

MARY ELLEN MICHAEL
Consultant
Forest Press
Lake Placid, New York

Summary of a Survey of the Use of the Dewey Decimal Classification in the United States and Canada

Within the last ten years, three studies have been performed dealing with the use of Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) outside the North American continent.¹ To date, there has not been a similar survey aimed at assessing the situation in the United States and Canada. In response to this need, Forest Press, publisher of the DDC schedules, has sponsored a survey to measure the use of the DDC by libraries and processing centers in these two countries. This paper highlights some of the findings of this survey. The full report has been published by Forest Press.²

There were four major objectives of the survey: (1) to determine the extent of use of the DDC by U.S. and Canadian libraries of different sizes and types, (2) to obtain information about the application of the DDC to library collections, (3) to determine the problem areas in the application of the DDC for collections in these two countries, and (4) to ascertain to what extent the DDC is taught in library schools and what problems are encountered in teaching it.

The survey was divided into three phases to meet the above objectives. First, a questionnaire was mailed to a ten-percent sample of all types of libraries—school, public, junior college, college, university, and system libraries. This questionnaire was also designed for processing centers, both commercial and nonprofit. Secondly, follow-up visits were made to processing centers and large libraries (those holding 500,000 volumes or more) that had responded to the mail questionnaire. More detailed interviews were conducted with the classifiers at these large DDC-oriented libraries concerning their experiences and problems with the scheme. The third phase consisted of another mail questionnaire sent to instructors in cataloging and classification in all accredited and unaccredited library schools in the United States and Canada. The results of this latter questionnaire are not included in this summary, however. Table 1 lists the libraries and processing centers which completed the questionnaire.

The U.S. Postal Service was unable to forward twenty-five of the eighty-four questionnaires to commercial processing centers because they had gone out of business or had no forwarding address. An additional five centers responded that they process books only and do no classifying. Since it was decided to include all larger libraries (500,000 volumes or more) and all commercial processing centers in the survey, the responses of these libraries weight the questionnaire results. Libraries using the Library of Congress Classification (LCC) were eligible to answer several questions.

Table 2 compares type of library to classification scheme used. To give a true picture of the use of DDC and LCC in the United States and Canada, a 10 percent sample is given to reflect the total population. In the survey, all libraries over 500,000 volumes were studied. Table 2 lists a 10 percent sample from this group.

School and public libraries comprise 69 percent of DDC users. Junior colleges and colleges are more evenly divided between the use of the two classification schemes. LCC is used in universities more frequently than is DDC, while DDC is used more heavily in school, public, and library system libraries and processing centers. (Some noncommercial processing centers are also school, public, or academic libraries.)

While Table 2 lists libraries and processing centers that fall in the 10 percent sample, Table 3 details only those libraries of 500,000 volumes or more. As mentioned earlier, all libraries in this size category were sent the questionnaire. Of these 242 libraries, 201 completed the questionnaire. Of the 201 libraries represented in Table 3, 18 are Canadian. Of these eighteen libraries, twelve university libraries use LCC and one library system also uses LCC. All five responding public libraries use DDC.

The majority (63 percent) of larger libraries in both countries use the Library of Congress Classification. Fifty-seven percent of these LCC libraries

| | <i>United States</i> | | <i>Canada</i> | | <i>Total</i> | |
|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
| School | 135 | 59.7 | 91 | 40.3 | 226 | 19.6 |
| Public | 473 | 94.6 | 27 | 5.4 | 500 | 43.4 |
| Junior college | 86 | 91.5 | 8 | 8.5 | 94 | 8.2 |
| College | 85 | 97.7 | 2 | 2.3 | 87 | 7.6 |
| University | 158 | 89.3 | 19 | 10.7 | 177 | 15.4 |
| Library system | 24 | 85.7 | 4 | 14.3 | 28 | 2.4 |
| Processing center | 33 | 82.5 | 7 | 17.5 | 40 | 3.5 |
| Total | 994 | 86.3 | 158 | 13.7 | 1152 | 100.0 |

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Type of Library.

| | <i>LCC Library</i> | | <i>DDC Library</i> | |
|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
| School | 2 | 0.2 | 220 | 24.6 |
| Public | 4 | 0.4 | 432 | 48.4 |
| Junior college | 45 | 5.0 | 47 | 5.3 |
| College | 44 | 4.9 | 35 | 4.0 |
| University | 36 | 4.0 | 5 | 0.5 |
| Library system | 1 | 0.1 | 22 | 2.5 |
| Processing center | 1 | 0.1 | 9 | 1.0 |
| Total | 133 | 14.7 | 770 | 86.7 |

Table 2. Type of Library Compared to Classification Scheme Used.

| | <i>LCC Library</i> | | <i>DDC Library</i> | |
|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
| School | — | — | 1 | 0.5 |
| Public | 7 | 3.5 | 50 | 24.9 |
| Junior college | — | — | — | — |
| College | 4 | 2.0 | — | — |
| University | 115 | 57.2 | 14 | 7.0 |
| Library system | 1 | .5 | 4 | 2.0 |
| Processing center | — | — | 5 | 2.5 |
| Total | 127 | 63.2 | 74 | 36.9 |

Table 3. U.S. and Canadian Libraries of 500,000 Volumes or More and Classification Scheme Used.

are affiliated with universities. Public libraries in this size category are the heaviest users of the DDC scheme.

Only 4 percent of LCC libraries—as compared with 29.5 percent of DDC libraries—do all or most of their own original classifying (see Table 4). Almost 75 percent of LCC respondents do some original classifying, while approximately 45 percent of DDC libraries fall in the same range; 21.3 percent of LCC libraries and 26.9 percent of DDC libraries do little or no original classifying.

A substantial proportion of those libraries responding that they do all or most original classifying are smaller libraries that often do their own classifying without resorting to available cataloging services, and large libraries using editions of *Dewey Decimal Classification* other than the eighteenth. Although this latter group uses many of the numbers given on LC copy, the large libraries still check all numbers against their various practices. Many respondents construed this as original classifying.

Only libraries which use DDC for their main collection of books were eligible to answer the next section of the questionnaire. When asked what would constitute the optimum interval for publication of DDC editions, most of the respondents preferred that new editions be published every five years. The larger libraries of 500,000 volumes or more preferred a span of seven years between new editions. Large public libraries accepted new editions more readily than did large academic libraries; the costs entailed in this may account for the latter's reluctance to favor frequent editions. Moreover, academic librarians have wanted new editions to aid in classification of new subjects, not for the updated structure of knowledge.

DDC classifiers were asked to indicate their view of the purpose of classification. The greatest number of those answering (356, or 44.1 percent) view classification as educational-efficient, or the process of gathering together those works most used together in a functional grouping. The next largest group (38.2 percent) view classification as primarily subject analysis. Only 9.4 percent of the classifiers think that the main purpose of classification is as a locational device ("mark and park").

The majority (63.6 percent) of those classifiers represented in Table 5 preferred that a classification system maintain stability of numbers, while 31.9 percent thought that a classification system should keep pace with knowledge as reflected in the literature of a subject. Care must be taken here when making inferences. There may have been a false dichotomy posed. It is possible to advocate *both* keeping pace with knowledge and maintaining stability of numbers; new subjects can be located at existing numbers.

Respondents were asked to indicate their attitudes toward a selection of features of the DDC system. The features were pure notation, hierarchical notation, phoenix schedules, continuing revision, stability of numbers, index,

| | <i>LCC Library</i> | | <i>DDC Library</i> | |
|-----------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
| All original | 4 | 1.6 | 88 | 10.8 |
| Most original | 6 | 2.4 | 152 | 18.7 |
| Some original | 190 | 74.8 | 367 | 45.1 |
| Little original | 47 | 18.5 | 164 | 20.1 |
| No original | 7 | 2.8 | 43 | 5.3 |
| Total | 254 | 100.0 | 814 | 100.0 |

Table 4. To What Extent Does Your Library Do Original Classifying?

| <i>Preference</i> | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|---|---------------|-------------------|
| Keeping pace with knowledge that reflects current trends in the literature of a subject | 255 | 31.9 |
| Stability of number, i.e., finding places within the current structure for new subjects | 508 | 63.6 |
| No opinion | 36 | 4.5 |
| Total | 799 | 100.0 |

Table 5. Keeping Pace With Knowledge vs. Stability of Numbers.

and mnemonics. The majority of those libraries expressing an opinion had a positive attitude toward the listed aspects. The index of DDC received the highest positive response (62 percent). It should be noted that as the question is worded, this must be interpreted to be an approval of the inclusion of an index with the scheme (as opposed to LCC's lack of a comprehensive index) rather than being a judgment of the quality of that index. As a method of change in the DDC system, continuing revision was looked upon more favorably than were the phoenix schedules.

Related to the question of preference of frequency of new editions are the questions of reclassification and stability of numbers versus keeping pace with knowledge. The most severe form of keeping pace with knowledge would be to redo the entire classification with each new edition. The next most drastic manner is the phoenix schedule. The strictest form of stability of numbers would be to alter nothing, providing locations for new subjects either at old numbers or previously unused numbers. The only change would occur with expansion, and even then there would be little change.

| <i>Number of digits to the right of the decimal</i> | <i>Libraries</i> | |
|---|------------------|-------------------|
| | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
| one | 7 | 2.2 |
| two | 58 | 18.1 |
| three | 175 | 54.4 |
| four | 42 | 13.1 |
| five | 22 | 6.9 |
| six or more | 27 | 8.4 |
| Total | 320 | 100.0 |

Table 6. Artificial Limit to Number of Digits to the Right of the Decimal Imposed by DDC Libraries.

Revision of the DDC, which most responding libraries favored implies either of the two fundamentally different courses described above: (1) finding a place for a new subject within the old DDC structure, leaving all existing subjects (whether current or not) where they are; or, (2) tearing down the old structure and providing new places for both existing and new subjects, including reuse by old or new subjects of numbers once having other meanings. While almost all university libraries visited in interviews were somewhat positive about continuing revision, five out of six favored stability of numbers as a preferred course as opposed to the phoenix concept. Large academic libraries desire little change.

Eighty-seven percent of respondents thought that more instructional notes in the schedules would be helpful. Eighty-four percent also favored greater detail in instructional notes. It appears from the data here and elsewhere that a good deal of work needs to be done to make the contents of the schedules more accessible to catalogers. Next to the phoenix schedules and, perhaps, reworking the index, helping the classifier to use the DDC more accurately should be the first priority for the upcoming nineteenth edition. More and better notes of all sorts are needed, especially those that explain alternate locations for material on a particular subject.

Libraries were requested to specify whether they impose an artificial limit on the number of digits to the right of the decimal point of the available DDC number. Such a policy is held by 43.3 percent (353) of the libraries. By size, the groups most commonly imposing an artificial limit are the larger libraries. Of these 353 libraries, 320 specified the artificial limit for number of digits to the right of the decimal (see Table 6). The majority (54.4 percent) of libraries with an artificial limit on number length limit their numbers to three digits to the right of the decimal.

The 48.7 percent (397) of the libraries which do not impose an artificial limit were asked exactly what factors determine how much a number is shortened. A variety of responses were given, the most common being that the length of the number used is determined by the extent of collection development, or foreseeable development, in each particular subject area; 61 percent of the respondents cited this consideration. Logical sense of number and previous practice were cited by 19 percent. In actuality, the classifier might rely on a combination of factors, but the tendency is to express but one facet on the questionnaire. A few librarians stated that the length of the number is determined by the size of the book spine.

Catalogers were asked to what extent they use segmentation of DDC numbers as found on the LC cards, in *Publishers' Weekly*, and through other services. Approximately 70 percent of the responding libraries use the segmentation provided in these services to some extent. Segmentation is valuable to the smaller libraries but much less so for the larger ones, which use it as a guide, but rarely as more than that. More care is apparently needed in determining breaking points, and perhaps guidelines for segmentation should be examined.

Classifiers were asked to indicate, by circling all applicable responses, what methods of treating biography are used in their libraries. The two most widely used ways of dealing with biography are B or 92 (used in 59 percent of the responding libraries), and 920 for collected biography (used by 62 percent of DDC libraries). Classifying biography under subject using standard subdivision -092 is used by 14 percent of the libraries, while 12 percent classify biography under subject without using standard subdivision -092. Evidently, DDC's preferred practice of classifying biography with the subject has not been widely adopted by libraries using DDC. Many libraries marked several choices, indicating that a mixture of several methods of handling biography in a single library is not an uncommon occurrence. The larger libraries indicated several ways of handling biography in the same library. As might be supposed, this is not true of the smaller libraries. The larger libraries have the highest percentages using DDC's preferred practice of classifying biography under subject, while very few of the smaller libraries classify under subject.

Most public service librarians in the larger libraries prefer to classify biography with the subject because it keeps the biographies in their divisions. Branch librarians are an exception to this rule, however. No matter how biographies are kept together, biographies of artists, athletes, musicians, etc., usually go with the subject, often without indication that the work is a biography. Several libraries class biographies by subject, but often do not use -.0924 because of the length of the number. The indication *B* on an LC card is always welcome, but occasionally suspect.

| | <i>Yes, class according to the prescribed methods of the 800s</i> | | <i>No, depart from prescribed methods of the 800s</i> | |
|-------------------|---|-------------------|---|-------------------|
| | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
| School | 188 | 90.4 | 20 | 9.6 |
| Public | 385 | 90.0 | 43 | 10.0 |
| Junior college | 39 | 86.7 | 6 | 13.3 |
| College | 34 | 91.9 | 3 | 8.1 |
| University | 14 | 56.0 | 11 | 44.0 |
| Library system | 21 | 91.3 | 2 | 8.7 |
| Processing center | 13 | 92.9 | 1 | 7.1 |
| Total | 694 | 89.0 | 86 | 11.0 |

Table 7. Types of Libraries Which Do or Do Not Class Works of and about Literature According to the Prescribed Methods of the 800s.

Libraries were then asked whether DDC should continue to classify biography with the subject as the preferred method. The majority (56 percent) favored its continuation. (Note that the number favoring the continuation of DDC's preferred method of classing biography is quite a bit higher than the number actually using this method.)

Classifiers were asked whether they class literature according to the prescribed methods of the 800s; 89 percent answered affirmatively. This percentage holds approximately true for all types of libraries except those in universities, where only 56 percent class literature in the 800s—44 percent do not (see Table 7).

Literature and its criticism surely present the greatest difficulty for Dewey libraries of any type. Although most catalogers cut off before the period, thus losing some economy in not accepting LC numbers, their troubles have only begun. A cutter number has to be assigned and criticism indicated, if this assignment is even done. Most processing centers, since they are not providing call numbers for a single collection, do not use cutter numbers. For the most part, the initial of the author's surname or the first three letters of his surname suffice. One-fourth of the larger public libraries also operate in this manner, somewhat to the dissatisfaction of their public service librarians. Both sorts of libraries usually do nothing for fiction in English, other than an *F* or *Fic* or *SS col* for a collection of short stories or *SF* or *M*, etc. The indication of type of fiction is usually put on the book's spine by the branches or departments in public service. More often than not, academic libraries use regular methods for classifying fiction. It is with criticism that most problems for the public are found, for criticism and literature are often mixed indiscriminately or the criticism is put in an unlikely place.

| | Full Edition | | | | | | | Abridged Edition | | | |
|------------|--------------|------|------|-----------|------|------|-------|------------------|-----|-----|-------|
| | 18th | 17th | 16th | 15th rev. | 15th | 14th | other | 10th | 9th | 8th | other |
| School | 187 | 7 | 3 | 1 | | | | 29 | 4 | | |
| Public | 212 | 40 | 25 | | 5 | 4 | 5 | 83 | 48 | 26 | 3 |
| Junior | | | | | | | | | | | |
| college | 36 | 3 | 3 | 1 | | | | 5 | 1 | | |
| College | 30 | 5 | 2 | | | | | | | | |
| University | 20 | 3 | 3 | | | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| Library | | | | | | | | | | | |
| system | 19 | 3 | 1 | | | | | 4 | | | |
| Processing | | | | | | | | | | | |
| center | 12 | | | | | | | 4 | | | |
| Total | 516 | 61 | 37 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 125 | 54 | 26 | 3 |

Table 8. Primary Edition Used by Type of Library.

Respondents were requested to list the primary edition in use in their library or processing center; Table 8 indicates the results. They could list one of the full and one of the abridged editions if they used both as their primary editions; otherwise, only one could be listed. Seventy-six libraries use two primary editions. Some of these libraries reported that they use the full edition for their adult collection and the abridged one for their juvenile holdings.

No colleges reported using any abridged edition of the DDC as their primary one. Only one university library uses an abridged edition for its juvenile collection. More public libraries reported using the abridged than did other types of libraries. Library systems and processing centers use only the most recent edition—the tenth abridged. Schools and junior college libraries list the tenth or ninth abridged as their primary editions. Only 11 percent of school libraries report using an abridged edition. One school librarian asserted, “the tenth edition is too abridged even for our elementary schools. We continue to use the bracketed numbers.” However, the sample of school libraries in this survey was taken from the mailing list of those schools which receive *DC&* (*Dewey Decimal Classification: Additions, Notes, Decisions*). These libraries tend to use the full edition. Further study is being made of school libraries and primary edition used.

Most academic libraries did not accept each new edition as it came. Their nonacceptance had variety: one library went from the fourteenth edition to the sixteenth to the eighteenth editions, using a few numbers from the fifteenth and seventeenth. Another has remained with the sixteenth

edition, having retained the author numbers of the fourteenth and abolished whatever fifteenth-edition numbers it had adopted.

Processing centers usually accept each edition as it is published, and they accept DDC numbers on LC cards as they come. The reason for such acceptance is simply that processing centers do not have to wrestle with a large working collection immediately beyond their doors. The decisions of processing centers affect a distant client. Thus, decisions regarding change are more easily made and defended.

The larger public libraries have, for the most part, begun to behave like processing centers and smaller public libraries in that they are moving toward uncritical acceptance of DDC-18 numbers, and they retain older numbers or older classes.

Another question put to classifiers concerned the need for in-service training materials to supplement current and future editions of DDC. The largest percentage (42.8 percent) of those responding would like to receive some type of in-service training material. Twenty-nine percent do not feel they need such materials and an equal number had no opinion. University libraries had the greatest proportion of those desiring in-service training materials (64 percent), while junior colleges are the next largest group (56.5 percent). One-half of the library systems and one-half of the processing centers would like to receive such materials. Colleges were the group least interested in such materials, with 46 percent stating that they have no need for them.

Catalogers are cynical about the sort of continuing education they have received, hence the many negative responses concerning in-service training. A significant number, however, see the need for training themselves and the clerical staff who are increasingly taking on cataloging responsibilities, especially at Ohio College Library Center terminals. Many respondents did see the need for explanations of the new aspects of a new edition. Several called for a new guide, one similar to the 1962 *Guide to the Use of the Dewey Decimal Classification*. One classifier commented: "Such a guide could introduce the DDC system to newcomers. Library school preparation is too general."

Libraries were queried concerning their need for discontinued numbers for retrospective material. The majority (51 percent) indicated that they do not need discontinued numbers for retrospective materials. One-fourth of the respondents said that their libraries do need these numbers, while another one-fourth do not know. Library size has little influence on whether discontinued numbers are needed. In only one category is there a majority response indicating the need for discontinued numbers—universities (58 percent). The college library category is the only other group with a sizable percentage (44 percent) needing discontinued numbers.

| | Yes | | No | | Total |
|----------------------|--------|------------|--------|------------|-------|
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage | |
| Less than 5,000 | 2 | 7.4 | 25 | 92.6 | 27 |
| 5,000 to 10,000 | 0 | 0.0 | 63 | 100.0 | 63 |
| 10,000 to 25,000 | 12 | 11.0 | 97 | 89.0 | 109 |
| 25,000 to 50,000 | 5 | 10.9 | 41 | 89.1 | 46 |
| 50,000 to 100,000 | 12 | 17.9 | 55 | 82.1 | 67 |
| 100,000 to 250,000 | 10 | 30.3 | 23 | 69.7 | 33 |
| 250,000 to 500,000 | 5 | 35.7 | 9 | 64.3 | 14 |
| 500,000 to 1 million | 8 | 36.4 | 14 | 63.6 | 22 |
| 1 million or more | 19 | 59.4 | 13 | 40.6 | 32 |
| Total | 73 | 17.7 | 340 | 82.3 | 413 |

Table 9. Size of Library Compared to Use of Locally Produced Expansions or Variation of Schedules.

The majority (51 percent) of respondents indicate satisfaction with the precedence notes for eliminating cross-classification in the DDC schedules. Only 11 percent are not satisfied with the notes, and 37 percent have no opinion. Respondents were then asked if they would like to have more precedence notes, such as:

155.42 – 155.45

Observe the following table of precedence,
e.g., preschool boys 155.423

Exceptional children
By class type, relationships
By age groups
By sex

Although the majority of libraries are satisfied with the present content of DDC's precedence notes, 38 percent of all respondents—or 65 percent of those voicing an opinion—would like more precedence notes included in the schedules.

A final question directed to libraries was: Does your library or processing center use locally produced expansions or variations of schedules? Approximately one-half of the 848 respondents completed this question. All types of libraries (except junior colleges) use locally produced expansions with almost one-half of the colleges, universities and processing centers reporting the heaviest use.

Table 9 gives the breakdown by size of library for use of locally produced schedules. All sizes of libraries (except the 5,000 to 10,000 volume

category) use locally produced expansions or variations of schedules. Libraries of one million volumes or more report the highest use of local schedules.

Those libraries which have local schedules were requested to specify in what areas they are used. They listed a wide variety of subject areas. Some of the expansions reflect the local area, e.g., "Texas counties"; others cover general subject areas such as literature and history.

Most of the libraries visited were suffering from current or impending reductions in staff and/or book budgets. One-third of the libraries had already become part of a computer network; almost all of the rest expected to become part of a network within the next few years. The reductions and the possibility of networking have brought most of the cataloging staffs of the libraries visited to a reassessment of the roles of classification and cataloging. Although they would like to keep material together, many have given up the attempt to do so. The general, discipline approach at the shelf that was once possible is rapidly disappearing in the bulk of the classification; thus, the public catalog has become much more important in subject searching. General searches must now be done at the catalog. Most, if not all, library users other than librarians are not aware of this and are consequently poorly served. What is not realized is that the subject catalog was devised to allow specific subject searches, and now general searches by discipline are virtually impossible. The degree of disservice to the patron is greater in LCC libraries where the extent of change is not so obvious and is therefore far more insidious. With DDC, at least, the public service librarians can readily perceive a relocation of *British history* from 942 to 941, or of *computers* from 651.8 to 001.6. Recognition of change in DDC and ignorance of change in LCC, which is far greater than most librarians realize, contradicts the adage that the baby who cries gets the bottle. In this instance the baby who cries comes to be despised or, at best, is accused of being the only baby in the world who cries.

REFERENCES

1. Vann, Sarah K. *Field Survey of the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) Use Abroad*. Albany, N.Y., Forest Press, 1965; Davison, Keith. *Classification Practice in Britain*. London, Library Association, 1966; and Sweeny, Russell. "Dewey in Britain," *Catalogue & Index* 30:4-6, Summer 1973.
2. Comaromi, John P., Michael, Mary Ellen, and Bloom, Janet. *A Survey of the Use of the Dewey Decimal Classification in the United States and Canada*. Albany, N.Y., Forest Press, 1976.