

Classification of Library Materials: Current and Future Potential for Providing Access. Ed. by Betty G. Bengtson and Janet Swan Hill. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 1990. 196p. (ISBN 1-55570-027-6). LC 90-8054.

The development of online catalogs has sparked a renewed interest in the theory and practice of classification in American libraries. Online catalogs have enhanced the possibilities (as well as user expectations) for improved subject retrieval. Classification, with its potential as a device for subject access, can play an increasingly important role in automated catalogs and networks. Within this context, and with the realization that there had not been an American Library Association conference on classification since 1966, the Association for Library Collections & Technical Services (ALCTS) sponsored a preconference institute at the 1985 ALA Annual Conference and a series of regional institutes on classification, specifically the two major classification systems used in the United States, Dewey and the Library of Congress. Most of the thirteen chapters in *Classification of Library Materials*, including the summary by Arnold S. Wajenberg, are based on presentations or workshops given at the preconference and the regional institutes.

Hugh Atkinson's keynote address emphasizes that classification is necessary not just because it provides shelf placement for an item, but because it can demonstrate to the user relationships with other materials that are broader and narrower in subject content. Catalogs could provide alternative classification numbers for works that cover more than one subject. A well-applied classification system can help a library patron to sort out from the multiple responses to a subject those materials that meet a specific need. As libraries become more dependent on inter-library loan and decentralized networks, patrons need more precise, accurate, and complete analysis of bibliographic items in order to make informed decisions. They cannot browse through the shelves if the shelves are somewhere else.

Karen Markey's report on the Dewey Decimal Classification Online Project demonstrates that classification can im-

prove subject access in an online catalog. Terms from the Dewey Decimal Classification Schedules and Relative Index were incorporated into the searching capabilities of an experimental online catalog. The effectiveness of this approach was tested in experiments at four participating libraries. The enhancement of bibliographic records with the Dewey Decimal Classification improved subject access in keyword searches.

American libraries are now discovering the role classification can play in subject access in an online catalog, but most European libraries have had manual classed catalogs for years. As described by Russell Sweeney, a classed catalog has subject entries arranged by call number notation in the classified file. The catalog has an alphabetical index leading the patron from search terms to the notation used to arrange the entries. An "author" file, including entries for author, title, editor, series, etc., enables the user to conduct a "known item" search. In a classed catalog, the classification is not just a device for shelf arrangement and browsing, but a required tool for information retrieval. The European subject search uses keywords to search files in addition to using classification as the basic searching tool. The American search uses alphabetic designators, with classification numbers as an addition. Online access to bibliographic records is leading to a synthesis of the two types of catalogs. Even though most United States libraries have not had public shelflists in their manual catalogs, patrons have learned to use and to expect a call number searching function in online catalogs.

However promising the future role of classification in an online environment may seem, certain practical considerations must temper optimistic expectations. Phyllis Richmond, in her "General Theory of Classification" chapter, warns that deviations from standard classification systems, especially in a computerized environment, diminish the chances of using classification effectively for any kind of searching. Several chapters on classification policy discuss ways of dealing with variations in classification. Revisions of classification schedules are inevitable, as

new fields of knowledge develop and the world's political boundaries are redefined.

The Library of Congress system can interpolate new sections of numbers, while changes in the Dewey system are often reworkings of numbers previously used with other meanings. Ideally, libraries could begin using the new or revised numbers for new materials and could reclassify old materials every time the classification system was updated. In practice, most libraries would find this impossible. Libraries can choose to begin using new or revised classification numbers for new materials, leaving old materials under the old classification, or they can continue to use the old numbers. Neither choice offers a completely satisfactory solution. While a library may attempt to maintain the integrity of its own catalog, the fact that most libraries rely on shared copy for the bulk of their cataloging and cannot attempt to classify everything in-house further complicates the situation.

Other legitimate variations in classification can occur, even within one library, because of choices made in applying the classification schedules. For example, interdisciplinary studies may fit into two or more places in the schedules, items that are parts of a series may be classed individually or under a general number, and bibliographies may be classed together or with their individual subjects. Some libraries choose to make local modifications to the classification systems. Such decisions usually prove expensive and dysfunctional for them and for other libraries in an automated network. If libraries expect classification to be used effectively as an additional point of subject access, then their local classification policies must begin to reflect the increasing importance of precision, accuracy, currency, and standardization.—*Elaine A. Franco, University of California, Davis.*

International Encyclopedia of Communications. Ed. by Erik Barnouw, et al.

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