have added value. (Badovinac, 2021, p. 366)

Ultimately, though, there is no one size fits all definition, so quality cataloging needs to be defined based on institutional context and institutional priorities or goals. Perhaps the best way to evaluate quality of cataloging is to respond to the following questions presented in Bade (2008)

1. What data elements are useful for the kind of library research performed here in this particular institution?

2. How much, and which elements of that necessary information can this institution afford to support? (This means either creating it initially, correcting or adding it to bibliographic records imported from external sources, and future maintenance in cases of changing standards, new headings, data definitions, etc.) (Bade, 2008, p. 129).

2 How often should we be evaluating our cataloging if quality is always changing?

Badovinac (2021) presents several methods used for assessing and improving data quality in the Slovenian union bibliographic database, including "regular reviews of records that were made by beginning catalogers, identification of record groups with common error patterns, yearly reviews of 100 randomly selected records, and continuous monitoring of the recently created bibliographic

records and authority records" (Badovinac, 2021, p. 361). Badovinac goes on to provide more detail on the continuous monitoring of bibliographic and authority records, also known as daily production monitoring, stating that "[i]ts primary goal is to correct and resolve the errors in recently created records" (Badovinac, 2021, p. 361). The monitoring method is conducted by random sampling of metadata; records are reviewed without a resource in hand, then recommendations are made to catalogers who can correct their records with a resource in hand. The process is completed within six days after creation and sampling of records (Badovinac, 2021, p. 361).

In addition to providing a practical answer to the previous question of how to assess quality of cataloging, Badovinac gives a detailed answer to the question of how frequently cataloging should be evaluated. The short, but broad, answer is "continuously." A practical, effective definition of "continuously" is going to depend on institutional goals and capacity constraints, specifically constraints imposed by finances and labor availability.

3 Should the quality of cataloging be determined by the local needs of a library or by the broader cataloging community?

Standards are essential to quality cataloging, but the local needs of a library should have the final say in assessing quality of cataloging. Snow says it best: "While standardization of bibliographic data remains important (especially now since machines need to read and act upon this data on the web), standardization without concern for user needs does not produce quality cataloging" (Snow, 2017, p. 450). Snow further states that "the developers of cataloging standards have largely neglected to study users as part of the development process and therefore current standards may not accurately reflect the needs of modern library users" (Snow, 2017, p. 447). Every library user is different, and every library is different, so libraries should follow Snow's recommendation to "[c]onduct a study of user information needs to determine what information is important to users at [their] institution and try to accommodate those needs in a way that is financially feasible, as suggested by Bade" (Snow, 2017, p. 451).

4 How do we balance the needs of library users and catalogers when it comes to improving the quality of cataloging?

The balance needs to be tilted in favor library users, and catalogers should recognize that their work is primarily for library users. As Bade says, "[u]sers of the library do not need bibliographic records at all, perfect or not. What they want is to find what they are looking for" (Bade, 2008, p. 125). That said, Flynn and Kilkenny illustrate how poor quality records can impede the user experience and the cataloger's ability to improve the user experience. For example, "[v]endor provided MARC records can vary in quality which affects the amount of time needed for cataloging" (Flynn & Kilkenny, 2017, p. 632). This can lead to backlogs which limit findability of items in a library's collections. Flynn and Kilkenny explain that institutions like Duke University have policies in place that reduce cataloging to core needs in order to increase staff productivity (Flynn & Kilkenny, 2017, p. 632). OhioLINK, on the other hand, "does full-level cataloging, ensuring that call numbers and subject headings are included and that descriptive metadata is accurate, especially the title field and author(s)/editor(s)" (Flynn & Kilkenny, 2017, p. 635). Furthermore, record maintenance projects in the OhioLINK consortium "prioritize user access as well as record standardization and consistency to ensure all e-book records meet current consortial cataloging standards" (Flynn & Kilkenny, 2017, p. 638).

References

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