Originally published as:
Schomberg, J. (2015). Online bibliographies for shared discovery. *z687: Creating the Future of Technical Services*, ALCTS white paper series. http://www.ala.org/alcts/resources/z687/shared-discovery
Editor: Pamela Thomas

Bibliography of Cataloging and Technical Services Assessment

By Jessica Schomberg

A few years ago, I began investigating best practices in cataloging assessment. I started with a review of related literature to gather citations on the topic. As this work progressed, I found that researchers describe assessment, or pieces of assessment, using many different terms including evaluation, quality, workflow, cost, and production. They also write specifically about cataloging or broadly about technical services; of which cataloging or metadata is a part.

Most of the research I found focuses on aspects of quality control (completeness, accuracy), efficiency (number of titles cataloged, volume of backlogs), and cost (cost per item, staff costs versus outsourcing costs). To a lesser extent, the research on cataloging assessment practices also discusses issues related to workflow processes, organizational culture (communication processes, setting priorities), training and professional development, and usability (high– or low-value fields, impact of backlogs on users). Most of the research describes quantitative methods of performing cataloging assessment, but few of the analyses provide explanation for how those specific methods fit into an overall, systematic assessment process. This seems to be especially problematic when quantitative data is used to compare institutions, without acknowledging that different libraries operate within different contexts. In fact, some of the articles point out that we as a profession need to do a lot more research in this area. From that observation, these online bibliographies were born.

As I gathered these pieces of information I realized that I was fortunate to have access to resources that catalogers elsewhere might not have so easily available, such as Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts (LISTA), Library & Information Science Source (LISS), the Taylor & Francis Social Sciences and Humanities Library, and other databases that

contain library research. After doing a very informal Twitter query to see if others would be interested in seeing an online list of resources on this topic, I decided to make it publicly available.

In addition, I wanted to provide an opportunity for people to share the research they came across. I recognized that I was probably not the only one surveying the literature in this area and that others might come across related articles that I hadn't found in my own searching. While part of my intent was to create opportunities to crowd-source the bibliography, I wanted the information to be organized in a consistent way. For that reason, I used the format of a standard bibliography—in APA style for no other reason than because I'm familiar enough with that citation style that I don't need to look up the rules every time I use it.

After the blog-bibliography was posted online, a colleague suggested that more descriptive information be added to the citations to assist researchers in selecting the articles that were of the most relevance to their interests. In response to that request, I began adding brief descriptions of content. These annotations were added if the content was easily available from the abstract or if I had read the article and was able to write a brief synopsis myself.

Cataloging and Social Justice

While developing the cataloging assessment bibliography and reading through the articles, I started noticing the Twitter discussion on critical librarianship (#critlib), which made me think about the role of cataloging in supporting the American Library Association Core Values of social responsibility, diversity, and the public good. I began to wonder if by merely assessing the mechanistic aspects of cataloging work we were missing out on an opportunity to include broader social concepts in our assessment and planning processes. As a result, I started to compile research on the intersection of cataloging and social justice. As the impetus for this compilation was the #critlib movement, the concept of social justice I was operating under was heavily influenced by those discussions. In other words, the articles included in this bibliography focus on how cataloging tools, including subject thesauri and classification schemes, do or do not accurately and respectfully reflect various modalities of diversity, including sexual orientation,

race, ability, language background and others. This was distinct enough that it needed a separate bibliography.

Reaction

If I had it to do over again, I probably wouldn't use the blogger platform, as navigation between the two bibliographies was not intuitive and the connection between those areas of study was not as clear as it could have been. However, my goal of promoting the existing research was accomplished and I have been contacted by others who have suggested additions to both bibliographies, primarily through twitter. I have also been thanked for the social justice bibliography. Once by a cataloging professor who said that she would use it to encourage her students to think about the social impact of cataloging work, several times by librarians who saw themselves and their lives reflected in cataloging research.

I have used the bibliographies to conduct my own research in the area of cataloging assessment, and the social justice bibliography has helped me with a project I'm working on to examine video classification practices. By using the bibliographies in my own research activities, I began to realize that while the APA citation list format is a great place to start, it might be more beneficial to group citations by area of focus. That may help me and others to quickly identify gaps in existing research. If I am feeling especially ambitious (or if there's a request for it), I may also expand the annotations to include information about research methodology, and indicate which studies have potential for replication.

Overall, I have been happy with this project and will continue to maintain these bibliographies with new research as it comes out. I anticipate that other librarians will use them as a jumping off point in beginning their research. Both areas have enormous potential for ongoing study, and I hope to see more discussion and writing in these areas in the future.

About the Author

Jessica Schomberg serves as the Media Cataloger / Library Assessment Coordinator at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Jessica is a member of ALA-ALCTS and OLAC, and has been appointed to serve as a member of the OLAC Cataloging Policy Committee (CAPC). She received her MA in English: Teaching English as a Second Language in 2007 from Minnesota State University, Mankato, and her MLIS in 2000 from the University of Washington, Seattle.