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Maximize the OPAC: Is FRBR in Your Future?

CONFERENCE REPORT

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The answer to the question in this program's title is a definite YES! That is, unless you plan to escape the world of standards and live under a rock somewhere. FRBR is the hot catchphrase and all catalogers must know about it if they want to be prepared for the changes coming down the pike. And not only catalogers need to know about FRBR, since its effect upon our online library catalogs will be felt by all library staff and users. So what is FRBR? The acronym stands for Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records and is often spoken as "furbur," though some refer to it as "furby" in fun.

FRBR represents a radical change in the conceptual approach to mapping relationships between various titles held by libraries. The FRBR model introduces new terminology that will eventually be reflected in the new AACR2 (or AACR3, since it is a BIG change) which is now in the works. FRBR will not arrive tomorrow, since it must be written into the cataloging rules and reflected in the related MARC definitions and that all takes time. But that standards work is

currently underway and so FRBR will be in our future, though nobody can say for sure just yet exactly when it will happen.

FRBR is a complex model, so it is important to hear and therefore learn about it gradually and frequently. AALL began to help in this effort by presenting this program during its Annual Meeting in Seattle on July 13, 2003. "Maximize the OPAC: Is FRBR in Your Future?" was very well-attended and the panel presenters on the program are true experts, intimately involved with the implementation of FRBR. Barbara Tillett (Library of Congress Cataloging Policy and Support Office) set the stage conceptually by defining FRBR and its terminology. Vinod Chachra (VTLS Inc.) came next and made it a bit more concrete by showing his company's interpretation of FRBR as implemented in its Virtua online local system. Then Glenn Patton (OCLC) finished up by speaking about the benefits of FRBR.

Dr. Tillett's slides are in the handouts book received at AALL registration and

they are essential to understanding her presentation and can even stand alone in giving a good overview of FRBR. Mr. Patton had a one page handout that is not in the book and Mr. Chachra did not have a handout, though his examples can be viewed on the VTLS website at: <http://www.vtls.com/> (in a box on the left side, click on "Navigating FRBR with Virtua"—viewed August 22, 2003). I was fortunate to be able to attend an almost identical program at the ALA Annual Conference in Toronto on June 22, 2003, called "Don't Be Dysfunctional: How to Put FRBR in Your Future." Dr. Tillett's and Mr. Patton's handouts from ALA are on the ALCTS website at: http://www.ala.org/Content/NavigationMenu/ALCTS/Continuing_Education2/Presentations/Presentations.htm (viewed August 22, 2003). I strongly urge you to check out all this material on the web, because it is impossible for me to give very much detail in this short report.

FRBR was originally the result of six years of work by an IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and

Institutions) study group and it was published by K.G. Sauer in 1998. But it is also available on the web at: <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s13/frbr/frbr.htm> or <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s13/frbr/frbr.pdf> IFLA is now monitoring the evolution and use of FRBR. To put it as simply as possible, FRBR deals with entities, relationships, and attributes. Within the category of entities, there are three groups:

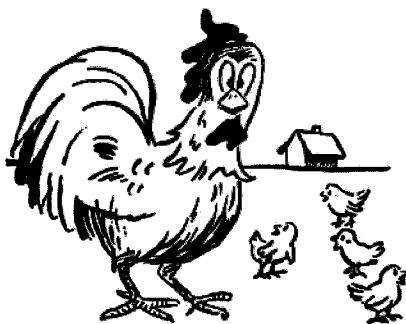
- Group 1: Products of intellectual and artistic endeavor (work, expression, manifestation, item)
- Group 2: Those responsible for the intellectual and artistic content (person, corporate body)
- Group 3: Subjects of works (groups 1 & 2 plus concept, object, event, place)

The various charts contained in Dr. Tillett's slides illustrate these groups best. In group 1, a "work" is an abstract entity, an idea in the creator's head. It is realized through an "expression," which can be described as an interpretation or realization of that work. A "manifestation" is a physical embodiment of that work or expression, and could be thought of as being at the copy level of a title. And an "item" is an exemplification of that manifestation, for example, one piece of a multi-volume title. The classic example that I first saw of FRBR used "Gone With the Wind" (GWTW). There is the original idea for the novel (work), which is realized through the original text, a translation, or a critical edition (different expressions). At the manifestation level, there can be the original print work, a PDF version, and an HTML version. And finally, at the item level, there can be one print copy as distinguished from a different print copy.

This illustrates how the FRBR model focuses in on the relationships inherent to the entities. Dr. Tillett advised that we think of works as being in families, such as in the GWTW example. The FRBR model then can be used to improve online catalog displays, thereby serving as a tool to help us think about how to serve our

users better. The bottom line reverts to the timeless Cutter's Objectives of the Catalog: finding and collocating. FRBR is especially interesting when applied to musical works and expressions. Dr. Tillett offered the statistic that in a sample of the OCLC database, it was estimated that less than 20% of the records in it have more than one manifestation per work. Her slides show some different scenarios and some "FRBR-ized" records. Dr. Tillett also touched upon FRANAR (Functional Requirements and Numbering of Authority Records), which is sort of an extension to the FRBR model that brings in the essential aspect of authority control. But that's a topic for another whole program, hopefully coming soon to an AALL Annual Meeting.

Mr. Chachra next showed the implementation of FRBR as included



in release 41 of VTLS' Virtua local system. In that release, libraries have the choice to implement FRBR completely, ignore it altogether, or have a mix of some records with FRBR applied and some without. Mr. Chachra described the examples available at the VTLS website. The implementation utilizes a tree structure to show the relationships between records in the Group 1 category: work, expression, manifestation, and item. Different labeled levels display via a split screen method in Virtua. On the staff side, it is a split between the top and bottom of the screen and in the webPAC, it is side by side. A work is cataloged once and then it appears in multiple trees, making use of the 001 and 004 MARC

tags to establish the links between related records. The linking is done automatically and recursively.

The rules-based validation routines built into the Virtua system can be changed by each library. Records can be "FRBR-ized" individually or in batches as added or they can be mapped retrospectively. Records that need to be shared in some way with another library or libraries can also be "un-FRBR-ized" for that purpose. According to Mr. Chachra, there were some accidental benefits that became apparent. Library users that are not fussy about what expression they receive of a work can place a hold at a higher level, thus perhaps expediting the process of receiving some version of that work. European libraries are also very pleased at the way FRBR groups titles in multiple languages. Mr. Chachra expressed one of the many benefits of FRBR as being the reduction of the cataloging workload. While that perhaps could be true further down the road, I suspect it would be a little way out considering the major adjustment implementing FRBR would represent in the shorter term.

"What Can FRBR Do for You?" was the title of Glenn Patton's portion of the program. He characterized FRBR as an opportunity to reacquaint ourselves with the history of cataloging and he spent some time discussing Cutter's Objectives (1876) and the Paris Principles (1961). While FRBR is viewed as a radical change, Mr. Patton reminded us that it is really just new vocabulary applied to the familiar concepts of finding and collocating. When we moved to online catalogs, there was a lot gained in terms of keyword access to more of the bibliographic record and integrated authority control. But some navigation tools that were present in the card catalog were also lost, namely guide cards and the ease of scanning through large sets of cards quickly.

Relationships can currently be made in our catalogs through the use of

uniform titles and role and function identifiers. But as Mr. Patton pointed out, we have not been consistent in applying these over time and to all types of materials. In addition, online catalogs do not utilize uniform titles to their best advantage. As a result, relationships in our catalogs are not clear. FRBR would change that and the increased sharing of good, clear information would ultimately improve productivity and reveal the value of catalogers. Mr. Patton summarized the benefits of FRBR as:

1. Clearer understanding of why we do what we do

2. Better collocation and navigation
3. Clearer, more useful relationships
4. More controlled, authoritative information for productivity

It seems to me that while many libraries are migrating to new local systems lately, this work is accompanied by a sense of dissatisfaction with all those systems in general. In my opinion, this dissatisfaction does not stem from the amount of work involved with such a move, but rather from the sinking feeling that the new system is not much better than the old one for our

end users. And it is often less efficient for library staff to operate. If FRBR can motivate library system vendors to improve their products, libraries will be more than happy to implement those systems. Even though the transition to FRBR may be disruptive, the intent behind it of serving our users better will be well worth the time and effort. At present it is essential that we all stay tuned to the new developments on the FRBR front. Many thanks for this excellent program to Kathy Winzer (Stanford) who was the coordinator and to Bill Benemann (Berkeley) who moderated—great job!