The Library of Congress Classification Scheme and its Relationship to Dewey

It strikes me as an interesting circumstance that I have been given the opportunity to speak about the relationship between the Library of Congress classification (LCC) and the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) on November 11, a day which I will always think of as Armistice Day. There is no armistice for the respective advocates of these two great classification systems; or, if there is an armistice, there should not be one. The long-range implications of the issues surrounding the Dewey/LC debate are too crucial to pretend that differences of opinion over the merits of the two systems are trivial. LCC and DDC are very, very different. They are so different, and they are different in such ways, as to raise the most basic questions about the very purpose of general library classification, its structure, its uses, and its future in the United States. In a very real sense, these are competing systems. Decisions are made, human resources are allocated, and money is invested in one system or the other. This competition was neither asked for nor wanted by the Library of Congress nor the publishers of the Dewey system. But it does exist and has been a rather expensive proposition over the past ten to twenty years, if not longer.

At the moment, it seems obvious that Dewey has come out very poorly in the United States insofar as many academic librarians are concerned.
Despite its losses, however, a recent report covering the years 1967-71 indicates that of 1,160 accredited, four-year nonspecialized institutions of higher learning, the libraries of more than 400 have remained with Dewey.\(^1\) Although the Dewey-to-LCC movement may have lost its momentum and may be near an end, it is not likely that it will be reversed unless there are drastic changes in the relationship between Dewey and the bibliographic needs of academic librarians. This relationship is changing—and has changed considerably during the past few years—as the Decimal Classification Division of the Library of Congress has increased its annual coverage of the English-language literature from 20-30,000 items to more than 100,000 items during the past year. However, at the present time I am less concerned with academic libraries than I am with public and school libraries. If, in view of this, I seem to spend a disproportionate amount of time commenting on academic libraries vis-à-vis Dewey, it is only because there is much we can learn from the academic librarian’s approach to the problems of classification and reclassification.

With the tremendous push toward the development of state, regional, and national bibliographic networks, I am seriously concerned that LCC’s firm place in existing and incipient network data bases (which are geared primarily to the needs of university libraries) will be used as a rationale for structuring public and school library networks to use LCC to the exclusion of DDC. This is probably the most important practical issue on which I will comment.

What I will try to do here has been done before, most recently by Maurice Tauber and Hilda Feinberg in an article published in the *Drexel Library Quarterly* in 1974.\(^2\) That article seemed to pull together rather neatly most of the background information which has led many librarians to the inevitable conclusion that the LCC system is the one to which they should commit their money, their energies, and—most importantly—their networks of automated bibliographic data bases. Heretofore, the advocates of LCC have addressed themselves primarily to the interests of college and university libraries. Tauber and Feinberg, however, have found evidence which has convinced them that public libraries, large and small, will find it advantageous to adopt LCC. We also know that several librarians have urged school libraries to switch to LCC.

Granting certain assumptions, one might indeed conclude that LCC is the system we need to take us through the last quarter of the twentieth century. However, I shall argue from different assumptions and try to make a case for the opposite conclusion; that is, that LCC is not the one to which we should commit ourselves at this time.

If I have some melancholy thoughts about the Dewey-to-LCC movement, this is not to say that I would presume to tell the Library of Congress what system best serves its needs. This is not the issue at all. With its massive collections of materials and with stacks which, for all practical
purposes, are closed to the public, the problems of the Library of Congress are quite different from problems encountered by the thousands of libraries (including many university libraries) that are the principal means of direct public access to books in the United States. My criticisms are not directed to the LCC system as such, but rather to the value of that system as a national classification scheme to serve the needs of centralized classification and national networks involving all types of libraries. This is a role which the creators of LCC never envisioned. If it is achieving that role, it is a historical accident, a development that is taking place without any analysis of the problem, without thought as to the function of a national system, and certainly without planning. The Library of Congress is in the best position to know what system it needs to organize its collections within the framework of its functions and services. I would only insist that what is good for the Library of Congress is not necessarily good for all libraries in the United States, nor even for all or most academic libraries in the United States. The assumption that whatever the Library of Congress does is *ipso facto*, good for all libraries has been the most pervasive "truth" invoked by the advocates of LCC.

**Relationships and Comparisons**

The point I will emphasize is that the wide adoption of LCC in the United States is going to have a profound impact on the future of general library classification for the next twenty years or more. I say this not because the Dewey system is "better" than LCC (although I believe this to be the case), but because of inherent weaknesses in the LCC system. In other words, it is not so much the fact that academic librarians have abandoned DDC which bothers me, as it is that they have adopted LCC. With their adoption of LCC, academic librarians have locked themselves into a system from which it will be nearly impossible to extricate themselves.

Since considerable literature on both systems is available, I will have more to say about the relationship between them than I will about the systems themselves. In addition, since the two systems have been compared extensively (usually in a way which demonstrates that LCC is superior), I will have more to say about the relationship of both systems to classification in general than I will about their structural differences. You will, I hope, pardon me if I slip into the pejorative rhetoric of those who have so vigorously advanced the cause of LCC and with equal vigor have apprised us of the folly of staying with DDC.

Obviously, what it is that makes the two systems different is important, although some librarians would argue with me on this point. Some librarians
believe that the potential for subject retrieval by any general classification system is of such limited value that neither system, DDC nor LCC, need be evaluated by structural features as they relate to retrieval potential. This is implicit in one of the rationales propounded by Matthis and Taylor for the conversion to LCC: "Any reasonably comprehensive classification system developed and maintained by the considerable means of a federally supported agency, that is, the Library of Congress, is the logical classification system for general library use."³

Matthis and Taylor believe that if the situation were reversed (i.e., if the Library of Congress used DDC), then the DDC "might serve as the vehicle for a nationwide centralized cataloging and classification program."⁴ Such statements, if you believe them, are calculated to remove the subject of classification from any discussion of reclassification, which is a tactical maneuver of such brilliance that it staggers the imagination. That these and many similar statements have gone unchallenged in the library literature suggests that, as crucial as I think structural differences may be, at this juncture it is much more important to try to understand why so many librarians place so little importance on structural differences. To say that there are no meaningful structural differences is to abandon general library classification as a nineteenth-century anachronism. If the advocates of LCC do indeed believe this, then they are in effect saying: "We don’t know what we are doing with classification, but whatever it is we are doing, we can do it a lot more economically and efficiently if we go with LCC rather than with Dewey." I am suggesting that our perception of classification as a tool for subject access is more important for the future of classification than are the differences between LCC and Dewey. Classification systems can be changed for the better if we want to change them. The switch to LCC was not for the better; it was regressive—a step back into the nineteenth century.

These are the reasons why I think we should come to grips with the deeper implications of the circumstances surrounding the massive change in the United States from Dewey to LC classification, and with the literature which accompanied and encouraged that change. This may be the best way to approach the more specific and more practical problem of comparing and evaluating the two systems in terms of their relative usefulness in serving the needs of different types of libraries.

Classification, Libraries, and Librarians

The widely accepted conventional wisdom is that LCC is best for academic libraries and DDC is best for school and public libraries. I do not believe that this has been proven in any objective way. It has not been
supported by hard research data. In any case, the more I think about the differences between Dewey and LCC, and the more I read of the literature on reclassification, the more inclined I am to believe that it is not so much a question of matching specific classification systems with specific types of libraries as it is a question of matching classification systems with different types of librarians. In other words, I do not think that in the end we are dealing with the problem of whether or not DDC, for example, is the best system for academic libraries, or whether or not LCC is the best system for school libraries. Regardless of the type of library in question (academic, school, or public), the choice of either system can be rationalized. If this is true, as I believe it is, then the librarian’s understanding of, interpretation of, and expectations about the role of classification in subject control and access are far more significant than the current possibilities and limitations of any specific general classification system. The latter, which are essentially structural and in part mechanical features, can be changed—even though such changes are expensive to implement and are a considerable inconvenience at the input end of a system. The former, which are in fact attitudes, are more difficult to understand and change, because we are dealing with subjective evaluations, vested interests, philosophies of library service, and images and perceptions which are deeply ingrained in each librarian’s attitude toward classification. In the United States, our expectations about the possibilities of classification have been somewhat circumscribed by certain historical events which took place many decades ago, but which still condition our attitudes about the uses of classification.

**Bases for Comparison**

Following are some aspects of classification which we would have to consider in some detail if we were to evaluate the relative merits of the two systems in terms of the needs of libraries today and in the future:

1. *Inner structural features* This refers to the classification itself, which is a list of concepts arranged in a systematic order so as to display subjects and the relationships between subjects in what our British colleagues call “a helpful order.” This is what classification is all about, but various auxiliary devices are needed to make a system operational.

2. *Exterior structural features* The notation is the exterior feature and represents the inner structure. The notation may be a symbolic language revealing the inner structure (as in DDC), or it may simply provide a location tag (as in LCC). What we want from a classification system will determine what sort of notation we want.
3. **Ancillary features** These are structural features which, although obviously quite important, are not really integral to a system. These can be changed without actually affecting anything really basic about the system. This category includes indexes, the physical layout of the schedules on the printed page, updating services, guides, directions for input, etc. When any of these are inadequate or lacking, there is no reason why they cannot be improved or developed.

4. **Efficiency** To analyze and compare the efficiency of systems is clearly a most basic aspect of our problem. This is to ask: Does it work? How well does it work? Does it do what a classification system is supposed to do? These are difficult questions to answer, and surprisingly little research has been done with either LCC or DDC. This involves studying a system at the output phase, at the point where the user interacts with the system.

5. **Input** If systems create problems at the input stage, this may be caused by inner structural inadequacies—or it may simply mean that the classifier does not have the information needed to interpret the schedules.

6. **Automation** Another mechanical aspect of great importance is the extent to which the system can exploit the potentials of the computer. When we use the computer with a classification system, does it provide new approaches to subject access, or does it only replicate our manual systems? If it does the latter, then the computer is little more than a very efficient and extremely expensive typewriter.

7. **Historical aspects** An examination of the history of classification might not seem to be of much help in solving current problems. On the other hand, I believe that a thorough study of the history of classification in the United States would tell us much about the singular lack of imagination we have brought to recent classification problems.

8. **Flexibility** One would like to know to what extent a given system is flexible enough to adapt to the changing nature of knowledge, and also to what extent it permits flexibility in its application at the local level. How this flexibility is achieved is important. Of these various bases for comparison, the one which will be considered the least significant by many academic librarians, network propagandists, and administrators is the potential for flexibility at the local level. The trend to standardization and centralization assumes that the needs of classification and its uses are the same for all types of libraries and for all sizes of libraries; this proposition strikes me as patently absurd.

9. **Costs** The last thing I would consider is the cost of a system, not because I do not realize how crucial this factor is, but because I would want first to know exactly what I would be paying for. Also, I would try to find some way of estimating the costs (or at least the value) of the system at
the output stage. All cost estimates I have seen so far are costs which result at the input stage; estimating cost is a difficult problem. How can one translate the value of expressive notation to the reference librarian into hard cost data?

Interpretation of Differences

Any librarian contemplating changing from DDC to LCC should carefully consider each of the above points. Furthermore, in considering costs one should distinguish between the costs of descriptive cataloging (including subject description) and the costs of classification. It would seem to me that no one should be given the responsibility for choosing one system over the other until that person has a thorough grounding in classification theory and a detailed knowledge of the practical dimensions and structural features of both systems. I have met too many librarians who have switched to LCC only to discover that they do not know how to interpret the LCC geographical tables, that they do not understand LCC’s use of preempted cutter numbers, or even the structural implications of a strictly ordinal notation of the type used in the LCC system.

The problem we have with these various aspects of classification when we use them as the basic for comparison and evaluation is that we do not all agree on their function or importance. For example, in examining and evaluating structural features, I would place great importance on expressive notation and synthetic features of the systems. But if, for whatever reasons, we believe that expressive notation and synthesis are of little value (or, indeed, may be negative features), it is clear that we have reached an impasse. Another structural feature is the use of logic in the construction of classes and subclasses. Some prominent librarians have praised LCC because it is not logical, and have criticized DDC because it is logical, claiming that nonlogical systems can adapt more easily to changes in the structure of knowledge.5

Another criterion used to evaluate a classification system is the extent to which it somehow manages to present a useful version of the world as it is (or at least a reasonable facsimile thereof). Even in such a seemingly noncontroversial set of subclasses such as those representing political or geographical areas, there are strong differences of opinion as to the need for currentness. The recent change in the political organization of England brought forth a supplement to the DDC schedules which provided a list of the new political units and a revised notation to represent these units. Not everyone was happy with this change in DDC, and many would have preferred that the system not be changed. It is at such times that one can sympathize with the editors of DDC (or, for that matter, with the editors of any general and widely used system). It is clear that if we ask different things from a
classification system, we will use different criteria for comparison and evaluation.

Needed Research

Obviously, we are concerned about how some of these conflicting ideas can be resolved. Is there some objective way of evaluating and comparing DDC and LCC? We do not know because we have never tried to find out. We have been too busy comparing costs to ask what it is we are paying for or why we are paying for it. We did not really try to answer the hard questions—and they are hard questions, ones which would involve new types of behavioral research. The one dimension of each system which lends itself to research relatively easily is notation: To what extent do enumerative hierarchical and ordinal notations lend themselves to on-line subject searching? One reason we may not have done this research—what work has been done has been accomplished by John Rather at the Library of Congress—is that it would prove that the DDC notation does have a future in on-line systems, whereas LCC does not.

Other areas of needed research are these:

1. The librarian’s use of classification in reference and other readers’ services—the extent to which the librarian, in functioning as a mediator between a library user and a local collection, uses a classification system as a way of thinking about the collection. Does the system provide a search strategy?
2. What versatility do different systems have in generating different types of references (i.e., can both broad and narrow bibliographies be generated)?
3. How can different systems be used in constructing user profiles for SDI (Selective Dissemination of Information) services and current-awareness services?
4. What actually happens at the output end of the system when a library user searches the shelves? We have established traditions of catalog use studies, but there is no comparable tradition in classification use studies.

I believe that librarians who have examined DDC and LCC from the point of view of their library needs have not considered all or even most of these basic questions about classification. If this is the case, how can we account for the “death of Dewey” in college and university libraries? A post-mortem is in order, but to understand what happened and why it happened we need to turn briefly to topics which at first may seem unrelated to the issue at hand.
Understanding the Great Switch

If we were to examine the literature produced in the United States on general library classification during the past ten to twenty years, we would find that one of the major preoccupations of librarians was not classification at all, but reclassification. That we should have been so preoccupied with reclassification rather than classification is, I think, an interesting commentary on the general state of classification in the United States. If I wanted to be uncharitable to both systems, I would say that what we have seen is the spectacle of thousands of librarians spending millions of dollars to the end of reclassifying from one nineteenth-century system to another, perhaps even more antiquated, nineteenth-century system. But that sort of characterization, although there is something to be said for it, would not do justice to the extent to which each system has partially escaped its nineteenth-century roots. On the other hand, it seems obvious that most librarians, when they felt they had to make a choice as to which classification system to use, never seriously considered that there might be some alternative system, or that it might be more advisable to construct an entire new scheme. We need to consider why this was the case. I do not believe that the DDC-to-LCC movement can be understood unless it is considered against the whole intellectual, professional, and educational climate within which it took place. The movement from Dewey to LCC was surely one of the most time-consuming projects undertaken by U.S. librarians during the past several decades. Such a vast undertaking invites a detailed analysis. Such an analysis has not yet been made, and I will do little more here than to suggest approaches which might be appropriate.

If a postmortem were made, I think it would tell us quite a lot about things other than classification—it would tell us something about how librarians go about solving some of their problems. The questions that such a study would ask would have very little to do with the checklist of classification features I have mentioned above. Rather, it would ask why change took place, how it was disseminated, and what factors were so compelling as to set us on a course of action that will alter the future of classification longer than any of us can imagine. There surely must have been compelling reasons for this change.

I am seriously going to suggest that the change from Dewey to LCC had very little to do with classification. We could compare DDC with LCC in the most minute detail, and in the end would still not understand what has happened nor why it has happened. What is needed in this case is not research in classification at all, but research in the chemistry of change and in the rhetoric and motivation for change. Precedents, and indeed tools and models, for the needed research are available in that broad group of sociological
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studies identified as studies in the diffusion of innovations. These classic studies in the process of change have a long history in the United States, dating back well into the 1930s. The techniques involved have been used in dozens of different fields, but not—as far as I know—in any aspect of librarianship.

In suggesting studies in the dynamics of change, I am aware that there are some differences between the types of problems dealt with by E.M. Rogers and other specialists in this field and those with which we must deal. Diffusion studies emerged when the U.S. Department of Agriculture wanted to find out why some farmers in Iowa readily accepted new strains of hybrid corn, while other farmers either did not accept them or did so at relatively long intervals after they were introduced. Acceptance patterns were studied, and farmers fell into various groups, such as early adopters, late adopters, etc. These results were correlated with a number of variables to identify opinion leaders and other dimensions of change patterns. If this seems like a farfetched source for the study of change in classification, it at least has this in common with our problem: the corn was the same, the differences were among the adopters. Note also that the research was about change as it resulted from innovative ideas. All well and good, but in the case of classification change, it is obvious that the LC Classification was almost as old as the product it replaced. Furthermore, the institutional setting of classification use suggests other ways that diffusion research in classification would differ somewhat from more customary types of diffusion research.

Anyone interested in exploring this idea further would also want to consider some types of marketing research. We are talking about a change in behavior. Advertising research is obviously interested in why people adopt one brand of soap rather than another, why they switch brands, and how something called “brand identification” is achieved. Advertising researchers know that many factors which influence consumers in their decisions have very little to do with the quality of the product or whether the consumer really needs the product. (If you have not read much in advertising research, I would not encourage you to do so unless you are already rather cynical, or unless you are prepared for considerable disillusionment about those friendly folks that bring you your favorite television shows.) About fifteen years ago, Bardin H. Nelson wrote what has since became a classic statement of the assumptions on which advertising is based. He called his article “Seven Principles in Image Formation.” Here is the first of his seven principles: “People are not ‘exclusively’ rational creatures.” This is the conclusion one could come to after delving into the literature on reclassification. How else can one respond to reasoning such as this:

Inasmuch as there seems little possibility of developing a classificatory language which will satisfy the demands of the super-specialist as well as
of the general reference librarian, it would seem that we must opt for
the most workable tool at present available to carry forward the
mundane but needful task of moving books and records from catalog
department to shelves and catalog. 8

The needs of the super-specialists (whoever they may be) have never been the
issue, and the dichotomy between specialists and reference librarians is a straw
man in the context of general library classification. Even if the dichotomy
were accepted as valid (which it is not), the conclusion “to opt for the most
workable tool” does not logically result from the premise.

The author of the above statement has confused ends and means, and
has done so in such a way that if you do not accept his conclusion, then you
put yourself in the position of being opposed to the “mundane but needful
task” of making materials available to your library users as quickly as possible.
And what is one to make of this statement by Matthis and Taylor:
“Essentially the argument has now moved beyond theoretical discussions of
the ‘best’ classification system and settled upon the real issue—the promise and
prospect of centralized cataloging and classification” 9 Any one with even a
passing acquaintance with classification theory knows that the arguments
cannot possibly have moved beyond theoretical discussions for the simple
reason that such discussions have never taken place. From the very beginning,
the issues were practical and focused principally on economic factors of
technical processing. On those few occasions when the advocates of DDC have
tried to talk about structural features of classification systems, they have been
accused of talking “theory” or, what is worse, of raising esoteric questions of
philosophy: “These questioning of philosophical assumptions, once raised,
tend to vitiate the impetus given to the spirit of change.” By raising such
questions (which, of course, have nothing to do with theory or philosophy,
but with structure, function, and use) one can thus initiate “a preposterous
dialogue of ‘pro’ this system and ‘con’ that.” 10 Indeed, such questions, once
raised, could vitiate the spirit of change; but whether the resulting dialog
would be preposterous would depend on whether you are buying a product or
selling it.

Without much further comment, I will quote a few more of Nelson’s
principles, and those of you who have critically read the literature on
reclassification will see the connections. Nelson’s second principle states that
“People respond to situations in ways which appear to them to protect their
self-images.” 11 I have an idea that in the world of academic librarianship,
self-images loom large in the decision-making process. The fifth principle tells
us: “If an image is marked by doubt, uncertainty, or insecurity, utilize
additional means for creating further doubts. Present the new image in a form
whereby it will dispel anxiety or doubts.” 12 His sixth principle is widely used
by network developers: "Place the desired image in the most favorable setting. If at all possible, clothe the new image in the already accepted values of the people."

Does all of this strike you as somewhat peripheral to a consideration of the change from DDC to LCC? Perhaps. But you will admit that the image of DDC was changed, that it was badly damaged, and that this set the stage for serious setbacks in its credibility as a viable classification system.

Parenthetically, I might add that the types of research which I have proposed might also be useful in understanding other library-type games and diversions, such as dividing the catalog, working for faculty status, changing administrative structures, joining OCLC, or whatever movement is currently substituting for the real problems of improving library service. If I have underestimated the depth to which advocates of change have explored some of the basic issues, I can only say that they did not state their case very well in the library literature. The central issue is the purpose of classification.

Purpose

There are two extreme views on the purpose of classifying books. On the one hand, some librarians consider classification to be an important device in providing access to library collections. Some of them have described classification as a map which guides the user through the collection, a device for discovering not only what one wants but what one did not know existed. In this ideal version of the purpose of classification, it is in fact a dynamic device of great importance in the learning process and in the acquisition of new knowledge. The other extreme says essentially that classification is not much more than a simple parking device: we mark and we park. The user's basic guide to the collection is the alphabetical subject heading catalog, and this catalog serves as an index to the classification system which organizes the books on the shelves. Those librarians who subscribe to the mark-and-park school will probably prefer the LC Classification. On the other hand, those librarians who place more importance on classification as a direct subject access device will probably prefer the expressive notation and modest use of synthesis available in DDC, since these offer a search strategy for open-stack collections.

Implementation

In the United States the purpose of classifying material is accomplished almost solely by using classification to organize books on shelves. This is supplemented by Cutter's alphabetico-specific subject heading catalog in its
straight A-Z form or in its divided form. These well-known facts need to be brought up in considering the future of classification in the United States. If, for the foreseeable future, classification is to function only as a system of shelving books, then we are dealing with one problem. However, with the use of the computer in organizing bibliographical data, we have a new tool which can be a very powerful search tool. In other words, the classified catalog, which for all practical purposes has been a dead issue in the United States since around 1900, may be in for a new lease on life. To me, one of the most exciting possibilities for the immediate future of the DDC is found in the extent to which we can use it for on-line subject searching. This issue has been completely ignored or misunderstood in all of the literature on reclassification which I have consulted. Tauber and Feinberg, in the report mentioned above, state that "LC can be programmed to do all that we have required of an enumerative scheme up to the present" (emphasis added).14 "All that we have required"—but in terms which might be relevant to computer potential we have required nothing, since our shellists have been used only for inventory control. We can now ask a lot more than that.

This is where the notation of LCC and DDC have very great significance in terms of potential computer application. To understand the possibilities and limitations of each, we need to consider the nature of nonexpressive, nonhierarchical notation of the sort used in LCC. In such a system, the only approach is to a specific subject class. With an expressive notation we can pull out blocks of material; if the computer is programmed properly we can enter the system at any level and all of its subdivisions. This almost self-evident potential of DDC is one that has yet to be fully explored. Dewey also has the potential for further refinements in subject searching if a system of facet indicators can be established. Consider, for example, the possibilities of searching local subdivisions in LCC and DDC. With DDC, a run of the computer could pull out all classes starting, for example, with the number 78, the class for music. If one wanted only books about music in England, then a second run (using the local subdivision number from the Area Tables) would pull out relevant titles. Or, rather, it could if a consistent facet indicator were developed for local subdivisions. This, as you know, is a problem now because a standard subdivision may be identified by one or more than one zero. I believe that the Dewey system can adopt some of the synthetic devices used in the Universal Decimal Classification and come up with a system of notation which can both serve as a notation for physically shelving books and at the same time exploit the class numbers with search devices which complement the alphabetico-specific structure of subject headings.

Since we are getting Dewey class numbers on MARC tapes, it is possible that even those libraries which use the LCC system to shelve their books will have an on-line searching device by using the Dewey class numbers.
Now, to what extent the LC Classification can provide such access seems to me to be so small as to be virtually beyond hope. The LCC notation was never designed to serve such a purpose and its ordinal notation would probably present insurmountable problems. On the other hand, I would not want to underestimate the imagination and resourcefulness of the Library of Congress staff, and I look forward with great interest to what search devices they will design. Be that as it may, the computer is the challenge which DDC must face. Structural changes will have to be made to go beyond its current potential in on-line searching (which, modest as it may seem, is far superior to what is available with the LCC notation). In placing so much stress on the current and future on-line capability of DDC, I do so within the framework of most libraries currently using the system (and most libraries which have recently switched to LCC). I am aware that information scientists have stated that both DDC and LCC are inappropriate for computer application in subject retrieval. From their point of view this may be the case. An on-line classified catalog using DDC may seem to offer limited possibilities when compared to highly sophisticated special information systems; but for most general library book collections, such access would be a monumental step forward. If I have any doubts about DDC's future in relationship to a revived form of the classified catalog, they are related less to the system itself than to those of us in the United States who know so little about the potential of any classified catalog, manual or automated.

There is a historical dimension to this issue of the classified catalog that is just interesting enough to comment on briefly. Dewey himself was an advocate of the classified catalog, and did not look with much enthusiasm on Cutter's dictionary catalog. In 1888 he said, "The dictionary catalog has been a popular fad and will die out."15 So much for Dewey as a prophet. In the first edition of his classification system, he noted that it was conceived as a system for organizing entries in catalogs, but could also be used for organizing materials on shelves and in files. When he was librarian at the State Library of New York, his subject catalog was a classified catalog. It may also surprise you to learn that Charles Martel, one of the prime architects of the LCC system, was also a firm believer in the classified catalog. He did indeed accept the alphabetical subject-heading catalog, but believed that any true research library had to supplement this catalog with a classified catalog. It was Martel's idea that the shelf list could be amended with guide cards, cross-references, and added entries in such a way that it could serve both for inventory control and for classified subject access.16 I do not know to what extent the use of such a catalog affected the evolution of LCC subject headings (although I understand that music librarians find that a shelf list is absolutely essential as a supplement to their subject-heading catalogs). In American library education, I doubt that we have sufficiently stressed the extent to which classified
systems complement the sort of access provided by alphabetical systems. If this distinction is not clear to many librarians in the United States, it is probably because they assume without question that alphabetical systems are for structuring catalogs and classified systems are for shelving books. Although this attitude reflects current practice, its implications for subject cataloging must be reexamined.

The technical problems that the Dewey system will have to solve are the result of its dual function as a system for structuring catalogs and a system for shelving books. As we have been told many times, the book is a one-dimensional physical object, and it can be classified in one place and in one place only. But catalogs can provide multiple access points, and there is no reason why a classified catalog should be limited to a one-place system, be it a manual or an automated classified catalog. In the United States, Dewey is used as a system for shelving books, and this is a function which is not likely to change. In other countries, DDC is used for both shelving systems and systems for the classified catalog (note, for example, the use of DDC in the British National Bibliography). If one were dealing with the classified catalog without the restraints of a shelving system, one could indeed develop a highly sophisticated searching tool. But the most valuable feature of the Dewey system is that it not only can be used for both functions, but that it is being widely used for both functions. It seems that for the working librarian this is a tremendous advantage, for one can indeed begin to structure a conceptual map of one’s library collection. If knowing one’s collection is a prerequisite for good library service, then the Dewey system has to be evaluated in the light of how it helps us to gain some sort of conceptual control over these collections, whether we are working directly with books or references to books in catalogs.

To those committed to the LCC system, the potentials of the classified catalog may seem somewhat less exciting than they do to me. But consider for a moment one of the standard working tools of the librarian: Library of Congress Catalog: Books: Subjects. The present structure of this subject supplement to the National Union Catalog is an unfortunate byproduct of our predilection for alphabetically arranged subject headings. As useful as this tool may be, I believe that if it were issued as a classified catalog (even if limited to the simplest form of such a catalog—i.e., arranged in shelf list order by the LCC system), it could serve its current function of providing subject access, but at the same time could combine the advantages of the classified approach. Furthermore, it would then give thousands of users of the LCC system what they probably want very much: a guide to LC’s shelf-listing practices. A colleague once told me that if a library adopts the LC Classification system, that library is to a certain extent a branch of the Library of Congress. There is a lot of truth in this statement, because the application of the LC
Classification schedules, with their extensive use of alphabetically arranged subclasses with a cutter number notation, is in large measure controlled by what is in the Library of Congress collection. Thus, to make use of LCC coincide with its use by the Library of Congress (which, I take it, is one of the main reasons for adopting the system), the librarian must assume that he or she is adding material to the shelf list of the Library of Congress with its millions of entries.

However, if the structure of LC's Subject Catalog were to be changed, I think it would not be unreasonable to propose that it be changed to the same form now used by the British National Bibliography. Not only would this be a step toward the standardization of national bibliographies, it would also be a service to the thousands of libraries in the United States and abroad which use DDC; this could be done in such a way that it would considerably improve the utility of Books: Subjects as an access tool. Those librarians now using the LC Classification would lose little, if anything, but those many, many thousands of librarians using DDC would gain tremendously.

Academic Librarians and Dewey.

I am not optimistic that academic librarians who have adopted LCC will in the near future change their ways of thinking about the potentials of library classification. Nor, for that matter, will they recognize the fundamental fallacy of bibliographical networks which simply deliver data without offering the possibilities of on-line subject access based on classification. On the other hand, if those who guide the future of DDC can do a better job of showing librarians how to exploit the system (both as a shelving system and an on-line access tool), then it is not unlikely that librarians already committed to LCC will make use of the DDC class numbers now available in machine-readable form on MARC tapes. This is one of several reasons why all material going into the MARC system, including all foreign-language material, should be given Dewey class numbers. Those who believe that the future of on-line access lies with a new system of subject descriptors rather than with classification are not taking into account the deep resistance which will come from academic librarians if the Library of Congress attempts to structure a completely new system of subject headings. I believe that academic librarians will strenuously resist such a change for the same reason they adopted the LC Classification system (i.e., the costs of cataloging and classification) and for the same reason they resisted those rules in the Anglo-American Cataloging Rules which adhered to the Paris Principles for the structuring of headings for corporate bodies; this, as some of you now know, was an expensive concession to the status quo, and the Library of Congress is moving ahead with its new policies and with “desuperimposition.”
The "great switch" has some implications for the Library of Congress and its relationship to its own classification system. The LC Classification no longer belongs exclusively to the Library of Congress, or if it does, it soon will not. The thousands of libraries which now use the system will want to have a say in its future development. Even if the Library of Congress wanted to abandon its own system (and it is not clear to me why they need it), it is hardly likely that the combined pressure of academic libraries would permit this to happen. Furthermore, if the system is to provide the economic advantages which have been claimed for it—these claims, of course, were never made by the Library of Congress, but by academic librarians from relatively small colleges—then librarians will need more from the Library of Congress than they are now getting. They will need access to the Library of Congress shelf list, a continually updated single index to the complete set of schedules (and at a reasonable cost within reach of small college libraries), guides to interpreting the schedules, an on-line authority file, and probably more tools which have been developed at the Library of Congress for the in-house use of catalogers and classifiers.

Public and School Libraries

Public and school libraries are in a position somewhat different from that of academic libraries. It is possible, however, that the general atmosphere created by the advocates of LCC is one which may have already begun to sow some seeds of doubt in the minds of librarians who direct school and public libraries. These librarians have a longstanding involvement with DDC and there are compelling reasons why I hope this does not change. The LCC system is completely inadequate for their service-oriented philosophies and open-stack collections. Most of the economic advantages claimed for a switch to LCC have probably been largely eliminated by LC's Decimal Classification Division's increased coverage of the current English-language book production. If there should be any savings in cost, I cannot imagine that they would be significant enough to justify what would be lost with a switch to LCC.

I am not sure to what extent, in the next few years, public and school librarians will find themselves in the same position in which academic users of DDC found themselves a few years ago—that is, under strong pressure from network developers to reclassify to conform to existing bibliographical data bases. This pressure will surely become stronger as we implement network developments advocated by the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. In the first place, I believe the economic arguments are spurious and were designed to benefit the economic base of the networks, not to benefit the users of the networks. In the second place, any network that
attempts to provide a national service is not conceivable unless it includes both LCC and DDC numbers. For one thing, the Dewey numbers give public and school librarians options for close or broad classification which are absolutely impossible within the structure of the LCC notational system. I would encourage public and school librarians to insist that their networks include the Dewey system.

Most public and school librarians do not need me to remind them of the advantages of DDC, but what follows may be of some interest to network developers (who should also apprise themselves of the fundamentals of classification) and library administrators who may be too far removed from the public service desk to understand the role of classification in public services.

Librarians working with relatively small collections, as compared to the collections of large university libraries, have a completely different relationship to their collections. The universe of knowledge with which they must deal is still one that can be grasped in its larger outlines and in considerable detail by an experienced and educated librarian. The large university libraries are best categorized as collections of special libraries which are administered by subject specialists. (This is consistent with the Library of Congress Classification which has been properly decribed as a collection of largely uncoordinated special classifications which lack unifying structural features.) Perhaps this is why DDC has always been appreciated by public and school librarians and, at one time, by many college and junior college librarians in the United States. The collections with which they deal are general in the sense that they cover wide areas of knowledge which represent many disciplines. As I have noted above, under such circumstances classification can be an indispensable tool for the efficient use of one's collection in providing public services. The notation provides a symbolic language which is quite easy to learn. It permits a type of interaction with the collection and with users of the collection which I do not think is possible in the case of LCC's notational structure.

In public and school libraries, one is more likely to find attempts to use a single classification system for different media. Unfortunately, we have little research on just how well DDC works with such diverse materials as sound recordings, slide collections, media kits, and other nonbook media. We know that some libraries have adopted DDC for these materials, and it would seem to be an ideal system for both students and faculty, not to mention public service librarians. Perhaps future editions of DDC should provide some information on how to use the system with these nonbook materials. The available DDC options of broad or close classification would seem to be significant in this case. As for LCC, it has been used by some librarians to classify sound recordings, but does not seem to have much of a future with nonbook media in general.
International Implications

What futures do the two systems have at the international level? DDC, of course, is already somewhat of an international system. The LCC system is not international, and there is no possibility that it will ever be widely used outside of the United States. It is too closely tied to the very specific needs of the Library of Congress, and more specifically to the needs of the Library of Congress as they were conceived between fifty and seventy-five years ago, when the purpose, the plan, and the structure of the system were developed. Thus, the very factor which has been advanced for its wide adoption in the United States is, I would argue, the chief reason it has no future in the international exchange of bibliographical data.

To what extent the Dewey system will be seriously considered as an international standard is not yet known. Although its future in this role may not seem promising (despite its tremendous worldwide dispersal), it should not be ruled out yet. If the Library of Congress continues to include DDC numbers on all items issued on MARC tapes as that data base continues to grow, then DDC will be a serious contender at the international level. Certainly, the decisions affecting the British Library will have a bearing on the issue, as will the wider dispersal of DDC in France.

Alternatives

I have been assuming that the only real choice available is between DDC and LCC. I suppose that right now this is the case. If one were seriously to suggest that what the Library of Congress needs is a new classification, one would be considered quite mad. Such is the way we have been educated to think about classification in the United States.

If, ten to fifteen years ago, academic librarians had asked for a new, modern classification system, they probably could have gotten one. But now, having spent millions of dollars converting to LCC and having convinced themselves that it is the best of all possible worlds, the option of a new system has been closed and will remain closed for a long time. The point I am making is this: if (for reasons which they accepted as valid) academic librarians found DDC inadequate, and if there were no ways it could be changed to make it adequate, then they should have switched to something better than LCC. If there were no better system, then either the LCC system should have been completely overhauled or a completely new scheme should have been constructed. Of course, I believe that at that time, DDC could have been changed to serve academic librarians.
LCC'S RELATIONSHIP TO DEWEY

If you have the impression that I am somewhat skeptical about the wide adoption of the LC Classification by academic librarians and that I find the literature on reclassification completely unconvincing, you could not be closer to the truth. I believe that it is not so much what DDC has lost as what librarians have lost.

I am not sure whether I have read a paper or given a sermon, but whatever I have done, these things needed to be said and these questions needed to be asked. If I have produced little or no scientific evidence with which to further the cause of DDC, then I am in good company, for the most vigorous advocates of LCC have given us little more than opinion surveys, cost studies (which I cannot accept), and "good news" from network organizers, for as Marshall McLuhan has said: "Advertising is good news." If there is anything that can keep the Dewey-to-LCC movement alive, it will be our lack of understanding of the potential of general classification in library service. However, if the movement has run its course, we can now turn our attention to the uses of classification rather than reclassification. If we do this, then the future of the Dewey Decimal Classification is assured.

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