

Thursday, February 10, 2022

Class 5: Classification in Libraries

LIBR 509:

- Looking at classification systems used in libs
- Lecture focuses on one particular hierarchical classification system often found in public libraries
- Assignment: investigate and analyze a classification system used in a potential workplace that covers a domain of interest to you
- Beginning part 2 of the course which are systems in libs
- This lecture: return to classification, but hierarchical classification not faceted classification
- **LECTURE PART 1**
- **What is hierarchical classification?**
 - Most frequent form of classification you'll find
 - Includes Dewey Decimal Classification - topic is divided into more specific kinds/ aspects of classification vs. facet classification which adds the same distinction through different facets (you can change the order of the facets, but all of the elements stay the same)
- **Hierarchical Classification AKA Enumerative Classification?**
 - More rigid - it "enumerates" the possible subjects as mutually exclusive classes
 - Requires a "primary" (ie. initial) principle of organization
 - Organizes in a top-down manner
- **LOC: (Supposedly) Everything is one of 26 things**
 - Hierarchical classification system
 - Academic libraries
- **DDC: Everything is one of 10 things**

- Hierarchical classification system
- Public libraries
- **4 Basic Assumptions Around Hierarchical Classification:**
 - 1. That they're universal and the world has universal order (Aristotelean belief that you just have to find them)
 - 2. There is unity of all knowledge available
 - 3. There must be an essential similarity of class members
 - 4. Every entity has some intrinsic essence that allows it to be classified in a set way
- **Standards for Classification**
 - 1. Inclusive - A place for every concept
 - 2. Unique - Each concept fits in only one class (no overlap between classes)
 - 3. Expressive - The number/label should represent the concept
 - 4. Hospitable - Room to add more classes
 - 5. Linear
- **Hierarchical System** - Child can only have 1 parent (few at the top and more at the bottom) - allows us to create numbers for each element (as exemplified by Dewey) exp. 1.4 /1.41/1.42
 - Can't have polyhierarchical organization for linear systems, because the numeracy falls apart
- **Polyhierarchical System** - Child can have multiple parents
 - This is why we have Thesauri
- **The Arrangement of Classes**
 - The meaning of any class term within a given domain can only be comprehended
 - As part of the domain
 - Within the specific context of that domain's classificatory structure
- **We can compare between hierarchical systems**

- **Background: Dewey Decimal Classification**

- Mean to capture the “universe of knowledge” to classify human intellectual and creative endeavours
- **A “theory” of organization**
 - Based on Francis Bacon (philosopher)
 - Structure of knowledge is based on 19th century (WASP) academic - reflects the context in which it was made and the types of materials that were included in libs
 - Bacon asserted that there are 3 types of knowledge: Philosophy (reason), Poetry (imagination), History (memory)
- Dewey Classification
 - 420s (English)
 - 430s (German)
 - Both are *collocated* (neighbours to each other)
- Dewey Classification cont'd
 - Writing system and phonology, etymology, dictionaries, grammar, and variations are *distributed*
- **Evaluation of the DDC**
 - **Strengths:**
 - Inclusivity - room for any concept (at least in theory)
 - Expressiveness - the class numbers express meaning
 - Constant Revision - means for input and critique at both class level (individual topics) and hierarchical structure (proportions, order, and placement)
 - **Weaknesses:**
 - Bias - Based on Dewey’s worldview (first level classes stay the same) and based on the historical propositions of publishing - doesn’t reflect the modern era and diversity of library users

- Inconsistencies - within classes and between classes - oddities have crept in due to revisions
- Has become an idiosyncratic and eccentric system
 - Exp. Sometimes breaks the rules of hierarchical classification and original classes. 640-Home Economics
- To help with these inconsistencies, there is a table of revisions/suggestions about how to classify properly
- There is also a table which tells you how to add consistent numbers to indicate the geography of a book
- **Think about what you were taught about perspective:**
 - What is privileged in the foreground to bring attention to, and where the viewer is standing, and where they are directed to look? Where is Dewey conceptually standing? What is given a lot of space and what is very small? What is your eye drawn to in the foreground (listed first)?
 - These choices made are based on Dewey's worldview and power to direct moral and religious worldviews (Christianity is centred in the system)
 - Physical space is a limiting factor to say something about things
- **Ongoing work at DDC**
 - Understaffed
- **Summary: When analyzing a classification system, think about these things:**
 - What are the first principles of division?
 - What's at the top?
 - What political and philosophical commitments are implied?
 - What set or scope of resources is it meant to organize?
 - Is it specialist or universal?
 - Is there a claim to organizing all knowledge coherently or one kind of knowledge?
 - Which institutions use it and for what function (shelf order and access)?
 - What is the maintenance and revision status of the system?

- Who is primarily responsible?
- What are the means to propose changes to the system?
 - These will all change the character of the classification system

- **LECTURE PART 2**

• **STEP 1:**

- Begin with a system in use at an institution you'd like to work at, or covering a domain of knowledge you're interested in
- It only needs to be classification, it may have nothing to do with libraries
 - For example, biological classifications, classifications of occupations, things called "taxonomies" work too
 - Must have classes of things, divided into more specific classes

- Best candidates are those with lots of publicly accessible documentation

• **STEP 2: Familiarize Yourself with the System**

- Read through the list of classes at the first principle of division and scan through the specific classes
- Outside of the system itself, look at the documentation available about revision and editing
- Outside of the institution managing it, consider scholarly articles and practitioner resources that explain the use and impact of the system

• **STEP 3: Write up a brief analysis**

- Factual information

Write up a brief analysis



- ∞ Descriptive points:
 - ∞ When was it created/published and by whom?
 - ∞ Who maintains it?
 - ∞ What resources/concepts does it label and organize?
 - ∞ What institutions/collections is it for? Which currently/historically use it?
- ∞ Analytical points:
 - ∞ What use case is it best for?
 - ∞ What are the obvious issues with the system?
 - ∞ How are you likely to encounter/implement it?
 - ∞ **You can pick a particular focus or a point of view for your critique, especially for very large/universal systems**

Pick a specific point of critique if you're working with a big system

Shorter is often better! You may have enough material for 5 pages, but keep it to 500 words

The goal is to provide a synopsis that your peers can learn from, make a quick resource for someone to learn from, not showing off everything you learned.

Depending on the system you're looking for and what institution manages it, some info may take a lot of digging and even contacting ppl directly

Peer assessment:

- You might be able to add from your knowledge and experience
- Consider if you have an idea of what the system would be relevant - was the explanation sufficient in explaining how it is used and what it is for
- The key points about the system
- How analysis illuminates aspects of the system, and classification more generally
- What questions you have about the system