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Cataloging 2.0: Metadata Research & Initiatives at a Community College Library

The world that I envision is one in which ... we like any metadata we see. We should strive to acquire, use, and appropriately display both user input as well as cataloger-assigned metadata elements. Not one or the other alone, but both. – Roy Tennant

At the Hostos Community College library, a small, public college in New York City, a cataloger and an information technology librarian are collaborating to use Library 2.0 technology to enhance information retrieval. Our efforts are inspired by innovations popularly known as Library 2.0 and by longer-standing discussions about how to provide meaningful subject access to users. They focus on initiatives that combine cataloging and other standard metadata practices with user-developed tags and folksonomies. Catalogers know better than most the care and precision that goes into creating and updating *LCSH*. We are also the first to be frustrated by the slow pace of change and its inability to describe digital resources that are gaining importance to educators such as video games and web resources. In the pre-Library 2.0 era, activists like Sanford Berman argued for a “contemporary, relevant, and accurate subject thesaurus, replete with generous cross-references” (Berman, 5). We strive to use social tagging technologies in the service of better access to library resources.

The technology that drives Library 2.0 brings librarians closer to users. It affords us the opportunity to re-evaluate traditional divisions of labor within the library with a view toward understanding and responding to the needs of users in an informed and meaningful way. So far, much of the discussion around Library 2.0 has focused on reaching out to users and eliciting feedback about collections and services. To a large extent, Library 2.0 is viewed from the

perspective of public services and catalogers are left out of the equation. However, Library 2.0 technology enables users to write reviews for and assign tags to library resources, and these activities closely parallel the work of catalogers.

In fact, cataloging has always been a user-centered activity. In *Cataloging and Classification: An Introduction*, Chan describes the major historical influences in the evolution of cataloging. For example, in his *Rules for a Dictionary Catalog* first published in 1876, Charles Ammi Cutter identified the principle of the "convenience of the public." Cutter argued that in creating a system for access to materials "cataloguers should be concerned with 'the public's habitual way of looking at things'" (Chan, 160). Cataloging attempts to express the subject, the "aboutness," of a work by choosing subject terms from controlled vocabularies such as *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, but catalogers are always mindful that these systems only approximate "the public's habitual way of looking at things" (Chan, 160). Until very recently, we haven't had access to the minds of the users.

Tagging and social software have changed all of that. User added tags, or natural language keywords, and social software support the principles that Cutter identified over a century ago. Social software lets users describe "how they look at things," and more importantly, their tags improve access for other users. We should be welcoming user generated tags as a complement to (but not a replacement for) traditional controlled vocabularies and exploring ways to incorporate them into our catalogs and websites.

At our small community college library, we are exploring ways to harness user-generated tags to improve access to library resources. Our "collections" of interest are video games and web resources. Gamers have been tagging games by genre, name, and other attributes for years and we have observed that they have done a much better job of describing them than

bibliographic records that use *LCSH*. We are exploring ways to develop a thesaurus that incorporates user-generated tags, *LCSH*, and terminology based on educational outcomes. We are less interested in developing a perfect thesaurus for video games than we are in examining ways to use tags and controlled vocabulary to improve access for our users—student, staff and faculty gamers and other educators who might use games as learning tools.

Following the example of other academic libraries, we are migrating our lists of web resources from static HTML pages, to a del.icio.us account. Where we previously published annotated web resources organized by subject on static web pages, our librarians now share a del.icio.us account and tag resources they add to the account. We have a tag cloud on our website that users can click to search by tag. Interestingly, we found that this project serves another purpose. In addition to helping us manage and update our collection of web resources, we can generate lists of the words our librarians use to describe the web resources they add to our del.icio.us account. We plan on examining lists of tags that we can generate from our library and college community, and exploring ways to integrate these into local thesaurus development.

Like most libraries, the value of our collection rests upon the work of catalogers who have organized and described it over the decades using *LCSH* and *AACR2*. This careful work is part of what makes libraries unique and valuable in the world of information resources. Now, Library 2.0 technology enables users to do some of the work of describing resources themselves. This can be seen as a threat to our traditional way of doing things, but we see in Library 2.0 an opportunity to provide a new way to complement subject cataloging and provide better access for users.

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