Everyday Cataloger Concerns

A practitioner-based research agenda for library cataloging

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Motivation

- Current state of cataloging research
  - LC goal to "build a cumulative research agenda and evidence base"
- Bridge the theory/practice divide
  - "Promote collaboration among academics, the practicing library community, and related communities, as appropriate, in the development of research agendas and research design"
- Desire to help librarians conduct quality research
- Our research question:

What kinds of research do catalogers think it is important for researchers to do?

Evolution of a Research Plan

- A survey of catalogers would provide good data to answer this research question.

- But how do we know which topics to ask about in the survey?

- A preliminary "idea solicitation" research project could provide this information.

Methodology

- Focus groups of catalogers
- Pre-test interviews to test questions
- Participants solicited via cataloging Listservs
- Four focus group interviews were held:
  - Academic library catalogers via telephone
  - Public library catalogers via telephone
  - School library catalogers at ALA 2011
  - Mixed group of catalogers at ALA 2011

Focus Groups

- Ask catalogers to describe the most important problems facing:
  - cataloging practice
  - cataloging tools and standards
  - design of catalogs
- Why did we ask questions about problems rather than about research?
- Focus group interviews were transcribed and coded for predominant themes

Coding Concerns

- Standard content analysis was not providing us with useful data

- "Themes" are not the same as research questions

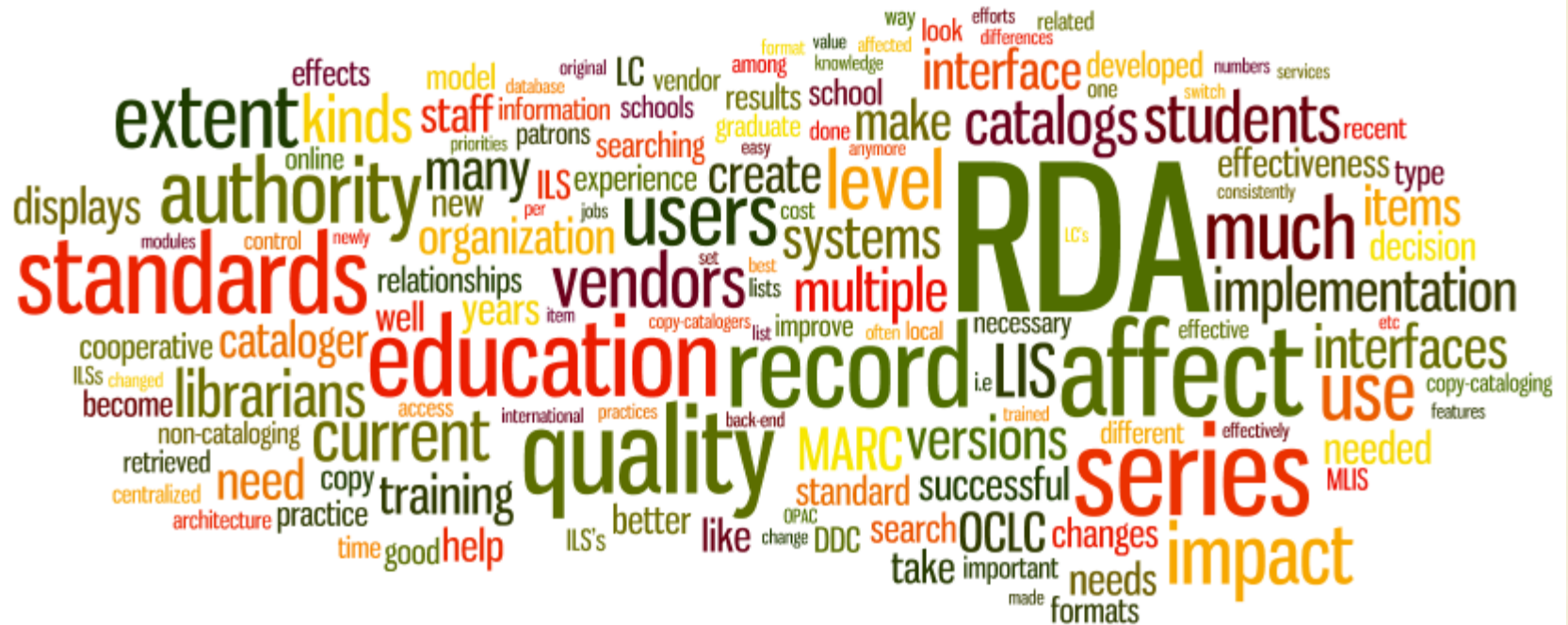- Brainstorming led us to the idea of deriving questions directly from the transcripts

Coding Reinvented

- Each of the four researchers derived questions from all of the transcripts

- Next, researchers compiled all of the questions, sorted them into similar content areas, and compared them

- A final list of questions was derived in two ways:
  - For a specific topic (group of similar questions), the question that represented the best research question was selected
  - If none of the questions were effective research questions, the team worked together to create a good research question or set of questions for that topic.

Representative Questions

- What are the effects of inconsistent implementation of contemporary cataloging standards?
- How successful is graduate library education at preparing students for positions as practicing catalogers?
- How will the implementation of RDA affect libraries?
- How will financially-challenged libraries be affected by RDA costs and implementation?
- What kinds of work are necessary to create RDA & FRBR compatible systems?
- What are the effects of LC's decision to stop creating/supporting series authority records?
- How do various/multiple format items affect catalog displays?
- What workarounds do libraries/librarians use in cataloging (and what does this reveal about systems and workflows)?
- Will a work record-based architecture improve catalog success?
- How might search results lists better express relationships between/among items in the lists?
- How much departure from standard practice do catalogers do in an attempt to make end-user interfaces more user-friendly?
- How common is departure from standard practice? Are there particular areas/fields where local practice is more common?
- Does the look of an interface affect cataloging work or is it enough to only be functional/practical?
- How well do end users understand/navigate the results of catalog searches?
- What will post-MARC cataloging look like?
- How do we create quality catalog records?

Preliminary Results

Question Process

1. Group questions from coding by similarity:

Are traditional standards appropriate for emergent digital content?

How are current standards being applied to new formats?

Are current standards adequate for new formats?

Can current standards be applied successfully / consistently to newly developed formats / digital content?

2. Distill ideas and formulate overarching research question:

Are current standards adequate for new formats?

3. From broad question, articulate specific, actionable research question(s):

What problems arise from applying traditional standards to new formats?

What is the relationship between age of standards and application to all current formats?

4. Suggest possible appropriate investigative techniques:

i.e., looking at AACR rev. ch. 6 and moving images

Questions Distilled

1. Original coding questions:

Would an alternate set of cataloging standards for public libraries be more successful than a universally applicable library cataloging standard?

Would public libraries be better served with a different set of cataloging rules and standards?

2. Broad RQ:

Would a cataloging standard created for specific library types be more successful for library users than a universal cataloging standard?

3. Actionable RQ:

Would a cataloging standard created specifically for public libraries be more successful for public library users than a universal cataloging standard?

4. Investigative suggestions:

Create an experiment

Questions Distilled

1. Original coding questions:

How much departure from standard practice do catalogers do in an attempt to make end-user interfaces more user-friendly?

How common is departure from standard practice? Are there particular areas/fields where local practice is more common?

How do catalogers balance standard vs. local practice?

2. Broad RQ:

How common is deviation from standard cataloging practice?

3. Actionable RQs:

How many libraries deviate from standard cataloging practice?

Under what circumstances do libraries deviate from standard cataloging practice?

What influences catalogers to deviate from standard cataloging practice?

4. Investigative suggestions:

Survey to ask catalogers if they deviate; how they deviate (local MARC fields, subject   headings, etc.); reasons for use of non-standard practices

Questions Distilled

1. Original coding questions:

What is the effect of centralized cataloging on local original cataloging?
What is the impact of increased centralized cataloging on cataloger jobs?
How does centralization affect catalogers' skills?
How does centralization affect catalogers' ability to train others?

2. Broad RQ:

How does centralized cataloging in a bibliographic utility affect libraries?

3. Actionable RQs:

How does centralized cataloging affect technical services staffing?
How does centralized cataloging affect catalogers' skills?
How does centralized cataloging affect local cataloging?

4. Investigative suggestions:

Investigate changes in staffing over time in utility and non-utility libraries
Test skills of catalogers in utility and non-utility libraries

What's next?

- Finish content analysis
  - generating questions & sorting results into themes
- Survey catalogers
  - which research questions and areas are most relevant and important to them
- Practitioner feedback
  - to determine whether the questions we developed were reflective of their concerns

Reporting our results

- Share overarching research themes
- Share examples of specific, researchable questions
- Discuss how librarians can use the themes to formulate useful, practical, and generalizable research questions
- Provide suggestions for research to best answer these questions

Reporting our methodology

- Write up methodology as a unique way to generate ideas and questions based on responses from short interviews and surveys

- Elaborate on the evolution and rationale of our methodology

- Identify other research areas which may benefit from this approach

Thank you!

Questions?

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Follow up to the presentation

- Additional resources on qualitative research
  - Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.
  - Pickard, A. J. (2007). *Research methods in information*. London: Facet.
  - Wildemuth, B. M. (2009). *Applications of social research methods to questions in information and library science*. Westport, Conn: Libraries Unlimited.