Curating and Virtual shelves: An Editorial

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Actions have consequences, and this is certainly true of knowledge organization. One reason our colleague Birger Hjørland (1998) urges epistemological analysis for the problems of information science is that resources might well serve many different purposes for different users, and thus different user groups might have different epistemological relationships with resources. There is a difference between consulting a dictionary for a definition, reading a text for comprehension to increase your knowledge base, reading for pleasure (which, evidently boosts certain endorphins), and synthesizing a scientific report to generate an hypothesis, just to generate a few scenarios. The only commonality in that list is the consultation of a resource. In each case the purpose dictates the activity and is reliant upon a different epistemological aim. No online source of facts is going to suffice if I want something to read that will give me pleasure; no catalog of fine literature is sufficient for the extraction of scientific theory.

Hjørland also suggests that the names we give – to documents, to categories, even to activities – embodies the action of naming, and thereby also the action of facilitating or obfuscating the use of named resources (Hjørland 2003, 98). Terminology cannot be neutral because the very selection of terms as names either provides a pathway to understanding or a barrier to usage, depending on the epistemological perspective of the user group. I won't go looking for Miss Marple in your dictionary if you call it a dictionary, even though it might contain a perfectly fine list of motives for murder. Likewise, as an information scientist I am not likely to look for research anywhere except in a database that purports to contain peer-reviewed scientific literature. Names have power, and the action of naming is powerful too.

We in knowledge organization need to be aware that no matter how elegant our science, the actions based on our research have consequences. A model generated empirically might make an excellent explanation of a specific reality, but if it migrates into the structure of a system for knowledge organization it has the power to help or hinder assignment to categories, not to mention retrieval from those categories. An important aspect of what we do is facilitating the curatorial aspect of information retrieval or librarianship. What I mean is that our job is not merely to "mark and park," as generations of catalogers famously have said of both resource description and classification, or even to generate parking spaces (to press my metaphor), but rather our job is to place each entity in the best category, each artifact in the best environment, each resource on the best "shelf" to enhance its usability should it actually be sought for retrieval. Hope Olson (2002) has also written about the limits we create when we exercise the power to name. We must be aware of the consequences of our science.

In librarianship in the United States at the moment there is a fair amount of hand-wringing about the future, and this anxiety has been fed by the report of Karen Calhoun on the changing nature of the catalog. Calhoun (2006) suggests that the library community should abandon many of its expensive knowledge organization practices – such as the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* – in favor of integration of search engines into library catalogs. As logical as this seems on the face of it (and as much as we might often have wished *LCSH* would go away!), purveyors of such notions have either forgotten or rejected the notion of the library as a social instrument, and therefore the order of things in libraries as an extension of that social role.

We must also view knowledge organization then as a cultural enterprise, a social act that has consequences. The ontologies we use to devise categorical

schemes imply certain realities (e.g. Olson 2001, Olson and Ward 1997). If we say there is no music other than Western Art, why, then there must be no point in paying any attention to music of any other sort, right? And if we say that UFOs are a kind of controversial knowledge, we join the community of non-believers who insist that UFOs do not exist. Surely if we thought they were viable phenomena we would create a concrete class for them (see *DDC* 001.942). Voila, now we know, UFOs do not exist – the *DDC* says so. And if a gay adolescent searches for literature to help understand and finds that it all falls under "perversion" then we have oppressed yet another youth (see Campbell 2001). Our actions have social consequences.

Librarianship incorporates the tools of knowledge organization as part of its role as cultural disseminator. Subject headings and classification were both intended by their 19th century promulgators – perhaps most notably Dewey and Cutter – to facilitate learning by grouping materials of high quality together. We might call this enhanced serendipity if we think it happens by accident or act of fate, or we might call it curatorship if we realize the responsibility inherent in our social role. The cataloger's job always has been to place each work sensitively among other works related to it, and to make the relationships explicit to facilitate and even encourage selection (see Miksa 1983).

Schallier (2004) reported on the use of classification in an online catalog to enhance just such a curatorial purpose. *UDC* classification codes were exploded into linguistic strings to allow users to search, not just for a given term, but for the terms that occur *around* it – that is, terms that are adjacent in the classification. These displays are used alongside *LCSH* to provide enhanced-serendipity for users. What caught my attention was the *intention* of the project (p. 271):

> *UDC* permits librarians to build virtual library shelves, where a document's subjects can be described in thematic categories rather than in detailed verbal terms.

And:

> It is our experience that most end users are not familiar with large controlled vocabularies. *UDC* could be an answer to this, since its alphanumeric makeup could be used to build a tree structure of terms, which would guide end users in their searchers.

There are other implications from this project, including background linkage from *UDC* codes that drive the "virtual shelves" to subject terms that drive the initial classification. Knowledge organization has consequences in both theory and application.

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We continue to require a reliable definition of knowledge organization. In this issue we find two feature articles that help define terminology. Fiorella Foscarini describes schemes for classification in records management; the classical principle of the fonds here turns into a classificatory criterion. Alireza Noruzi provides an overview of folksonomy, or social tagging, the egalitarian form of knowledge organization spreading like wildfire through Web 2.0 applications.

This issue also includes the final bibliography of knowledge organization to be contributed by our long-time colleague Gerhard Riesthuis who has now retired from this duty. Readers owe Gerhard a debt of gratitude for his very thorough work for many years.

Finally I would like to announce the impending shift of *Knowledge Organization* to an online mode of publication. Beginning with the next volume subscribers may choose *KO* in paper or in electronic form or both. For registered subscribers the pdf-versions will be available for download on the Ergon webspace. ISKO members will receive the paper version plus, on individual request, the pdf-versions without extra charge by registering for this service. The service will include volumes 27 (2000) forward. Contributing authors will be provided, on request, with pdf versions of their articles that they may use for their own scientific and scholarly purposes; copyright will of course remain with Ergon Verlag.

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Editorial Correction

In *Knowledge Organization* volume 33, number 2 (2006), the title of Boyan Alexiev's article was misrepresented in the Table of Contents and on the Contents Page.

The correct title of the article is: **Terminology Structuring for Learner's Glossaries**.

We regret the error.

The Editor