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Some Observations on the Forthcoming 19th Edition of the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) Scheme

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The paper critically reviews some of the recommendations of the Committee on "DDC Additions, Notes and Decisions" for its 19th edition. It is observed that the policy of following the principle of continuity and integrity of numbers has not been consistently followed in cases of class numbers 900, area notations -41 and -42 and total revision of schedules for the life sciences (560–590). While commenting critically on the recommendations made by the DDC Editorial Policy Committee in respect of the above mentioned entries, the paper also discusses the great difficulties libraries using the DDC will have to face for reclassification of a cognizable area of their collections due to these major changes which are going to be implemented in the 19th edition of the DDC Scheme. (Author)

1. Introduction

Uptil edition 18 of the Dewey Decimal Classification scheme (3) the DDC Editorial Policy Committee while recommending additions, deletions etc. in the existing edition of the DDC followed a uniform policy which was based on the principle of subject integrity where both subject content and notation are hierarchical. But the Committee always faced the problem at the time of publication of a new edition of the DDC of how to reconcile the conflicting requirements of the principles of continuity and integrity of numbers and of keeping pace with ever growing knowledge. However, in every new edition the former ideas have prevailed over the latter and as a result with the growth of the DDC scheme during the last century the libraries which have followed this scheme did not have to face any considerable problem of reclassification of a significant portion of their holdings. This is perhaps one of the reasons for the extensive adaptation of this classification scheme in USA, UK and other countries, although since the 1950s the DDC Editorial Policy Committee has realized the need of the latter principle i.e. revision of the DDC following a principle of keeping pace with knowledge.

After careful study of the current issues of volume 3 of the "DDC. Additions, Notes and Decisions" (4–7) published by the Forest Press Division of Lake Placid Club Education Foundation, it appears that the DDC Editorial Policy Committee is about to bring out some major changes in the 19th edition of the DDC which will have considerable impact on and practical consequences for those libraries following the DDC Scheme to class their holdings. These changes will alter the standing century-old practices and affect the classification of many thousands of volumes.

Some of the major changes recommended by the DDC Editorial Policy Committee for insertion in the 19th edition of the DDC scheme appear to be anamolous and will be discussed in detail in this paper.

2. Major changes in the application of 900 and area notations for British Isles, United Kingdom and Great Britain

In the 18th edition of the DDC (3) the concepts 'British Isles', 'England', 'United Kingdom' and 'Great Britain' are located under area notation -42 and that of 'Scotland' and 'Ireland' are under area notation -41. However, it is of interest to note that for the area notations -41 and -42 and also for their subdivisions, the DDC Editorial Policy Committee has recommended an extensive revision. It has been recommended by the Committee in 1975 and later endorsed by the Forest Press to relocate the concepts of 'British Isles', 'United Kingdom' and 'Great Britain' from area notation -42 to area notation -41 and to shift 'England and Wales' from -41 to -42 in the forthcoming 19th edition of the DDC scheme. Consequently it is now necessary to classify 'History of Great Britain and United Kingdom' under 941, while that of 'England and Wales' would remain in 942. The general summaries of the revised -411 to -419 and -421 to -429 have been enumerated by the Lake Placid Education Foundation in their publications "DC & 3: 6" and "DC & 3: 7" (1975) respectively. However, before introducing these major changes in the main class numbers and area notations, opinions of the reputed librarians of England and those of the British National Bibliography (BNB) and the Library of Congress (LC) were sought by the Committee. All of them, except a few British Librarians, have agreed to this proposal. It may be endorsed in this connection that BNB had already introduced this major change of the above concepts in its 1975 annual volume and the LC has also started to follow these new concepts in its own classification scheme, effective from 1975 onwards.

3. Total revision of the schedule for the life sciences

The DDC Editorial Policy Committee has recommended publication of a Phoenix schedule (involving 80 to 100% change in original class number) for the entire life sciences schedules (560–590). From DDC, Vol. 1, p. 60 (3), it may be seen that a Phoenix schedule is "A completely new development of the schedule for a specific discipline. Except by chance, only the basic number of the discipline remains the same as in previous editions, all other numbers being freely revised". It may be mentioned here that the introduction of similar Phoenix schedules by the DDC Authorities is not a new thing as it is evidenced from the publication of similar schedules

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for 'Organic and In-Organic Chemistry', 'Psychology' and 'Law' and 'Mathematics' in the 16th (1), 17th (2) and 18th (3) edition of the DDC respectively.

'Human Anatomy' (611) and 'physiology' (612) will be classed in 591 along with 'general animal anatomy and physiology' and as such all of 611 and 612 will be relocated at 591. Further, 572–576 will stand for concepts of biological structures and processes in general, 581 for 'plant anatomy and physiology' and 591 for 'animal anatomy and physiology'. However, in 581 and 591 the same base number will be used as in the existing schedules of 18th edition. Further, the taxonomic portions 582–599 with the exception for mammals 599 will not be extensively revised.

4. Discussion

From a study of the different changes recommended by the DDC Editorial Policy Committee for incorporation in the forthcoming 19th edition of the DDC scheme, it becomes apparent that the Committee henceforth may not follow the principle of continuity and integrity of numbers as it did in the past. With the emergence of new concepts, radical changes in earlier concepts and reversal of customary classification order, there may be perhaps no other alternative for the Committee but to shift from their century old principle while revising the DDC according to the new principle of keeping pace with knowledge in order to provide more flexibility for the scheme. But the changes proposed for the entries as indicated in sections 2 and 3 of this paper do not appear to have been necessitated by such considerations.

With regard to the major changes proposed in the area notation for the 'British Isles' (as discussed in section 2), one can not help observing that the opportunity for revision could have been utilized to make the classification more rational by assigning either of the area notations -41 or -42 to (a) 'Ireland' or (b) the 'Republic of Ireland' with the other one assigned to the single political entity 'Great Britain' or 'United Kingdom' and subdivided to cover the different parts of namely, 'Scotland', 'England', 'Wales' and in the case of (a), 'Ulster'. It is desirable from the points of view of both rationality and practical convenience that in any system of classification, the component parts of an entity, whether political or geographical, should be classed as subdivision of the notation for the entity. But in the proposed revised scheme, 'England' and 'Wales', which are component parts of the political entity 'United Kingdom' or 'British Isles' (-41) are placed under a different notation -42, or taking the main island as a geographical entity, component parts of it, namely 'Scotland', 'England', and 'Wales' respectively are placed under separate notations.

Apart from this, the implementation of a change in the standing century-old class number viz 900s and area notations for 'British Isles' will lead to a serious consequence causing great hardship to the followers of the DDC scheme who may have to undertake an arduous reclassification job of thousands of volumes which is really unfortunate. The success of a classification scheme generally depends on the unchanging feature of its basic structure of the schedules, notations, connecting symbols, etc. If the Committee, like the Colon Classification scheme, henceforth indulges in frequent major changes as indicated in this paper, the popularity of the scheme may perhaps diminish as it has happened in the case of Colon.

The total revision of the schedules for 'Life Sciences' (560–590) by publication of a Phoenix schedule as discussed in section 3, and shifting of all concepts from the schedules in 611 and 612 to 591 is really unfortunate. The arguments advanced in support of the shifting of all concepts from 611 and 612 to 591 appear unconvincing. The shifting is sought to be justified on the basis that the present trend is to class the 'anatomy' and 'physiological processes' of specific organisms with the *processes* rather than the *individual organism.* But under 611 and 612 as well as 591 classification is already in terms of processes and not in terms of species. The editors and the Committee have further set a limit to the preparation of this principle, that it will be applied only upto the Kingdom level.

Thus processes and structures relating to plants will be classed under 581 and those relating to animals under 591. It should have been logical to extend this criterion to processes and structures relating to man, as distinguished from other species of animals, in other words to treat man as belonging to a separate kingdom. This would have been amply justified by the very large volume of knowledge existing and continuing to grow in the fields of 'human anatomy' and 'physiology' as compared to 'animal anatomy' and 'physiology' and also the unique practical interest of such studies relating to man. The present recommendations are all the more difficult to comprehend because it appears that 'veterinary anatomy' will continue to be classified under a separate notation, 636.089 with the appropriate numbers following 61 in 610–619 added and not under 591 like 'human anatomy' and 'physiology'. It is of interest to note that 'veterinary physiology' used to be classed under 591.1 was assigned notations 636.089.1 and 636.089.2 in the 16th edition (1). Another argument for the proposed shifting of concepts under 611 and 612 to 591 appears to be that 'anatomy' and 'physiology' are *pure sciences* and should not be classified under medicine which is an applied science. The distinction between *pure* and *applied science* is at best a tenuous one and such classification serves little purpose because ultimately all scientific activity is directed to practical ends, whether immediate and foreseen or remote and unpredictable. In the study of human anatomy and physiology, the motivation has always been their relevance and potential application to medicine. Conversely, even granting the feasibility of the exact demarcation of *pure* and *applied sciences*, it can be argued even more convincingly that pharmacodynamics is now a pure science, but it is proposed to continue its classification under 615.7. The editors would have done well to avoid so far-reaching a change, bound as it is to affect extensively the existing classification of the holdings of numerous libraries, particularly medical libraries.

However, it is not correct to expect that the DDC schedule, being an enumerative one will provide suitable numbers for growing subjects like 'Life Sciences' where newer concepts and areas of knowledge keep emerging all the time. The impact of ideas in the newly developed frontier disciplines like 'biochemistry', 'biophysics',

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