

Not for the casual reader, this volume is a must read for anyone working on cataloguing code development at the national or international levels, as well as those teaching cataloguing. Any practising cataloguer will benefit from reading the draft statement of principles and the three presentation papers, and dipping into the background papers.

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BATLEY, Sue. Classification in Theory and Practice. Oxford, England: Chandos Press, 2005. 181 pp. ISBN 1-84334-083-6.

According to the author, there have been many books that address the general topic of cataloging and indexing, but relatively few that focus solely on classification. This compact and clearly written book promises to “redress the balance,” and it does. From the outset the author identifies this as a textbook – one that provides theoretical underpinnings, but has as its main goal the provision of “practical advice and the promotion of practical skills” (p. vii).

This is a book for the student, or for the practitioner who would like to learn about other applied bibliographic classification systems, and it considers classification as a pragmatic solution to a pragmatic problem: that of organizing materials in a collection. It is not aimed at classification researchers who study the nature of classification *per se*, nor at those whose primary interest is in classification as a manifestation of human cultural, social, and political values. Having said that, the author’s systematic descriptions provide an exceptionally lucid and conceptually grounded description of the prevalent bibliographic classification schemes as they exist, and thus, the book could serve as a baseline for further comparative analyses or discussions by anyone pursuing such investigations.

What makes this book so appealing, even to someone who has immersed herself in this area for many years, as a practicing librarian, a teacher, and a researcher? I especially liked the conceptual framework that supported the detailed descriptions. The author defines and provides examples of the fundamental

concepts of notation and the types of classifications, and then develops the notions of conveying order, brevity and simplicity, being memorable, expressiveness, flexibility and hospitality. These basic terms are then used throughout to analyze and comment on the classifications described in the various chapters: DDC, LCC, UDC, and some well-chosen examples of faceted schemes (Colon, Bliss, London Classification of Business Studies, and a hypothetical library of photographs).

The heart of the book lies in its exceptionally clear and well illustrated explanation of each of the classification schemes. These are presented comprehensively, but also in gratifying detail, down to the meaning of the various enigmatic notes and notations, such as “config” or “class elsewhere” notes, each simply explained, as if a teacher were standing over your shoulder leading you through it. Such attention at such a fine level may seem superfluous or obvious to a seasoned practitioner, but it is in dealing with such enigmatic details that we find students getting discouraged and confused. That is why I think this would be an excellent text, especially as a book to hold in one hand and the schedules themselves in the other. While the examples throughout and the practical exercises at the end of each chapter are slanted towards British topics, they are aptly chosen and should present no problem of understanding to a student anywhere.

As mentioned, this is an unabashedly practical book, focusing on classification as it has been and is presently applied in libraries for maintaining a “useful book order.” It aims to develop those skills that would allow a student to learn how it is done from a procedural rather than a critical perspective. At times, though, one wishes for a bit more of a critical approach – one that would help a student puzzle through some of the ambiguities and issues that the practice of classification in an increasingly global rather than local environment entails. While there is something to be said for a strong foundation in existing practice (to understand from whence it all came), the author essentially accepts the *status quo*, and ventures almost timidly into any critique of the content and practice of existing classification schemes.

This lack of a critical analysis manifests itself in several ways:

- The content of the classification schemes as described in this book is treated as fundamentally “correct” or at least “given.” This is not to say the author doesn’t recognize anomalies and shortco-

nings, but that her approach is to work with what is there. Where there are logical flaws in the knowledge representation structures, the author takes the approach that there are always tradeoffs, and one must simply do the best one can. This is certainly true for most people working in libraries where the choice of scheme is not controlled by the classifier, and it is a wonderful skill indeed to be able to organize creatively and carefully despite imperfect systems. The approach is less convincing, however, when it is also applied to emerging or newly developed schemes, such as those proposed for organizing electronic resources. Here, the author could have been a bit braver in at least encouraging less normative approaches.

- There is also a lingering notion that classification is a precise science. For example the author states (p. 13):

Hospitality is the ability to accommodate new topics and concepts in their correct place in the schedules Perfect hospitality would mean that every new subject could be accommodated in the most appropriate place in the schedules. In practice, schemes do manage to fit new subjects in, but not necessarily in their most appropriate place.

It would have been helpful to acknowledge that for many complex subjects there is no one appropriate place. The author touches on this dilemma, but in passing, and not usually when she is providing practical pointers.

- Similarly, there is very little space provided to the thorny issue of subject analysis, which is at the conceptual core of classification work of any kind. The author's recommendations are practical, and do not address the subjective nature of this activity, nor the fundamental issues of how the classification schemes are interpreted and applied in diverse contexts, especially with respect to what a work "is about."
- Finally, there is very little about practical problem solving – stories from the trenches as it were. How does a classifier choose one option over another when both seem plausible, even given that he or she has done a user and task analysis? How do classifiers respond to rapid or seemingly impulsive change? How do we evaluate the products of our work? How do we know what is the "correct" solution, even if we work, as most of us do, assu-

ming that this is an elusive goal, but we try our best anyway?

The least satisfying section of the book is the last, where the author proposes some approaches to organizing electronic resources. The suggestions seem to be to more or less transpose and adapt skills and procedures from the world of organizing books on shelves to the virtual hyperlinked world of the Web. For example, the author states (p. 153-54):

Precise classification of documents is perhaps not as crucial in the electronic environment as it is in the traditional library environment. A single document can be linked to and retrieved via several different categories to allow for individual needs and expertise. However, it is not good practice to overload the system with links because that will affect its use. Effort must be made to ensure that inappropriate or redundant links are not included.

The point is well taken: too much irrelevant information is not helpful. At the same time an important point concerning the electronic environment has been overlooked as well: redundancy is what relieves the user from making precise queries or knowing the "right" place for launching a search, and redundancy is what is so natural on the Web.

These are small objections, however. Overall the book is a carefully crafted primer that gives the student a strong foundation on which to build further understanding. There are well-chosen and accessible references for further reading. I would recommend it to any instructor as an excellent starting place for deeper analysis in the classroom and to any student as an accompanying text to the schedules themselves.

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