

CLASSIFICATION OF LIBRARY MATERIALS

Current and Future
Potential for
Providing Access

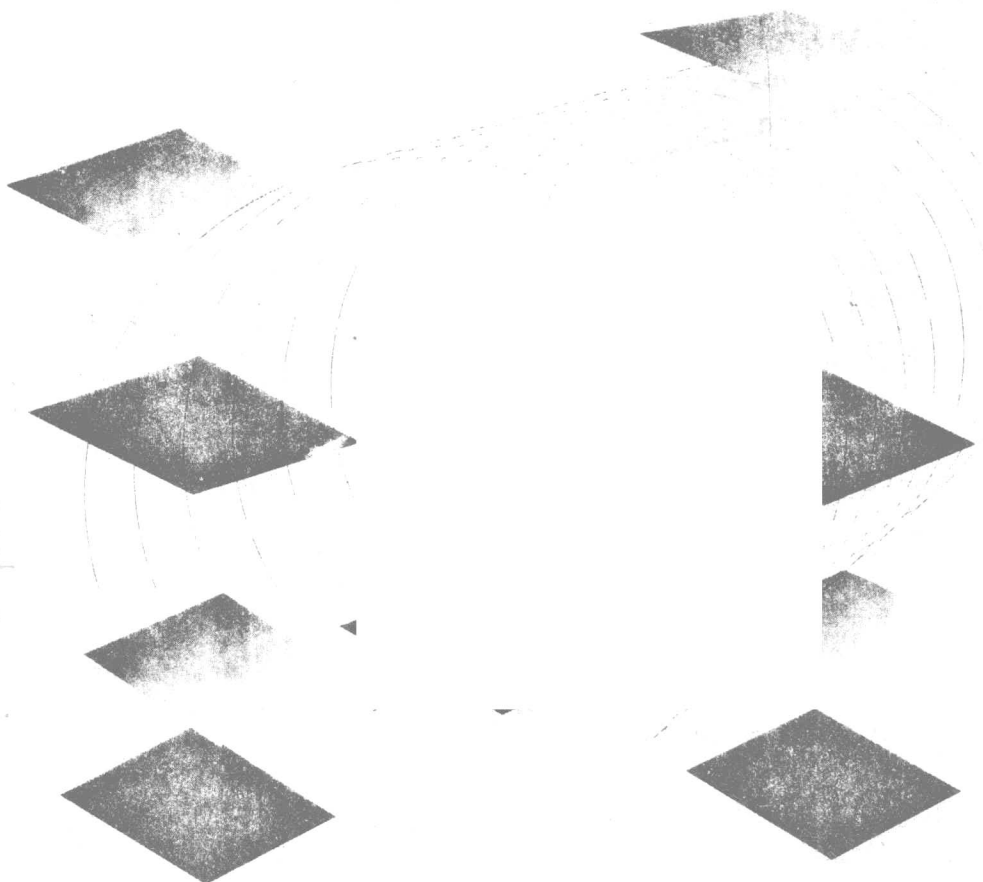
EDITED BY
BETTY G. BENGTON and JANET SWAN HILL

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Introduction

Now, after a period of relative neglect, the application and mechanics of classification and the role classification will play in the future are receiving attention. The use of the machine to manipulate records, to provide additional access points more easily, and to provide through Boolean operators access heretofore unavailable has led to renewed interest in classification for information storage and retrieval. The study of the use of online catalogs sponsored by the Council on Library Resources in 1981 revealed the strength of the demand for subject access.

In the past few years, there has been considerable study and discussion about descriptive cataloging, authority control, and subject headings with regional institutes offered on each by the Association for Library Collections & Technical Services (formerly Resources and Technical Services Division). However, there has not been an American Library Association conference on classification since the Institute on the Use of the Library of Congress Classification held in New York in July, 1966. In an attempt to rectify that situation, ALCTS sponsored a preconference institute designed to be a state-of-the-art review and a series of regional institutes designed to give more practical training in the use of the two major classification systems used in the U.S.—Dewey and the Library of Congress. The preconference was held July 4-5, 1985 at the ALA Annual Conference in Chicago. The fact that 130 people gave up their July 4th holiday to attend the meetings attests to the strength of interest in classification.

The chapters in *Classification of Library Materials* have been assembled from various sources. Most reflect presentations given originally at the preconference in July, 1985. Some were repeated at the regional workshops between 1986 and 1988. The Nichols paper was not given at the preconference, but was presented at the regional institutes. The Younger paper was written for this volume. Papers read from prepared text appear essentially as they were submitted by the authors. The presentations of Liz Bishoff, John Comaromi, Mary Ghikas, Mary Kay Pietris, and Arnold Wajenberg were given as workshops, without a prepared text. In these cases the text has been edited from a tape transcription of one of the workshop sessions. For both types of presentations, substantive questions from the audience and their answers as recorded during the preconference have been incorporated into the text wherever possible. Where appropriate, the papers have been updated to reflect developments since their original presentation.

In his chapter, based on his keynote address at the preconference, Hugh Atkinson reaffirms the importance of classification and calls for even more rigor in its application as decentralization increasingly

removes the user from the materials and substitutes browsing in the online catalog for browsing on the shelf. Phyllis Richmond's review of general classification theory provides a background for the remainder of the papers.

Nancy Williamson reports the results of a survey of graduate schools of library and information science instruction in classification and of employer needs and expectations in the area of classification knowledge.

Russell Sweeney discusses the Atlantic divide in classification—the different attitudes towards classification in North America and in Europe.

John Comaromi and Mary Kay Pietris briefly review the Dewey and LC classification schemes, highlighting history, current developments, and recurring problems. Classification in copy cataloging is explored by Arlene Taylor.

Karen Markey reports on the Dewey Classification Online Project, an experiment designed to test the use of classification to enrich subject access in the online environment. Mary Ghikas and Lizbeth Bishoff present the administrator's viewpoint in separate sessions on setting and implementing classification policy.

Elizabeth Nichols presents the results of a survey of classification usage and decision-making patterns among California libraries. Jennifer Younger discusses known item searching, shelf browsing, and classification policies. Arnold Wajenberg's delightful wrap-up summarizes significant themes from throughout the conference presentations. The importance of classification, its potential role in online catalogs to enhance information retrieval, and the problems of dealing with changes in classification schemes were the recurrent themes addressed by the contributors to *Classification of Library Materials*.

Betty Bengtson

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Classification in an Unclassified World

Hugh C. Atkinson

When talking about classification, at least in this country, working librarians must approach it from a practical point of view, even though understanding the theoretical bases is necessary before committing to a useful, practical approach. Classification is, after all, as Maltby points out, "the systematic arrangement of library material in a manner which is useful to those who use it"¹ (those who use a library or those who seek a particular piece of information). The important thing to remember about this definition is that it refers not only to an arrangement, but to a useful arrangement.

Classification is necessary not just because it puts something in a particular place in the library but also because it demonstrates to the user a relationship of one kind or another. This relationship is usually with materials classified in the same area, and, if it is a good classification system, with materials scattered throughout the collection. This is where the notation as a retrieval device can demonstrate a relationship that is not clear from the notation as shelf placement. The most familiar example in the United States is the system for mnemonics found in the Dewey classification.

When we talk about classification in the U.S. library world, we do not mean Bliss or Ranganathan or some of the fancier schemes. In the United States there are really only two classification systems in general use, plus some that are homemade. The two major ones are, of course, Dewey and Library of Congress. The information contained in this chapter should be interpreted in the light of those two classification systems, not in terms of such radical schemes as Colon classification or even the Universal Decimal Classification, which is so popular in Europe. While Pauline Atherton (afterwards Cochrane), as we catalogers so fondly call her (based on the old form of entry for George Eliot) and Karen Markey have made a fairly cogent argument² that the

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Library of Congress is not truly a classification system, since it has relatively little ability to demonstrate the relationship of one item to another. Nevertheless, we will consider it a classification scheme and recognize that in academic libraries it is perhaps the one most commonly used.

I come from an academic library that does not use LC. The University of Illinois has always used the Dewey Decimal Classification and we are not planning to change. There are two reasons for this attitude. The flippant response evokes Stephen Dedalus's comment to Cranly in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. When Stephen had stopped being a Catholic, Cranly asked if he was going to become a member of the Church of Ireland, Stephen asked in turn why he should "... forsake an absurdity which is logical and coherent . . . to embrace one which is illogical and incoherent."³ For a more practical response I point out that the disruption to users would be so great, and would last so long that changing from Dewey to LC is an option that is simply not available to a library that is committed to decent service. Switching from Dewey to LC is not going from one absurdity to another with a loss of logic. Neither system is absurd, but at UIUC (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) we prefer the more complex Dewey with its clearer emphasis on relationships, its attempts (albeit occasionally unsuccessful ones) to provide a consistent approach to both information and library materials. Yet both Dewey and the ever popular alternative provided by the Library of Congress are far from absurdities. They are necessities. The larger a library grows the more difficult it is to find material, and to double that complexity by using two classification schemes would be an unpardonable act as far as I am concerned.

BROWSING

One of the problems that besets us as librarians is that our patrons do not always act in the manner that we would prefer. They do not always use the tools we so laboriously provide; they do not value the things that we value; they place a premium on things that we see to be less essential; and they have a habit of ignoring those things that we consider to be more essential. For instance, getting the building open seems to be valued far more by our patrons than high quality reference service or high quality cataloging. The one thing we can agree on is that whether we like it or not, whether we think it is the best way to approach the literature that we so carefully acquire, store and provide access to, browsing—whether done on the shelf or in the catalog—is one of the primary ways of finding library material and of satisfying library needs. That is the fundamental reason that I think classification is so important for libraries and librarians, and why I believe that off-site storage

facilities and other devices in library systems that do not allow browsing take a very high toll in library use and patron satisfaction. The same principle, by the way, may well be true for those systems that will come upon us, machine-based information systems and machine-readable library materials. If the browsing function is not somehow provided we will be unable to provide library service to the extent that it is really needed. Nor will we be able to convince our patrons that the service they are getting is that which provides for their information needs. Whether it is academic libraries as Fussler and Simon⁴ noted, or in technical libraries as Slater and Fisher⁵ demonstrated, the browsing function is an essential part of the strategy for retrieval of material. This is true whether the patron is seeking known items or is seeking library materials by subject. Browsing is the primary retrieval system for a very large portion of our patrons' library searches. Therefore, the work of classification is as fundamentally important as any task in librarianship.

ONLINE CATALOGS

It is quite clear that the age of the online catalog and of machine-readable access to a library's holdings is here. The question is not whether we are going to provide such catalogs, but when and in what form we will make that provision. We will have to decide whether the online catalog will be designed cooperatively with other libraries or whether we will do it alone, whether we will provide it through a utility, whether we will buy a stand-alone system, and so forth. The question of whether we will move to a machine-readable catalog has already been answered in the affirmative, and there is general consensus in the library world that that is the appropriate response. It is the future of the library's bibliographic control.

The move toward automation has two aspects that are of interest. First of all, one should note that in the very near future cataloging is likely to be fully automated or at least semi-automated. For instance, if a Kurzweil machine can read a book to a blind patron, it can just as easily read the title page and perhaps the verso of the title page and match the data captured to data in a large bibliographic file. In fact, if the machine does not find a record, it can probably be programmed eventually to perform most of the tasks outlined in the current catalog codes. For the vast majority of literature, the information found on the title page plus some physical measurement is enough for descriptive cataloging. A machine can measure the size of a book. A machine can read the last page number. A machine can transcribe the title page form of the author's name.

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It is not hard to imagine connection of a Kurzweil machine or something like it to a personal computer or to OCLC, and then to an inputting device for use when a matching record is found. In fact, it is not hard to imagine developing cataloging codes that make such activity the standard. What is much harder to imagine is that same machine being able to perform the function of analyzing the item as to what it is about, or performing the kinds of analyses and notation that demonstrate the relationship of that item and what it is about to the other books, journals, films, videotapes, and the like, which are in the library—in short, the activity of classifying the material. From a very practical standpoint, it is clear that such a machine may well take away the job of the descriptive cataloger, but it is much further in the future that a machine will usurp the job of the classifier.

As we look at the decentralized and other systems, which are helping libraries make more productive use of professional librarians' time and more efficient use of support staff, it is also clear that even in non-automated systems the professional will probably be assigning the descriptive cataloging to the nonprofessional, reserving only the subject analysis and classification to herself or himself. Thus, classification will be far more likely to require our services in the future.

CLASSIFICATION FOR SUBJECT RETRIEVAL

In addition to self preservation, which is a strong motivation, as we look at ever more complex libraries, we can see the universal need for good classification. Whether material is found by browsing or whether indexes or catalogs are used to lead patrons to library material, it is very clear that one of the great problems in retrieval of library materials or information has changed. In many cases the major problem is no longer trying to find out all there is about a subject, but rather sorting through what there is in order to find material that answers specific needs; sorting out from the plethora of answers to our query those that are best suited to our use. It is not information scarcity that is a problem, but rather information overload. This is one of the places where classification comes into its own. A well applied, good classification system will show relationships of the item found to items that are broader and narrower in subject content. A well applied classification number provides the library patron with the ability, once having found one item, to assemble other items in the forms and amount that he or she needs.

One of the most striking examples of the use of classification for subject retrieval is found in the work of Karen Markey. In a 1985 issue of *Information Technology and Libraries* Ms. Markey and Pauline Cochrane had an interesting article on the use of online catalogs and online indexes for the classifier.⁶ The University of Illinois at Urbana-

Champaign is one of the places where Ms. Markey tested theories about the usefulness of a machine-readable form of the Dewey index and schedules. She performed some experiments in our Mathematics Library, and it was clear to me as I watched other people using the catalog she constructed and when I used it myself that the alphabetical indexes—the A to Z approach to subjects—were immediately enhanced by the ability to move up and down the topical hierarchy from mathematics to algebra to Reinges integral and the like. It was clear that those relationships that were not present in the subject headings but were present in the classification notation enabled retrieval with far greater precision than anything I had seen before. In fact, I was so impressed with it, that if I had to choose between an A to Z alphabetical list of subject headings and the machine-readable Dewey index and a program to use it as a retrieval device, I suspect that I would use classification rather than subject headings. Of course, far greater retrievability results when one uses both. It is very likely that a combination of word searching in titles, subjects, and descriptive cataloging entries, coupled with classification and classification indexes will provide the most powerful approach to library materials. If that occurs, it may be that we will no longer be facing the phenomenon that we now see in so many academic libraries—that some 80 percent of the uses made of our collections are for known items. It is my suspicion that the present situation only exists because we have not provided adequate subject retrievability. The studies that demonstrate this alleged phenomenon are flawed because they ignore present physical browsing activity. When we do provide good subject access and retrievability to our holdings we may see an enormous rise in the use of that kind of access. It is clear in public libraries that a far smaller portion of catalog use is for individual known items, and that a very large amount of user interest is in general subject or author, not in a particular title or literary form.

It is often assumed that only large libraries, catering to those specializing in the esoteric, that require fine classification and precise subject analysis. I disagree. Let me give you an example that I came across in my own use of my local public library, the Urbana Free Library. I admit that libraries in university towns tend to have a different clientele and a different book selection policy, and perhaps even a different library administration from libraries in other kinds of cities and towns. However, the Urbana Free Library is not an atypical medium-sized public library. It is a good library for a town of 35,000. It is well administered and well supported by the town. The fact that the director teaches at the University of Illinois Library School and holds a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago does, of course, tend to set it apart from most other libraries in towns of 35,000. That, however, is not the point of this anecdote.

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I was looking for books on Indian cooking, especially recipes for curry dishes. The practice in the Urbana Free Library, as it is in so many libraries of its size, is to carry the classification to as few places to the right of the decimal point as possible, seldom more than three. 641.591 is "Cookery characteristic of areas, regions and places," with area notations added. Now, if you simply use 641.591 or 641.592 and Cutter by author, the problem is clear. When one is looking for Indian cooking, one may well be interested, as I was, in the cooking of allied regions or cultures. Thus, a book on Bengali cookery, or cookery of the Kashmir or Bangladesh would be as important to the user as one about the cookery of India in general. The Urbana Free is a relatively small library, but nevertheless there were some two and a half sections of cookbooks in the 641.591s and 592s—fairly typical of a library of this size in this kind of community. Now by Cuttering after 591 or 592 one has Chinese cookery intermixed with Italian and the cookery of Canada intermixed with the cookery of India. Joyce Chen and Julia Child get shelved together. I really needed the demonstration of relationship that Dewey would have afforded if the classification had been carried out further. Indian cookery is 641.592411, and Bengali cookery is 641.592144. If these longer numbers had been used, instead of having to browse through three to five hundred volumes, I would have had a far more precise, and probably far more complete search result. Until I looked at the Dewey classification schedule I did not know that a book I could easily overlook would be one on the cookery of Kashmir. Thus, it is not the size of the library or the general rules of administration of classification that should have been applied in this case, but rather the needs of users. Long isn't always bad, and short isn't necessarily better. It depends on what the number tells the user.

The "arrangement for usefulness" that we defined as being what classification is really about is called for in all libraries. It is clear in this case that the classification had been used simply as a place to park the materials, and not as part of an information system for the user. This example illustrates clearly why the job of the classifier is truly one of intellectual analysis, which is not only analysis of the material, but also analysis of the potential reader. The job of classification does not end with the analysis of the book. If classification is ever complete, it is complete only after there is an analysis of the book as well as the uses to which it is likely to be put.

PATRONS USE PATTERNS

Just how books and other library materials are used by our patrons is one of the least understood aspects in all of librarianship. As Paul Metz notes in his admirable *The Landscape of Literature*,⁷ it seems

impossible that such complex systems as libraries have been designed to meet needs that are not understood, or are misunderstood, and about which we know so little. It might well be that the easy task of the classifier is to analyze the subject of a work, and the harder task is to analyze just how a patron is likely to use it.

One of the apparent but often ignored truths in librarianship is that there is not just *a* patron, or just *the* patron, but there are many patrons, each of whom brings to the library a unique set of needs and an equally unique way of using library materials. Of course, these unique ways and uses can be sorted into patterns, and that is the job of the classifier. Are we arranging materials for the specialist or the generalist? Are we providing access for those who use a particular subject as a primary resource or for those who regard it as a peripheral interest? Mr. Metz points out complexities in the use of academic libraries, but it is clear that what we do not know about the use of libraries of all kinds may well be greater than what we do know. That becomes a real challenge for the classifier. It requires the realization that good library service requires very rigorous classification and that classification must be done by someone who recognizes the limits and the ambiguities of the *inherent subject* of a work as well as the scope, limitations and ambiguities of the classification scheme. Most important, the classifier must recognize the range and differing needs of the patrons for whom that classification is performed and the library service provided.

The ability to strive simultaneously for perfection and to recognize the inability to reach it, all the while recognizing the anomalies of the task itself, requires an intellectual strength that I think classifiers have always demonstrated. That strength is required to an even greater degree now, since we are just beginning to adjust our librarianship to the theory that the best library service is that which is easiest for the library patron to use; that the best library access methods are those that provide for the strategies that our patrons want to employ; that the better library collections are those that are made up of materials that the patrons want or will want; and that the language of librarianship, of its service and its catalogs should be the language of our patrons. Sanford Berman's long campaign to have libraries provide a language of access that corresponds to the language used by patrons to formulate their requests is essentially correct. Sandy often reminds me of those prophets who wander through the pages of the Old Testament proclaiming the truth so accurately and so irritatingly that the rest of us, while recognizing the validity of the message, wish they would just go away and stop demanding such difficult reforms.

DECENTRALIZATION

There are good reasons to believe that we are moving into a world of decentralization. There are many examples of the decentralizing of the activities of our society. For instance, responsibilities that we have traditionally assigned to the federal government are moving from Washington to the individual states. Right or wrong, that kind of change is going on in our society. While we may not necessarily agree with each individual application of that change, the changes are occurring because we are part of a society that is demanding them. Society is requiring that the information, the decisions, the responsibilities, the authority and the need for information about things that affect our daily lives must move ever closer to the individual. That kind of decentralization requires a communications network that is broader and stronger, capable of higher volume than ever before.

We have heard a lot of talk about decentralizing libraries. As we decentralize, as we move to branch libraries, or as we move to greater use of interlibrary loan, not only can we no longer say we are independent agents, independent libraries, independent states, but we should also note that in the process of ever more independent decision making there is a requirement for ever more *interdependent* communication. As soon as one moves to a "distance independent" communication world, as soon as one moves from a set of shelves that is nearby, or from a catalog that is at hand, to dependence on interlibrary loan, on library bibliographic and control systems, on multi-state processing centers and the like, as one moves to a network of various sized units, then the requirements of analysis and classification become ever more rigorous. One cannot just grub around on the shelves because the shelves are somewhere else. The patron has to be provided with the kinds of information that are necessary to make informed decisions. Do I want that piece of information? Shall I borrow that book? Does that periodical contain what I need? Does our state have the kinds of library materials and information necessary to support this kind of industry? As we get more sophisticated telecommunications systems coupled with decentralized library activity and holdings, all situated within an interdependent network, the answers to those questions require fine and sophisticated classification. Classification has to be both precise and far more detailed than we have ever had before.

We are moving forward to a time when, without destroying our present library structures, we will add networks—whether local, state, regional or national, perhaps overlaying one network on another, and providing vastly expanded library service. We can see more decentralized library activity and more interconnected series of very small nodes. In such a network design, where we see increasing volume over the communication channels and decreasing total numbers at each of the

nodes, precise, accurate, and complete analysis of individual bibliographic items is extraordinarily important for the full utilization of such schemes.

In the modern era, we have never had to use the catalog instead of the books on the shelves. Up until now, no matter what we said as theorists, the catalog was an aid to using the shelves, not a substitute for them. When we evolve a concept of "library" that encompasses all of the collections within a five-county area, however, or all of the holdings in a state or in a region such as the Pacific Northwest, we will not have the luxury of the shelf at hand. Without that nearby presence we will have to have a catalog and a system of classification that demonstrates the kinds of relationships we might see if we walked through the library stacks. Not only will the need for the local catalog be enhanced by the use of classification, as demonstrated by Karen Markey, but also classification may become an essential tool for the decentralization and networking of library and information centers in this country.

Future catalogs and future information retrieval systems will require classification schemes that show relationships and deal with the hierarchy of subject relationships as expressed by useful mnemonic devices.

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

Another example of the use of classification as we move toward a changed world of librarianship is occurring right now in Illinois. The Illinois Board of Higher Education is sponsoring initiatives in the area of cooperative collection development among academic libraries. The State Library has been pursuing the same ideal within the public library community. The two approaches are being coordinated, and there is a lot of interaction between members of both working groups. The process is not only leading up to cooperative purchasing and selection, but is evolving a methodology by which such cooperative activity can be a rational process. Hopefully, it will be a process that will bring to the students and other researchers who reside within the state as comprehensive and complete a library collection as possible. The technique being employed is a refinement of the conspectus developed by the Research Library Group (RLG) and adopted by the Association of Research Libraries for the analysis and description of library collections. Under the leadership of the collection development officers of the libraries, a fair number of the larger academic libraries in Illinois have cooperated in performing the kinds of shelflist counts that are required by the national shelflist count project. This group is building matrices by those subjects from the national shelflist count for the participating libraries. In addition, a number of other somewhat broader areas are being analyzed in terms of collection quality and quantity to supplement

the analyses done by the national shelflist count. Those two factors, together with such factors as the date of the material, the age of the collection, and the languages of the materials housed in the collections are being used to provide profiles both of individual collections and of the state's holdings. It is from these profiles and analyses that future purchasing programs will be developed. We look forward to both expansion of the matrices and the building of appropriate online databases. The purchasing programs that will spring from and be based on this kind of analysis will, we hope, be a successful and responsive collection development effort. It is an attempt to establish a system by which the selection and purchasing programs are in the hands of the same bibliographers who direct the purchasing programs and selection in the various libraries, or at least a representative group of them. Thus, we are trying to move away from a simple and self-serving program of buying expensive items and are trying to avoid the political process of supplementing various libraries' book budgets. If we can develop a rational plan for library service for the patrons of academic libraries within the state, it will attract significant funding without interfering with the present levels of funding for state-supported libraries.

Most academic libraries in Illinois use the Library of Congress classification scheme. It is clear, as I look at the kinds of data and analyses that are going on in the process of trying to provide the best possible collection development program, that there would be great benefits if all the cooperating libraries applied a much finer and more precise classification scheme. It is not enough simply to provide the translation of LC into Dewey, or Dewey into LC (which heaven knows is problem enough), but rather, if we had all used better schemes in the first place, we would have been able to provide analyses that included the types of the hierarchical relationships that can provide guidance for purchase to collection development officers or book selectors in the same way that I, as a public library patron, needed guidance in the cookbook section of the Urbana Free Library.

An administrator or a participant in the library planning process would be much happier if he or she were able to perform the collection development function using a classification scheme that demonstrated both hierarchy and relationships and that was able to connect that information to particular bibliographic items in particular libraries. Thus, while I think we will in fact do a good job of cooperative collection development, I think that it would be a better job if we were able to perform some of the kinds of analyses for all libraries that we will be able to perform for some of the public libraries.

Cooperative programs are becoming widespread and are soon going to be active in all parts of the country. The Pacific Northwest, California, Alaska, Indiana, and many other areas are initiating similar projects. New York State, through its 3R program has long been a leader in this